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IF IT'S NOT LICENCED, IT'S NOT SAFE

Bank of Zambia Cautions Borrowers



"Consumers that engage with such entities expose themselves to significant financial and other risks"

Angry Mazabuka Residents Cry Over Promises

Will residents of Mazabuka see the completion of their new market shelter before the onset of the rains?

That's a question on the minds of the people of this vibrant town that is home to the nation's industrial sugar conglomerate, Zambia Sugar.

See story on page 5



New Hope For Closed Munali Nickel Mine

Zambia's Munali Nickel Mine, 85 kilometres south of the capital Lusaka, is on the verge of resuming its stalled operations, three months after its sudden closure in July, sources close to the mine have disclosed to MakaanDay and MazFm reporters.

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New Hope For Closed Munali Nickel Mine

By Gift N’gandu

Mazabuka District, Zambia



Zambia’s Munali Nickel Mine, 85 kilometres south of the capital Lusaka, is on the verge of resuming its stalled operations, three months after its sudden closure in July, sources close to the mine have disclosed to MakaanDay and MazFm reporters.

Earmarked as a key employer in Mazabuka district, the mine’s sudden closure in July devastated many families, with hundreds of workers and their families left distressed, the vast majority of whom were from the local area.

In a two-tiered ownership structure, operational control was held by London-based Consolidated Nickel Mines (CNM) through a lease and royalty agreement with Chinese owners, the Jinchuan Group.

CNM's wholly-owned subsidiary, Mabiza Resources Limited, operated the mine up until its recent closure.

It is unclear what the new ownership structure will be.

MakaanDay understands however that previous owners, Jinchuan Group, are set to lead the new ownership structure.

Reliable sources have confirmed that the mine is set to re-open, possibly as early as October next month.

An affected employee who wished to remain anonymous, speaking on behalf of many workers, expressed deep disappointment over the mine’s unexpected shutdown in July.

“The closure of the mine affected me negatively, both as an individual and as a worker. We never saw it coming —no notice was given. The closure stemmed from mismanagement,” he told MakaanDay journalists.

He criticized the mine leadership, claiming management had failed to engage with workers and ignored their concerns.

“When you're in management, you need to listen to your workers and understand how to lead. Unfortunately, the people in charge were making decisions without consulting us—the end users.

“Mismanagement, including unchecked theft, was a key reason for the mine's downfall. As employees, we saw it happening and hoped it would be stopped,” he charged.

Responding to concerns raised by the former workers, a combined Maz FM and MakaanDay team visited the mine site to assess the situation.

The first security checkpoint was abandoned.

A short distance away, the guard at the next boom-gate, which was closed, told the team that there was nobody inside at the mine.

Nevertheless shortly afterwards, a convoy of three vehicles driving fast approached from inside the mine, all three cars packed with workers in reflector work-suits.

Peter Tembo, an employee from the company expected to take over operations, offered a glimmer of hope.

“There is new hope,” he said.

“A new investor is coming on board,” Tembo added.

“While it’s still in the early stages, we’ll share more information once preparations for the official re-opening are complete.”

Tembo’s disclosure was corroborated by two additional sources, including confirmation from a Chinese official who wished to remain anonymous.

Oliver Mulomba, Mazabuka District Commissioner (DC) confirmed in an exclusive interview, that the closure was largely due to financial challenges faced by the mine's shareholders.

“From the facts we've gathered, the mine closed because of a lack of funding. The two original shareholders were hesitant to continue financing operations as they were still trying to recoup their investments.

“A third shareholder has since joined negotiations, and there's talk of an injection of about \$9 million to revive the mine,” Mulomba disclosed.

However, government strongly opposes the mine’s closure, particularly in light of the national push to re-open long-dormant mines across Zambia, Mulomba noted.

“We can’t allow this mine to remain closed, especially when the Republican President has been working hard to re-open mines that have been shut for decades,” he said.

“We made this clear during our visit in June/July with the Mayor and Town Clerk. After our report, the Minister also visited the site,” he added.

Mulomba confirmed that communication had been received indicating that workers are being called back, suggesting that the shareholders have agreed to move forward.

“This is a good sign. It means the three shareholders have come to an agreement to invest more. As government, our position is clear—we want the mine to remain operational so that workers can keep their jobs and earn their salaries.”

However, he acknowledged worker frustrations over “third leave”, a temporary leave arrangement that was meant to end on 30th July 2025, but was extended indefinitely.

“That indefinite leave was a major concern. But we can’t employ all those workers overnight. That’s why we’re insisting that the mine be brought back into operation so these people can continue working,” he added.

He revealed that the matter had reached the highest level of government.

“The issue is being handled by the Minister, who visited State House on 17th September. That shows how serious it is. We are not sitting back—we are deeply concerned about the livelihoods of our people.”

Nickel is increasingly becoming a critical raw material, largely used as an alloy for steel.

it is also projected to become a key component in the electric vehicle value chain, with demand expected to rise globally.

Last available production figures by Consolidated Nickel Mines, the previous operators of Munali Nickel Mine, listed production of 3,321 tonnes of high grade nickel ore in 2023.

Produced by Mazabuka FM for MakaanDay. The article has been edited and fact-checked by MakaanDay.



Kenya | Migrant battalion

Credible and licensed agents

William Moige

Kenya’s Principal Secretary for Diaspora Affairs, Roseline Njogu, recently appealed to Kenyans to verify every job opportunity they come across. “The National Employment Authority can inform you about credible and licensed agents,” Njogu was quoted as saying, adding, “We are still seeing Kenyans using travel agents and tour companies in an attempt to find jobs abroad; however, these are not licensed operators.”

The goal Njogu purported to embrace—proper control of foreign job recruitment channels—was certainly needed. In recent years, young Kenyan women seeking to improve their lives by migrating for domestic work in the Gulf States have been abused, and some have even died. Because of such reports, Kenya recently adopted rules that, the government said, would ensure that only “credible and licensed” agents could offer foreign job and fellowship opportunities to its citizens.

Government paid an agency to send youth to Russia

However, the resulting system does not seem to have done much to help Kenyan youth—ever more compelled to seek jobs abroad amid rising unemployment—gain a real sense of where they are headed, particularly with regard to Russia. Licensed recruitment agency Yumna has even been paid by the government itself to send students there; Cabinet Secretary Alfred Mutua has seen them off personally and Kenya’s ambassador to Russia, Peter Mathuki, waxes lyrical (“I am impressed” about the Alabuga Special Zone recruitment scheme.

Promising a better future

With such promoters, how can Kenya’s youth be blamed for thinking Russia provides the hope they seek, especially when social media is full of videos featuring accomplished women like Vyonna Rukono, speaking in glowing terms about the Alabuga Start programme that targets young women aged 18 to 22? “It has been an amazing experience,” Rukono says. “I would love to tell you more about it.”

For young Kenyans, who make up 35% of the population and face a dire lack of prospects to find meaningful work, this is a story of hope. According to a 2023 report by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, full unemployment rose significantly in the last quarter of 2022, soon after President William Ruto took office, doubling from 5.2% to 10.4% in the last three months of the year. These figures rise to a shocking 67% when focusing on youth and excluding informal work such as hawking. Young Kenyans who want more out of life than simply eking out a subsistence are therefore an ideal audience for curated videos featuring Rukono and other Africans promising a better future in Russia.

Some may well even prefer being at Alabuga

Some may even prefer being at Alabuga, once there, to the situation they faced before leaving Kenya. According to another video, at least one Kenyan recruit remained committed to being there despite Alabuga’s, by all accounts, military-adjacent environment—even after a Ukrainian bombing of the site. “I came to work and study at Alabuga Polytech. (...) I am fine now,” says Macrene Achieng Otieno in the video

looking angry and appalled at those responsible for the bombing that hit Alabuga on 2 April 2024. “Those who attacked our hostel today are real barbarians and deserve serious condemnation. In my opinion, they wanted to intimidate us. But I want to make it clear: they did not succeed. You will not scare me, because Alabuga is a strong place, and we will get through this.”

The bombing of the Alabuga site—causing damage to several buildings, including dormitory facilities housing workers—2024 took place only weeks after the arrival of one of the first batches of Kenyan recruits, of which Achieng Otieno had likely been a part.

Unanswered calls

No more videos or pictures featuring Achieng have been circulating since; besides her own, only Vyonna Rukono’s remain. We tried to contact Rukono through social media but found little to no information about her, and the available accounts are inactive. We couldn’t find Achieng either, nor were we able to establish contact with any Kenyans at the site.

A request to facilitate such contact, made to the enthusiastic Alabuga promoter and Kenyan ambassador to Moscow, Peter Mutuku Mathuki, contained in a letter that also asked whether the embassy was monitoring the safety and well-being of Kenyan recruits—went unanswered. Likewise, the Kenyan Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not respond to a letter inquiring whether it, if not Mathuki himself, was ensuring the well-being of Kenyan citizens on the site.

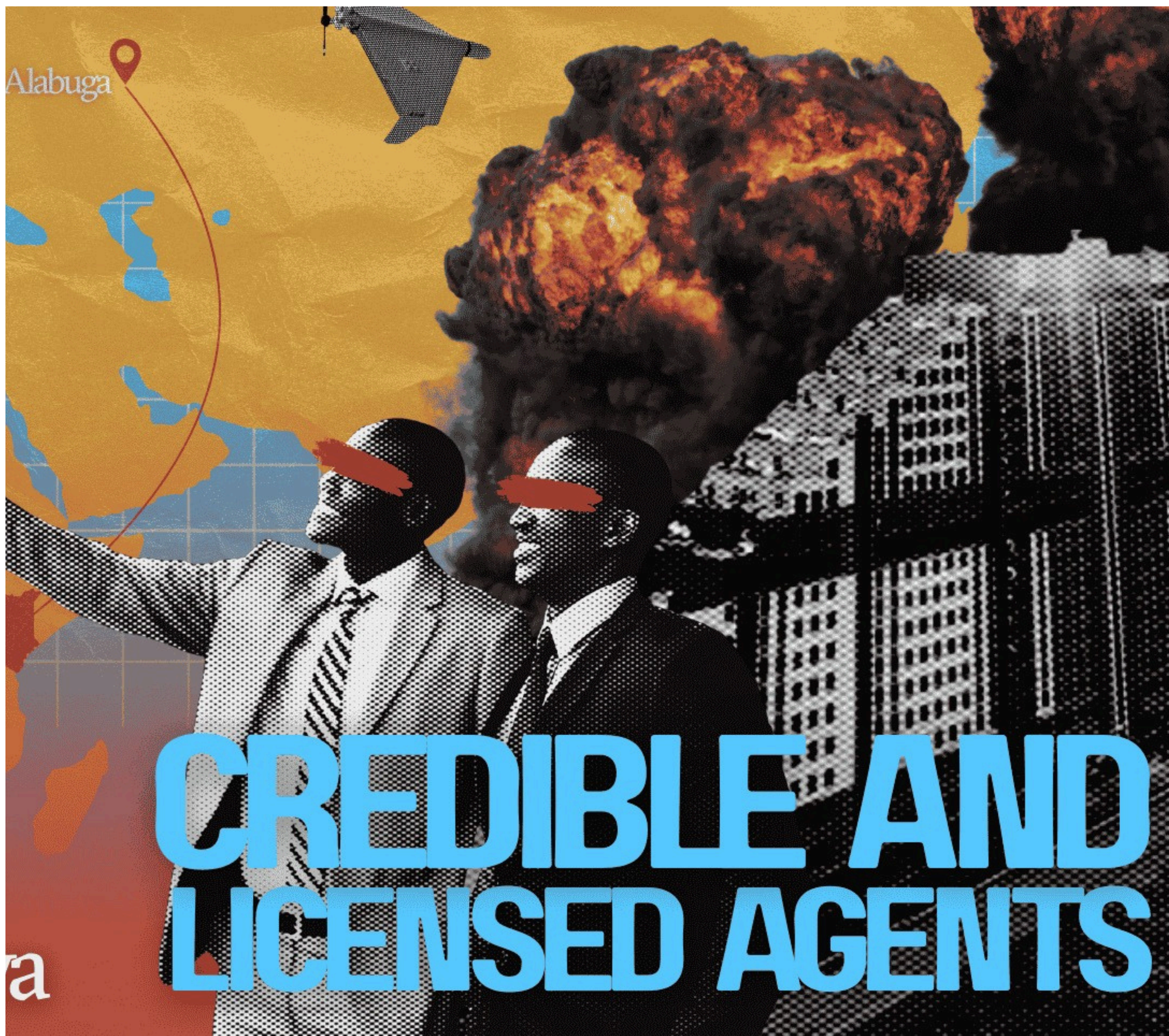
An “impressed” ambassador

Kenya’s ambassador to Russia, Peter Mathuki, was quoted in a May 2025 news update posted by the Alabuga channel on X, as saying that he had visited the special economic zone, which had “exceeded his expectations.” “I had heard about Alabuga before, but it helped a lot to see this technological industrial park with my own eyes. I am impressed,” he added. According to the Russian embassy in Kenya (see comment below), Mathuki is “in constant contact” with the reported 14 Kenyan participants in the Alabuga programme. In July 2025, he was also a speaker at the Russian Cyber Hack Camp in Moscow congratulating participants as “our new defenders.”

According to a report by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime, around 400 Kenyan women aged between 18 and 22 have been issued passports to travel to Alabuga. However, the report also found that, as of December 2024, only 14 Kenyans were employed at Alabuga, and two had returned home, according to the Immigration Department.

No warnings

Kenya’s government has, to date, issued no warnings to its youth regarding Alabuga or Russia’s PR—neither after the Ukrainian drone strike on the site, nor following shocking reports in October and November



Design by Sky Walker

that alerted the international community to the presence of an Iranian Shahed-136 attack drone factory at Alabuga, where several women from African countries were found working, including with hazardous chemicals. Nor has the government responded after reports of the general recruitment of African students and workers in Russia, including Kenyans, began appearing in global media

“The Kenyan embassy sees a clear benefit”

While the Russian embassy in Kenya did not respond to our queries, it has previously published a statement criticising reports in the Kenyan media about Russia’s Alabuga recruitment operation, describing them as part of a “large-scale disinformation campaign” by the West. The embassy also stated that the Kenyan embassy in Moscow was “in constant contact with the Alabuga SEZ (Special Economic Zone) representatives,” and that “the Kenyan Embassy sees a clear benefit from the participation of young Kenyans in this program and proposes to expand enrolment. The embassy can give further details and arguments about their position independently.” Queries sent by our team to the Kenyan embassy in Moscow were left unanswered.

Instead, when in December 2024 the embassy of Russia in Nairobi announced a revision of its visa policy for Kenyan citizens, introducing an electronic visa system that eliminated the previous more lengthy application process and offered an affordable visa within five days, Kenya’s authorities started working with the Yumna Investment Company, a registered recruitment firm based in Nairobi, to advertise jobs for Kenyans in Russia. The government-funded Uwezo Fund, meant to create opportunities for women and people with disabilities (1), partly funded the company to organise a group deployment to Russia for around 50 workers, purportedly for work in a food packing factory in an undisclosed location in June 2025. Several enquiries as to the location of the food factory from Kenya’s Labour Ministry were unsuccessful.

The Labour Minister embraced the Russia project

The endeavour was embraced by Labour Minister Alfred Mutua who, just a month earlier, had maintained that the Kenyan government had no programmes actively sending workers to Russia. However, his added remark—“but if one comes up, we will send people there”—heralded his own Russia project almost immediately thereafter. Mutua also enthusiastically praised the use of the Uwezo Fund for the trip, as condoned by President Ruto, saying: “It was touching to hear young Kenyans express how this opportunity gives them a new lease on life and how grateful they are to H.E. (His Excellency) President Ruto for this life-changing opportunity”

The use of taxpayers’ money to fund a Russia-bound trip organised by a private company raises questions, particularly since—according to the Labour Ministry, -

headed by Mutua—there are currently no labour agreements in place to protect Kenyan workers in Russia.

Mutua has not responded to questions as to the whereabouts and well-being of the workers that were sent off to a country where—according to interviews held by our team with Africans currently residing in Russia—“army recruitment posters promising tens of thousands of dollars are all over.” Our formal letter to Mutua, which also asked about oversight mechanisms, the ministry’s coordination with recruitment agencies like Yumna Investment Company, transparency in contract terms, measures to protect Kenyan workers from potential exploitation or involvement in military-related roles, and the government’s official position on risks related to placements in the Alabuga Special Economic Zone, sent several weeks before the publication deadline, was similarly left unanswered, as was a letter to Prime Cabinet Secretary Musalia Mudavadi, in charge of foreign and diaspora affairs, requesting clarity on the government’s policy regarding youth deployment abroad, particularly to Russia.

Commenting on the lack of information and the mixed messaging from Kenya’s government, Professor Peter Kagwanya, president of the Africa Policy Institute, said the country should “adopt clear, honest policies to protect its citizens.”

Locked doors

Like our approaches to the above-mentioned government entities, efforts to obtain a response from the Nairobi-based Yumna recruitment firm were also unsuccessful. The company did not respond to a detailed questionnaire seeking clarity on their role in recruitment, contract transparency, worker welfare, and allegations of exploitation. Neither did it answer phone calls. A physical visit to their stated office on University Way, Nairobi, revealed locked doors.

Foreign recruitment may be seen as the best way out

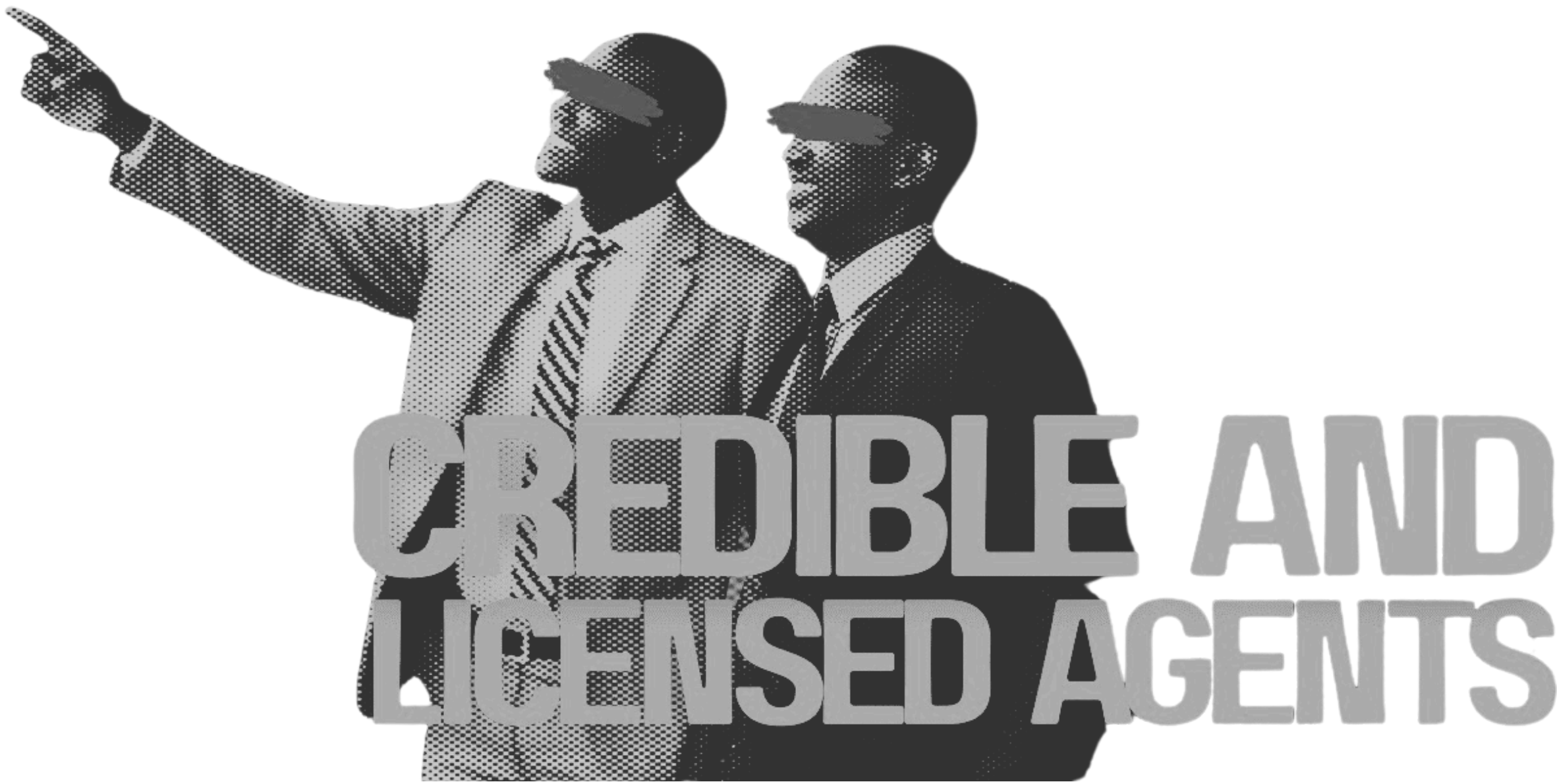
The exodus of Kenyans to Russia may be partially encouraged by a smooth PR campaign featuring videos of accomplished and energetic women like Vyonna Rukono and Macrene Achieng. But our investigation shows a much deeper crisis at the root of the phenomenon: Kenyans are willing to work abroad despite unclear labour conditions, and even in the face of a very real threat of war.

A recent survey by Afrobarometer showed that more than half of African citizens have considered emigrating. Among them, 49% said they would do so in search of better work opportunities, while 29% cited the desire to escape hardship and poverty. Choosing foreign recruitment, offered with the apparent support of one’s own government, may therefore appear to be the best ‘way out,’ particularly in light of the worldwide visa difficulties facing Africans.

Foreign exchange

However, the Kenyan government’s promotion of ‘jobs abroad’, even to risky destinations, points to an absence of plans to develop real opportunities for its youth and, worse, to a conscious policy of using citizens as a resource to bring in foreign exchange. Critics have already raised fears that the recent announcement of a survey of financial remittances to Kenya by migrant workers abroad—which accounted for almost 4 per cent of the country’s GDP in 2024, according to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics’ 2025 Economic Survey—may be followed by a tax. If this happens, it will be yet another cost borne by Kenyans working in foreign countries—including dangerous sectors in Russia—and by the families missing them.

Job empowerment programmes often lump different sections of the population together in this way.



Angry Mazabuka Residents Cry Over Promises

By Joanna Ndabala, Mazabuka

Will residents of Mazabuka see the completion of their new market shelter before the onset of the rains?

That’s a question on the minds of the people of this vibrant town that is home to the nation’s industrial sugar conglomerate, Zambia Sugar.

Barely weeks left before the onset of the wet season, marketeers at Nakambala market feel time has run out for the market shelter project, which began last November, and was originally scheduled for completion this November.

With the clock ticking fast, the marketeers’ discontent is not only limited to the slow pace of the market’s construction, but also to what they feel are unfulfilled development promises from their elected leaders.

Vendors at the market voiced loud frustrations over what they say is a lack of progress in improving market conditions, with heavy congestion and compromised hygiene.

MazFm and MakanDay reporters found congestion in the market exacerbated inadequate ablution facilities, with vendors not only struggling to make ends meet, but also risking their health.

Many are frustrated with the bad sanitary conditions, insufficient toilets and the market’s unhygienic conditions, posing serious health risks to both vendors and customers.

Vendors are worried that this could spark a cholera outbreak, including other diseases, especially during the rainy season just a few weeks away.

“If Cholera was to break out right now, we would be the first ones to be affected.

“We also wonder what will happen when the rain season comes because if heavy rains with wind come today, you will just hear that people have died due to the danger we are exposed to,” said a marketeer.

The outcry comes in the wake of revelations last week by Elijah Muchima, the Health Minister, that 174 cholera cases and two deaths had been recorded as at 17th September.

The Minister told reporters at a media briefing that 156 cholera patients had been discharged, with 16 remaining under admission in treatment centres across the country in Mpulungu, Nsama and Mbala districts.

“This temporary shelter is not even safe, every time the wind blows the shelter even shakes. We just decided to put something to hold the shelter in place to support it.” a vendor disclosed.

Additionally, lack of space forces vendors to trade outside the temporary shelter, exposing them to direct sun.

They say they get burnt in the sun and sometimes their merchandise gets spoilt.

Mazabuka municipal council’s facebook page of the 21st November 2024 says the council had a successful ground-breaking ceremony of the rehabilitation and upgrading of Nakambala market shelter at a cost of K8.7 million.

Royal Kent were awarded the contract for the market’s rehabilitation and upgrading.

The vendors allege that the contractor stopped working “a long time ago,” and that “they go to the incomplete shelter once in a while just to show people that something is happening, when nothing is actually happening.”

MazFm Radio and MakanDay reporters visiting the market found there was no contractor at the shelter construction site.

Royal Kent, the contractors, were not immediately available for comment by press time.

Additional efforts to get the area member of parliament Gary Nkombo’s comment proved equally futile by press time.

However, following these efforts by the journalists, fresh pictures appeared the next day on the town council’s facebook page.

The pictures appeared to show workers busy at work at the market.

In an exclusive interview, Mazabuka District Commissioner Oliver Mulomba promised to visit the market to assess the situation and meet with traders.

He cited the importance of local councillors taking keen interest in addressing community concerns, as they are elected to serve the people.

“Our leaders promised to bring development to the District and improve conditions at Nakambala Market, but to this day nothing has been done,” claimed a vendor.

However, despite the frustrations expressed by the marketeers, in other parts of Mazabuka town, roadworks could be seen with graders and workers busy with construction upgrades on several inner town roads.

With the year coming to a close and the 2026 general elections drawing closer, it is clear that residents are signalling that they will hold their leaders accountable.

Another said, “we are tired of empty promises, as marketeers, we will not be swayed by their kneeling and begging during the 2026 general elections.”

The vendors’ sentiments reflect a broader sense of disillusionment among residents, who feel despite repeated promises, tangible improvements in infrastructure and economic opportunities seem elusive.



Nigeria | A dodgy channel

Over a thousand prospective recruits are in the queue on Telegram

Beloved John

Late last year, the world was alerted to disturbing reports that Russia was recruiting hundreds of young African women, aged 18–22, to manufacture drones in a military-industrial compound called Alabuga, 1,000 km east of Moscow. The reports also stated that the recruits—from at least 15 African countries—were promised good salaries and skills training, but once there, they were often trapped, facing tax deductions, dangerous working conditions, strict surveillance, and difficulties in returning home.

In the past six months, a ZAM team in seven African countries investigated the Russian recruitment drive—and why so many young Africans take the chance to go, sometimes even after being warned. In Nigeria, Beloved John stood in a long queue of women trying to apply.

The Alabuga Start Programme says on its Telegram page that only those of us between 18 and 22 can apply, because “this is considered an ideal age range to begin building a career from scratch.” This may be so. But after going through the first part of the recruitment process myself, I begin to think there may be another reason. Maybe they just target impressionable youth? Maybe more mature adults would not put up with the badly written emails and long silences we get from our Human Resources (HR) recruiters? Or is our—perhaps youthful—desire to ‘japa’, to leave Nigeria, so strong that we will put up with anything at all?

Not all is what it seems

Russia probably doesn’t have enough “HR specialists” to engage with all of us at once. There must be pre-selection criteria in place; however, we are not told what they are. The Alabuga scholarship, advertised on our Ministry of Education’s website, had only asked for a high school certificate and an 18–22 age range. It looked very appealing, with polished-sounding descriptions of salary, duration, structure, and skills training options. But going through the process, some of us start to doubt if all is what it seems.

When I start questioning Alabuga’s registration professionalism, I have already completed my short bio form on the Alabuga Start official website, providing my name, age, and contact details. From there, I am directed to the Telegram group page, where I find my co-applicants trying to enrol. That all interaction with Alabuga is conducted primarily on Telegram, unlike in most professional application processes, is the first thing that raises an eyebrow for me.

The message from the HR specialist contains a lightbulb and a heart

I must be making a good impression though, because it’s not long before I am assigned an “HR specialist” who says their name is Halilov Nurlan. But Nurlan’s communication is also not very professional. Their first message, sent simultaneously to my email, Telegram, and WhatsApp accounts, has no subject line and contains both grammatical errors and random emojis, like a wave, a lightbulb, and a heart.

It all becomes a bridge too far for me, and I jump ship. Fellow applicants who stay on board tell me later that they were informed by their “HR specialists” that their data had been processed and sent, first to the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and then to the Russian embassy in Nigeria. One of them, Elizabeth Ojewale, tells me that, at the end, “they will send your document to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to issue you an invitation to come to Russia.” Another, Grace Onochie, adds, “You will book an appointment with the embassy in Abuja (Nigeria) for your visa. Then Alabuga will book your flight, and then you go.”

A deleted message

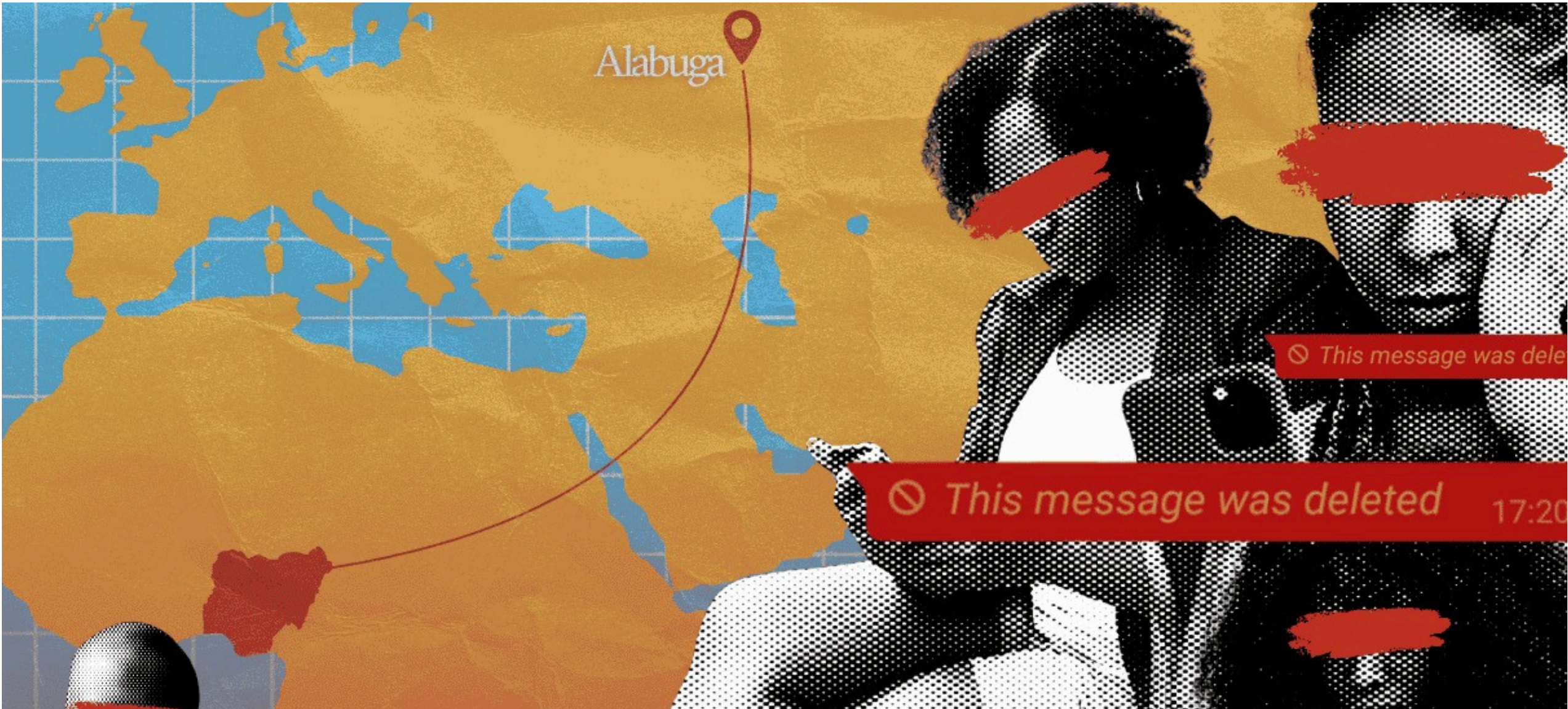
Most applicants I have been talking to have persisted throughout the dodgy process, even after seeing warnings about Alabuga. Only Fatimah Yusuf tells me she has begun to reconsider her decision to enrol in Alabuga Start, after noticing that an inquiry about the programme was quietly deleted from the Telegram group page. The deleted post, shared by an unknown user on 17 August, was a screenshot of ChatGPT’s response to a “concern about Alabuga Start” prompt. The first sentence in the image reads, “deceptive recruitment,” and another reads, “exploitation and poor working conditions.” The user shared the screenshot with the caption, “Tell me.”

Yusuf had been alarmed by the post but, she says, she hoped a response from the Alabuga group admin would clarify the misconception. Seven hours later, she found that the message had been deleted from the group. “I don’t know anymore. I don’t think I want to continue. I am so confused. I have devoted so much of my time to this,” she said. “I just checked myself. It’s true.”

The video said there were “no downsides” and “no racism”

Her disappointment was palpable, since for her the programme had represented the opportunity of a lifetime. Yusuf had, she said, completed secondary school three years earlier but was unable to continue to university due to financial constraints; she was now sitting at home, frustrated. She had felt energised, thinking she had found a new purpose, when she came across social media posts and videos of young women who purported to be at Alabuga—like an Ethiopian participant portrayed in an advertorial published on both our Daily Post and Pulse Nigeria sites, who had been quoted as saying she was “happy with her career growth”; and one fellow Nigerian, Victoria Kilani, whose “testimonial” that there were “no downsides” and “no racism” at Alabuga was published by Weekly Africa Magazine.

That the “interviews” were not the original work of the media that carried them, but simply copied from Alabuga PR texts, was probably unclear to Fatima Yusuf and others like her. Combined with Alabuga’s animated images and motion graphics on Telegram, WhatsApp, X, and other social media platforms, which regularly featured young fictional characters from poor economic backgrounds who went on to achieve success at Alabuga,



There are no application windows, cycles or deadlines

When I register, I first discover that there is no application window. The process runs throughout the year; it has no cycle or deadlines. From messages by other applicants on the Telegram channel, I gather, after some time, that it usually spans a minimum of three to four months, but can extend up to a year. This is probably partly because we are in quite a queue here: over a thousand group members, from all over Africa.

My fellow applicants complain about poor communication: half-answered and repeated emails, or falling into a deep hole of silence after what seems like progress. “(Three months) is if you are lucky. It depends on how fast and responsive your HR specialist is,” Priscilla Eze (20), one of my co-applicants, tells me.

Later in the process, interacting not only with Nurlan but also with other “human resource specialists,” I am asked to submit a video essay which details my “work experience,”—even though the scholarship is advertised as available to students at high school level. They then also want me to scan and submit every single page of my passport. Asked about this, Nurlan responds that this is for processing “a visa and a migration card, like it is done for all foreign residents who come to Russia.” Thereafter, I am told I must still submit a medical examination result that proves I don’t have a ‘chronic condition,’ do a simulation test, and learn 100 Russian words.

The Russian embassy is the last step

The PR posts had filled Yusuf with hope. “The problem has been money,” Yusuf had told me. “With Alabuga, they told me you can make money and go to a university after you finish the programme. But now I can’t do it. I cannot risk it,” she had ended, sadly.

Unfazed

Unlike Fatimah Yusuf, however, Nneka Amadi, from Lagos, has remained unfazed by the warnings. “I haven’t secured admission into a university. I don’t have the funds. My parents couldn’t sponsor me. A scholarship (to Alabuga) will be my only escape route.”

Parents try to register their daughters

Even if one has the funds, it is not easy to get into higher education in Nigeria. Data from the country’s Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) show that over one million young people seek admission each year but are denied access. Yomi Fawehinmi, an educationist, researcher, and human resources professional, says he understands very well why youth would hope for an opportunity such as that seemingly offered by Alabuga. “Getting into a university is a significant challenge in Nigeria, especially when you consider the rising level of poverty,” he said.

As a result, it’s not just young people themselves who flock to the Alabuga opportunity. In the Telegram channel, but also in a dedicated WhatsApp group, I even find parents trying to enrol their daughters, siblings researching or asking follow-up questions on behalf of relatives, and prospective applicants seeking guidance on the admission process.

Japa

Generally, opportunities in Russia are increasingly familiar terrain for those who try to ‘japa’, as the term goes, escape from Nigeria’s worsening prospects. Thousands of Nigerians have already studied in Russia in recent years. The Russia–Nigeria Bilateral Education Agreement (BEA), jointly administered by the Russian Ministry of Education and its Nigerian counterpart through the Federal Scholarship Board (FSB), is the primary driver of this cooperation. Each year, the Russian government grants scholarships to about 100 Nigerian students. According to the Nigerian embassy in Russia, more than 2,500 Nigerian students are currently enrolled in universities across Russia, particularly in cities such as Moscow, St Petersburg, Kazan, Belgorod, Rostov, Voronezh, Kursk, and Samara. However, although advertised on Nigeria’s Ministry of Education web portal, Alabuga Polytech is not among them.

The official says he “doesn’t know” about the website post

Reaching out to the Ministry of Education to inquire why the scholarship was on its website, I was directed to the Federal Scholarship Board, which I was told oversees such listings. A response from FSB Director Ndajiwo Hammanjoda Asta states that neither her agency nor the Ministry itself have “involvement” with the Alabuga project. “Whatever is on the website,

it was made by fraudulent persons trying to use the Ministry. We have never issued any statement endorsing Alabuga,” Hammanjoda Asta says. “The Ministry did not authorise it. Let the public know about this. Anyone can draft a letter and upload it to a known website.”

Remarkably, two press statements endorsing the programme have also been published on the Ministry’s website. Both statements carried the ministry’s logo and were presented on its official website as an endorsement of the programme. FSB official Chris Eje admits, in line with the comment made by Hammanjoda Asta, that fraudulent institutions “sometimes hack” the ministry’s website “to upload fake reports and press releases advertising fake educational opportunities.” “If anything, this is a deceptive tactic used to give the programme credibility,” he said. “A scammer published this.” When asked why the false statements have not been taken down, he says, “I don’t know.”

A network of recruiters

Besides using social media channels, Alabuga Start has also contracted employment and travel agencies in Nigeria to recruit young women. Some of these have substantial social media followings and use persuasive marketing posts to attract applicants. Adeleke Oluwatobi, director of one of these, called “Mercy of Success Konsultant,” tells me that “There is a network of recruiters. We (Mercy) have signed a memorandum of understanding with them (Alabuga).”

Initially reluctant to share the agreement his agency has with Alabuga, saying, “It’s a confidential document. I have to be careful,” he eventually shares a video recording of a three-page document titled “Memorandum of Understanding between Special Economic Zone of an Industrial and Production Type ‘Alabuga’ and MOS Konsultant.” The document, written in both English and Russian, states that the agreement has been drafted to develop and strengthen cooperation between “parties in the field of employment in Nigeria under the programme Alabuga Start.” It adds that the recruiter is mandated to “disseminate information about the (Alabuga) programme to potential participants” and to “provide support in establishing contacts with other structures or organisations that may be interested in helping to disseminate information about (the) programme.”

Medical testers must be approved by the Russian embassy

Another part of the document indicates that the recruiter is obliged to assist with the arrival of applicants to the Alabuga Special Economic Zone in Russia from Nigeria, and yet another part states that the agency is expected to “send participants of the programme to medical centers approved by the Embassy of the Russian Federation to undergo medical examination and obtain confirmation of the absence of the following medical conditions: HIV/AIDS, syphilis, tuberculosis, Hepatitis A, B, C, D, E, pregnancy, and an X-ray.”

Next to Mercy, the Topklass Erasco Travel & Tours agency also recruits for Alabuga in Nigeria. Branding herself as the “face of Alabuga” in Nigeria, Topklass director Cynthia Orah frequently posts promotional content about the programme on her official TikTok account, which has over 29,000 followers. When I contact her with concerns about the nature of the Alabuga programme and its recruitment process, she says this is all “false information.”

The agency director feels “insulted”

Both Topklass Erasco and Mercy are registered businesses under the Nigerian Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC). Both Mercy’s director, Oluwatobi, and Topklass’s Cynthia Orah insist that they are also recognised by the Nigerian government as recruiters for foreign companies. However, a licence from the Ministry of Labour is required for such a purpose and the Ministry, when asked about Topklass and Mercy, states that these are “not on the list of licensed private employment agencies.” When I ask both agencies’ directors for a response to this finding, Orah only says she feels “insulted” and will no longer be interacting with me. Mercy’s Oluwatobi does not respond at all.

Russian denial

Since the Telegram channel discussions reflect that the Russian Embassy in Nigeria is the final step in the Alabuga registration process, I try to engage Ambassador Andrey Podelyshev at a press briefing held by him, but all my questions are met with denial. He says he can’t tell me how many visas his embassy has granted to Nigerian Alabuga applicants and that he also cannot comment on the welfare of participants in the programme. “The embassy does not have any relationship with Alabuga,” he states, adding that he “knows little” about the programme. He insists, however, that foreign participants are not recruited to assemble military drones, as “Russian legislation prohibits this. For anyone to work in the plant, they must obtain clearance from the security agency.”

The Nigerian embassy does not respond to queries

Hopeful that I may receive cooperation or insights from our ambassador Abdullah Shehu at the Nigerian Embassy in Russia—he visited the site and posed with participants already in 2023 so he must have access—I am disappointed again. No reply comes to my query regarding Nigerian participants’ welfare in the Alabuga Special Economic Zone, or regarding the possibility of facilitating a meeting with them. Likewise, the Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not respond to the question of whether it is aware of any programme that invites young Nigerian women to Russia.

“Life has defeated you 4-0 by making you Nigerian”

Meanwhile, the Alabuga Telegram channel keeps growing, with many applicants still joining the queue; the complaints about delays likewise seem neverending. At some point, my compatriot Nneka Amadi—the one who told me that Alabuga was her “escape route” out of Nigeria—seems to have had enough. Lashing out on the group in early August, she writes, “God knows that my deadline for Alabuga is August 31. If I don’t have my visa by then, I’ll scratch (forget) everything about them and won’t encourage anyone else to apply. Imagine spending money to get a visa and then having no flight ticket (...) Will that money be refunded to me?”

Two weeks later, Amadi has given in, reconciled to the fact that she has yet to invest more money for her chance to travel. After writing: “Life has defeated you 4 – 0 by making you Nigerian,” she resignedly tells me that the recruiters did not book her flight (yet) and that she will now apply for another visa. “And that will cost me more money.”

*Names have been changed for privacy and security reasons.

From page 1

Zimbabwe | Mothers left behind

Garikai Mafirakureva

“A senior government official asked me if I wanted my daughter to study in Russia.”

Late last year, the world was alerted to the disturbing news that Russia was recruiting hundreds of young African women, aged 18–22, to manufacture drones in a military-industrial compound called Alabuga, 1,000 km east of Moscow. Reports said that the recruits—from at least 15 African countries—were promised good salaries and skills training, but that once there, they were often trapped, facing tax deductions, dangerous working conditions, strict surveillance, and difficulties returning home. In the past six months, a ZAM team in seven African countries has investigated the Russian recruitment exercise—and why so many young Africans take the chance to go, sometimes even after being warned.

However, amid the many international reports about recruitment for Alabuga, only one has highlighted the plight of families left behind. Reporting for Deutsche Welle, Garikai Mafirakureva interviewed worried parents in Zimbabwe in June this year . At ZAM’s request, he went back to several of them to ask how they are doing now. “A senior government official asked me if I wanted my daughter to study in Russia. She is no longer communicating.”

Read the three testimonials below.

Ulita Semende: “We hardly speak these days”

I am 47, I live in Harare, and my daughter is 19. She was active in various youth programmes (1), and when she told me she was leaving for Russia,

I was not surprised, and I wished her well. My daughter and I are very close, so when she stopped calling, I became very worried about her.

We hardly speak these days. Whenever she calls via WhatsApp—the last time was in May—she sounds like she is in a hurry. I am beginning to believe the stories I hear about the girls manufacturing drones because she is so secretive about her job or her schooling programme. I received US\$400 via Western Union in May this year. I don’t know where to turn to. I am afraid to approach government officials, because I feel they would say that I am the one who is feeding the media with news.

(1) Zimbabwe’s ruling party, ZANU-PF, organises several workshop- and training programmes for loyal youth.

Sositina Mukatwa: “The government is mum”

I am 43 and I live in Chivhu (140 km south of Harare). My girl is 19. When she applied and went to Russia, she never told me about the programme. The only thing I remember is that she was running around asking for money from friends and neighbours to process her passport. That’s when I inquired, and she then told me that she wanted to surprise me because she was leaving for Russia.

At first, I was so happy because I thought this was her opportunity to help me and her two siblings with school fees and the general upkeep. Now, I am afraid, not knowing if she is fine, because she rarely communicates. She has only called thrice to say she is fine, but I could sense she was not free to talk, as if someone were listening or she had little time on the phone. In fact, we have only talked three times via WhatsApp since she left in 2023.

The last time we talked, she sounded drunk and hinted to me that she had been laid off and was living with a friend, but when she called me in June, she said she is back at work and sent me US\$200 via Western Union. She doesn’t want to talk about her job, her living conditions, or even the school programme. She never said when she is coming back to visit. I am living in fear because the government is mum about the whole programme. I don’t know what to do now.

Ruzvidzo Masambaasiyana: “I feel like I sold my daughter into slavery”

I am 55, I live in Harare, and my girl is turning 20 in January next year. I heard of this programme from a friend, a senior government employee, who asked me if I wanted my daughter to study in Russia. So I facilitated the process.

When she left for Russia, I felt my connection to those in higher offices had now paid. I was not worried until I read and watched the news saying they are manufacturing drones used in the war against Ukraine. I tried to talk to her about it when she last called me sometime in April, but she brushed me aside and told me I should not always believe what I watch on TV or read in the newspapers.

I am now worried because she is no longer communicating. She never sent me anything, but I am not worried about her sending me money or not, as long as she is safe. I approached my friend,

the government employee, about the issue, and he joked that I should “stop expecting a bridegroom from Russia.” He never spoke to me again about the programme, and she is also not talking about it. I no longer trust him. I want my daughter back, but I can’t do anything about it. I feel like I sold my daughter into slavery.

All names have been altered for security purposes.



Design by Sky Walker

Politics & Opinion | The global threat of Russian recruitment in Africa

Instead of young Africans trading their dreams for a place in someone else’s war, the international community should embrace them.

By Charles Mafa, Samuel Baker Byansi, Elizabeth Banyitabi, Eric Mugendi, William Moige, Josephine Chinele, Emmanuel Mutaizibwa, Beloved John and Evelyn Groenink

International reports have addressed Russia’s recruitment of young African women for its Alabuga military-industrial zone, 1,000 km east of Moscow, as a ‘trap,’ based on false information and fake promises. Our recent investigation [hyperlink] confirmed that much of the content in campaigns that reached tens of thousands in our countries was indeed false. Alabuga is not a school, but a tough working environment; it is not full of love and happiness, but military-style, tightly controlled and disciplined, with limited freedom of movement. Salaries are subject to deductions, and savings are difficult, if not impossible, to transfer back home. It is also not just about study and work, but about supporting Russia’s war industry; the site includes an Iranian Shahed-136 attack drone factory.

We also interviewed young men in the recruitment channel. Their destiny was even darker: they are either recruited directly into the army or funnelled from the factory floor straight to Ukraine’s battlefields.

The Russian system appears designed that way. Recruitment networks in African countries systematically target both young men and women, using the same legitimate-looking websites and cultural centres, channelling women to ‘new families’ in the Russian military environment and men toward a military endpoint that recruiters deliberately obscure.

Many insisted they would still go

But false information and fake promises were not all there was to the recruitment phenomenon. Among our interviewees, several said they would rethink their plans after being informed of the true nature of the place they had thought of travelling to. But—and this is our main takeaway—there were even more who insisted they would still go. “This is my only escape” and “Better to be exploited in a developed country than where I am now” are just some of the many, many comments we encountered from passionate young women and men, who either held on to the false information they had been given, desperately hoping the warnings were only ‘Western propaganda’, or who went in with their eyes open, intent on making something of themselves elsewhere, no matter where or what. As one Burundian recruit explained: “When your family is struggling to eat, and someone offers you US\$800 a month plus free housing, you don’t ask many questions.”

Trapped already

To understand this, especially for Westerners, it is important to take into account that Africa’s youth are already trapped: in badly governed countries where only a politically connected few live the good life. Avenues open to the non-privileged are often limited to eking out a living in the informal economy. Vast numbers of non-connected university graduates sit at home,

frantically trying to work online—sometimes doing academic assignments for peers in the West, sometimes turning to gambling. The Alabuga recruitment is only the most recent manifestation of this unemployment crisis among youth, who form the largest population demographic and are therefore eager to embrace any opportunities, real or perceived, outside the country.

Fifteen years ago, we at ZAM published interviews with young African women who were trafficked by sex work gangs from Nigeria to brothels in the West. Even then, we found that many of the ‘girls’ being groomed for sex work were fully aware of what they were getting into. Even then, we were told: But how else do I get out of this country? Today, in Nigeria, there is a word for that burning desire to leave: japa, escape.

The burning desire to leave is called ‘japa’

Of course, it is preferable to leave legally, for study, work, or even just a holiday, to a place where you want to go. But with the West locked down, and most youth lacking the money to pay their way into the world, only one route remains: recruitment by foreign powers. To get out, one depends on prefabricated channels with vague purposes or even clear risks. After sex work from Nigeria, we found that youth were channelled into domestic work, where they were often abused in the Gulf States. Now, it is Russia.

Governments complicit

We found that insult was added to injury by the African governments’ own attitude toward this phenomenon, most starkly in the context of the Alabuga recruitment scheme. Authorities in all seven countries appeared to have embraced this scheme without scrutinising any risks or dangers. No African government has issued warnings about Alabuga’s military-adjacent nature. Nigeria is seemingly incapable of removing an Alabuga brochure from its government portal. A Kenyan ambassador has publicly praised the Alabuga programme as “impressive.” Uganda’s ambassador to Russia announced Alabuga scholarships and visited the compound. An MP is helping to facilitate Alabuga passports and says, “We are OK with them [the Russians] taking the girls.” A Cameroonian politically connected businessman, while facilitating his country’s young women’s travel to Alabuga, talks of “financial empowerment of the girl child” and brags on social media that his Russian recruitment route is “the solution to Africa’s problem of illegal migration.” And as he insists that all criticism against Alabuga recruitment is “propaganda” and that “these girls are fine there,” he continues to deny our team’s request to speak to at least one of them ourselves.

The rupture of families and communities is an unavoidable side-effect

The rupture of families and communities is an unavoidable side-effect that the same governments also don’t seem to be concerned about. In Burundi, a mother, with a breaking voice, tells us, “It’s like our children don’t matter.” In Cameroon, families flock to an anonymous Facebook page to find rumours about their loved ones amid silence from their government. In Zimbabwe, a mother whose daughter’s trip to Alabuga was helped along by a “senior government employee” said that speaking openly about her concern for her daughter would lead to government reprisals: “They’ll say I am feeding the media.” The family of Libère Hatungimana was told by Burundi’s embassy in Moscow that he “might have died,” but received no official confirmation or assistance.

The deal—selling out the youth—to Russia, a new “partner” increasingly embraced by political elite authorities in African countries, therefore appears more important than checking on the well-being of these recruits and their families. A senior education official in Rwanda’s government told us, on condition of anonymity, that she was worried about students leaving for “vague” destinies, but added: “The orders to work with these people (Russia) are always coming from above.”

“The orders are coming from above”

Foreign exchange

Besides the context of working with Russia—see more on that below—we found that African governments in the seven countries have generally normalised sending their youth through foreign recruitment channels as if leading cattle. Instead of designing a future for young people in their own countries, or at least working diligently to upset unfair visa regimes and create real foreign opportunities for the talented and energetic, instead of using such foreign opportunities to grow a reservoir of skilled people to help build Africa and the world, they appear focused simply on getting them out.

The Kenyan government has subsidised a private recruitment agency taking youth to unclear destinations in Russia; the minister involved poses proudly for cameras with his soon-to-be migrant workers, but refuses to answer questions. In Malawi, a minister openly talks of the ‘marketability’ of youth as a way to get foreign exchange (“and that money will not even be put to good use to build our country, but will be stolen again,” as one team member put it). The same minister scolds youth working abroad for bad behaviour and abandoning their posts, instead of expressing concern about reports of abuse and unkept promises in the labour arrangement.

The focus is on simply getting them out

Questions we posed about the Alabuga recruitment scheme, or about recruitment agencies’ work in general, were not answered by any ministry or embassy, anywhere.

Generation Z

The question of why African governments seemingly want to ‘market’ their own youth away seems simple to answer: there are so many young people on the continent, with over two-thirds of the population under 35. And the dwindling, badly managed economies certainly cannot provide jobs for all. But there is another factor, too: in Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria, and elsewhere, young people have been at the forefront of demands for change. Generation Z is aware, often educated; it sees the rot in postcolonial governing structures and has ideas on how to change it. It is itching to play a role, come to the fore, come into its own, and lead countries toward real development.

Most of the ageing autocratic—and often kleptocratic—leaders on the continent appear unwilling to listen. Kenya, Uganda, and Nigeria have been violently confronting, even shooting, their protesting Generation Z in the streets, and have been globally criticised for it. Could it be that simply pointing them towards greener pastures elsewhere is seen as a more elegant way for them to get rid of the problem?

Old leaders may be disempowering the youth on purpose

Russia’s deal

The Russian recruitment scheme presents such oppressive leaders with a deal that, for them, is very good indeed. Not only does it release some steam from the kettle that is the trapped and frustrated young citizenry in their countries, but it also comes with real support for their own oppressive apparatus. Russia, part of the BRICS multipolar configuration, is developing ever closer ties with dictatorial regimes in this respect, offering weapons, drones, surveillance technology, and aerial power unconditionally. “The case is simply that Western countries have outlived their opportunities for Africans,” as the above-mentioned Cameroonian recruiter, closely connected to the autocratic regime in his country, put it, positioning Russia as “taking the lead.” Russia, for its part, banks on Africa’s tin-pot despots, offering itself as their new, more loyal, stronger partner, with rich prospects of resources, both human and material, and a whole continent to become the main player in, in return.

Meanwhile, the West weakens, with the United States under Donald Trump also turning into a tyrannical state, beginning to resemble Russia or the African governments mentioned earlier. Europe’s feebly and intermittently issued statements on human rights and a free press risk becoming increasingly inconsequential.

Democrats should feel alarmed

Democrats, both in Africa and elsewhere, should therefore be very alarmed at what is happening to Africa’s youth. Its recruitment by this new alliance of oppressors,

local and abroad—both using their economic vulnerability for their own purposes—intersects with their political marginalisation and weakens them as the main force ready to fight these developments.

Regional institutions

The problem should be laid urgently at the doorstep of continental and regional bodies like the Southern African Development Community, the Economic Community of West African States, the East African Community, and certainly the African Union (AU). All of these have so far been quiet on youth emigration, but have a critical role to play in reversing this trend. It would be good if they first and foremost acknowledged their failure to date to protect Africa’s citizens from predatory recruitment. But even if they hesitate to do that, they should at least now begin establishing monitoring systems for their nationals abroad and hold governments accountable for promoting dangerous programmes.

Equally importantly, they must finally start to address the economic desperation that makes these schemes seem attractive and seek genuine solutions for youth, whether abroad or at home. There is much that African regional authorities could do to ensure that the continent’s natural wealth is managed transparently and fairly, so that its benefits reach communities rather than being concentrated in the hands of a few. They could champion stronger youth empowerment initiatives—investing in education, skills training, entrepreneurship, and innovation. They also have the power to create safer, more regulated pathways for youth to move across African borders in search of work and study, ensuring that mobility within the continent becomes a real alternative to risky ventures beyond it.

The story of Africa’s youth could shift

They could furthermore amplify the voices of young people themselves, giving them a seat at the table where decisions about their future are made. By making youth active participants in policymaking, they can help build a continent where young people no longer feel the need to ‘escape’—as opposed to simply travel—in order to live with dignity. If African governments, together with the AU and regional bodies, would act decisively, the story of Africa’s youth could shift—from one of flight and loss to one of opportunity, fairness, and hope on the continent itself. Without such concrete steps, the only ‘japa’ route for young Africans will remain their use as pawns by Russia or any other foreign powers.

As journalists standing for accountability and justice, and as members of the affected citizenries and societies, we request that our governments and these regional and continental bodies prioritise such action. We will interrogate all these institutions on these issues should they continue to fail.

Solidarity

Besides, within Africa, the message for the international community—especially in the West—is becoming increasingly clear. Firstly, Russia’s recruitment represents a clear form of human trafficking that violates international law. Each day of inaction means more African families lose their children, and more communities are left crippled and traumatised. Secondly, the current situation means that the West’s enemy, Russia, will continue to build up its war machine using African youth.

The West, therefore, needs to act—but it cannot limit itself to passionate warnings to young Africans that “this is a trap.” Waving red flags about the dangers “out there” has repeatedly proven to have little or no effect on an exasperated youth, eager to escape at any cost.

The West might want a fighting chance for the continent

Rather, solidarity with Africa’s Generation Z and its push for democracy and good governance on the continent seems essential if Africa is to be saved from a destiny as newly colonised pawns, with its leaders firmly in the Russian embrace, its people corralled, its communities fragmented and muzzled. If not for these reasons, the West might, at the very least, still want to have a fighting chance for trade relations with a continent so rich in vital resources, while, to the east, facing an army increasingly populated by the same African youth it so desperately tries to keep from its own shores.

Geopolitics aside: the voices of the disappeared, the sons and daughters whose families wait by silent phones, demand more than sympathy. They demand action to ensure no more young Africans trade their dreams for a place in someone else’s war.

Malawi's September 16 Election Marred by Widespread Irregularities

Malawi's successful navigation of the 2019-2020 electoral crisis is viewed as a model for democratic resilience in the region.

But have the ghosts of 2020 returned to haunt Malawi again?

MakanDay's Special Correspondent in Lilongwe reports.

A week after Malawi's September 16th general election, an electoral crisis is unfolding. It threatens to undermine the democratic gains made since the historic 2020 court-ordered rerun.

Multiple political parties have lodged formal complaints with the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC), citing widespread irregularities and systematic failures that eerily echo the chaos of the 2019 elections that were ultimately nullified by the courts.

A Pattern of Failures Emerges

The governing Malawi Congress Party (MCP), led by incumbent President Lazarus Chakwera, has emerged as the most vocal critic of the electoral process.

On September 19, the party announced it had uncovered evidence of irregularities spanning 13 of Malawi's 28 districts.

Vitumbiko Mumba, Chakwera's Running Mate, confirmed that the party has lodged a formal complaint with MEC, demanding a comprehensive physical audit of results in areas where "serious anomalies" were discovered.

The allegations extend far beyond simple administrative errors.

MakanDay sources suggest a coordinated effort to manipulate results, with particular concern focused on four key districts: Mangochi, Machinga, Ntcheu, and Nkhata Bay.

Results from these constituencies were effectively quarantined by MEC, with officials citing the need for "verification" before release.

The Ghost of 2019 Returns

The current crisis bears uncomfortable similarities to the 2019 elections, which were ultimately nullified by Malawi's Constitutional Court.

During that electoral debacle, judges cited "widespread, systematic and grave" irregularities, including the infamous use of correction fluid (Tipp-Ex) on result tally sheets.

The Court's decision, upheld by the Supreme Court, was hailed internationally as a triumph for democratic accountability and led to Chakwera's historic victory in the 2020 rerun.

Now, five years later, similar accusations are emerging.

Multiple sources within the electoral process have reported instances of counterfeit result forms appearing alongside missing original documentation.

In some cases, duplicate tally sheets have been discovered, raising questions about the integrity of the entire tallying process.

MEC Under Fire

The Malawi Electoral Commission finds itself at the center of mounting criticism over its handling of the election.

Beyond the quarantined results in the four districts, the commission has faced accusations of compromised neutrality and systemic failures in result delivery.

The delayed announcement of official results has only fueled speculation about behind-the-scenes manipulation.

Police intervention has added another layer of complexity to the crisis.

Eight election data entry clerks in the Lilongwe area have been arrested on suspicion of "manipulating data," according to official sources.

While authorities have not provided detailed information about the nature of the alleged manipulation, the arrests have reinforced concerns about the integrity of the electronic tallying system.

Opposition Voices Join the Chorus

The MCP is not alone in its concerns.

The United Democratic Front (UDF), led by Atupele Muluzi, has documented irregularities across multiple districts, including vote figures that allegedly do not match the number of registered voters, technical failures of election machines, and altered vote tallies.

Traditional leaders in Blantyre have also petitioned MEC, citing voting irregularities in the South Lunzu Constituency.

The breadth of complaints suggests this is not merely post-election positioning by losing parties, but potentially indicative of systemic failures within Malawi's electoral apparatus.

A Democracy Under Strain

The current electoral crisis comes at a particularly sensitive time for Malawi's democracy.

The country's successful navigation of the 2019-2020 electoral dispute is viewed as a model for democratic resilience in the region.

However, the emergence of similar patterns of irregularities raises questions about whether the fundamental issues that plagued the 2019 elections were ever fully addressed.

Human Rights Watch warned as early as August 2025 that without urgent intervention from domestic institutions and regional actors, Malawi risked "descending into a cycle of contested legitimacy and democratic decay."

Those warnings now appear prescient as the country grapples with yet another disputed election outcome.

The Road Ahead

As investigations continue and legal challenges mount, Malawi finds itself at a democratic crossroads.

The MEC's handling of the current crisis will likely determine not only the legitimacy of the 2025 elections, but also the long-term health of the country's democratic institutions.

With preliminary results showing former President Peter Mutharika of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) leading with 2,022,955 votes at the time of writing, several presidential candidates have already conceded defeat.

Joyce Banda of the People's Party (PP) and Dalitso Kabambe of the United Transformation Movement (UTM) have both congratulated Mutharika on his projected victory, demonstrating a level of acceptance that contrasts sharply with the ongoing disputes over electoral irregularities. However, the stakes remain extraordinarily high given the scale of complaints lodged by the governing MCP.

If the irregularities prove substantial enough to warrant legal intervention, Malawi may face another rerun election.

Despite some candidates' willingness to accept the preliminary results, such a scenario could further strain public confidence in the electoral system.

Closely watching is the international community.

With regional bodies and development partners expressing concern about the unfolding situation, for a country that once stood as a beacon of electoral justice in Africa, the current crisis represents not just a political challenge, but a test of the resilience of democratic institutions in the face of sustained pressure.

If it’s not licenced, it’s not safe

Bank of Zambia Cautions Borrowers

By Linda Soko Tembo

The Bank of Zambia (BoZ) has raised alarm over the growing number of unlicensed online credit providers accused of predatory lending practices that exploit unsuspecting borrowers through unfair, deceptive, and sometimes fraudulent means.

In a statement, BoZ Assistant Director of Communications, Besnat Mwanza, explained that affected borrowers are often lured into taking unaffordable loans with unclear terms, leaving them exposed to serious financial harm.

Mwanza stressed that these online lenders operate outside the regulatory framework and are not bound by consumer protection standards.

“Consumers that engage with such entities expose themselves to significant financial and other risks because the usual consumer protection recourse mechanisms are not available to them in the event of disputes,” she said.

She revealed that the central bank is working with relevant authorities to take enforcement action against unlicensed credit providers. Mwanza further urged the public to avoid transacting with financial service providers that are not licenced.

“Due diligence is critical. We urge the public to verify the licensing status of financial service providers before engaging in any financial transactions,” she emphasised.

Mwanza added that all licenced financial institutions are required to comply with regulatory standards that promote consumer protection, transparency, and ethical business practices. A publicly accessible list of licenced financial service providers is available on the Bank of Zambia website



Awards Ceremony

Entries Open for MakaanDay Investigative Reporting Award

The Eminent Prize for Investigative Journalism is now in its fourth year. This award recognises journalists who demonstrate exceptional commitment to uncovering hidden facts and holding leaders accountable.

Deadline: 31st October 2025

A panel of independent judges will review submissions and select up to two winners.

- Overall Winner: A brand-new laptop
- Runner-up(s): A three-month, fully paid internship at MakaanDay
- Honourable Mentions: Up to two may be named and invited to the awards ceremony hosted by MakaanDay

Winning and finalist entries will be featured on the website <https://makanday.org> and across our social media platforms.

Submission Guidelines

- Entries must uncover abuse of power, corruption, or expose injustice.
- Journalists may submit their own work or nominate another’s work (with their permission).
- Eligible entries must have been published or broadcast between 1st January and October 31st 2025.
- Non-English entries must include a translation.
- For print entries: include a scanned copy (and, if unclear, a transcript in Word or PDF).
- For broadcast entries (TV, radio, or online video): include a link or attach the file.
- All entries must include a biography and photo of the entrant(s).
- The awards are open to all Zambian journalists and MakaanDay contributors. However, MakaanDay journalists are not eligible to participate.

Submit entries to: editor@makanday.org

Visit: website <https://makanday.org>

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