



# Russia's Nuclear Projects in Africa: Profits and Political Gain

**OE Watch Commentary:** Russia's state-owned nuclear conglomerate Rosatom recently received permission from Rwanda to construct a nuclear research center and reactor in the capital, Kigali. As the accompanying article from *Deutsche Welle* reports, the complex, with its 10-megawatt capacity research reactor, is intended to be completed by 2024. Rosatom has inked similar deals with Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Zambia, and less extensive ones with Ghana, the Sudan, Uganda, and the DRC.

Since Western sanctions for its invasion of Crimea, Russia has been looking to Africa for business opportunities, though these agreements mean more than just profits for Russia. As the article discusses, with these investments, Russia also gains new friends in Africa, and important new partners on international issues which may come up for votes in the UN, where Africa has the greatest number of votes. The article describes that this is all part of Putin's need to remain relevant in Russia and ensure the country has significant international influence. Large deals with African countries help provide that influence.

Exactly how large that contract is with Rwanda is unknown. However, it must be noted that Rosatom, the world's biggest nuclear company when it comes to foreign orders, offers all-in-one deals. Thus, it can be expected that besides constructing the Kigali plant, it will train Rwandan researchers and technicians, supply uranium for the plant's entire lifetime, and dispose of nuclear waste. Russian state loans will probably also finance the deal.

The article discusses the many benefits to having small reactors, such as the production of radioisotopes for medical care, but also notes that many experts feel that nuclear technology is inappropriate, at least at this time, with some concerns centering on potential terrorism and instability in several of the countries looking to obtain them. However, the biggest worry appears to be their enormous expense and the drain they will have on many African countries with limited financial resources. Thus, despite Russia's promotion of the technology, the fear is that the future African landscape could be dotted with "white elephants"-- what the article describes as costly projects that countries end up being locked into, and perhaps radioactive ones at that. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



The Research Reactor (ETRR-2) in Inshas, Egypt was built by the USSR in 1958. Rosatom, the Russian owned nuclear conglomerate, has agreements to build several nuclear reactors in Africa..

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***“Rosatom has been aggressively wooing African nations since the mid-2000s... the nuclear deals are seen as part of Russia’s push turn a profit and gain influence in Africa.”***

**Source:** Kate Hairsine, “Russia’s nuclear play for power in Africa,” *Deutsche Welle*, 30 June 2020. <https://www.dw.com/en/russias-nuclear-play-for-power-in-africa/a-54004039>

*“There is good money if you can sell a research reactor,” said nuclear scientist Gatari.*

*“Unfortunately, the convincing capacity of [Rosatom’s] marketing is very high, and the understanding of those who are buying is low.”*

*Rosatom has been aggressively wooing African nations since the mid-2000s and the nuclear deals are seen as part of Russia’s push turn a profit and also gain influence in Africa.*

*“For Putin to remain relevant in Russia, he really has to ensure that Russia has a big influence,” said Ovigwe Eguegu, a geopolitics analyst with the international affairs platform, Afripolitika. “That’s why he is looking at African markets so he has more parties to partner with when it comes to international issues.”*

*In addition, on a continent where more than half of the population lack access to electricity, there is “immense potential” for nuclear to provide a clean source of energy to meet Africa’s large energy deficit, the Center for Global Development study, Atoms for Africa, found.*

*Rosatom funds scholarships for students from sub-Saharan Africa to study nuclear sciences and engineering in Russia. As of January 2020, around 300 students from more than 15 African countries were studying nuclear specialties there.*

*Currently, South Africa is the only country in sub-Saharan Africa with a functioning nuclear power plant, while Nigeria and Ghana have research reactors, which are primarily used for studying and training and to test materials, such as minerals....*

*Gatari [a professor at the University of Nairobi] warns of countries becoming locked into costly projects that end up being “white elephants”.*