

**PRELIMINARY ACCIDENT REPORT**

**Accident and Incident Investigations Division**

Accident  
- Preliminary Report -  
AIID Ref No: CA18/2/3/10664



**Figure 1:** The file picture of the accident aircraft. (Source: [www.flightzone.co.za](http://www.flightzone.co.za))

**Description:**

On Saturday afternoon, 27 June 2026, a pilot and a passenger on-board a Piper PA28-180 aircraft with registration ZS-ESZ were on an hour-building flight from Lanseria International Airport (FALA) in Gauteng province with the intention to return to the same airport.

The aircraft took off at 1325Z from FALA Runway 07 to the Johannesburg (JHB) General Flying Area (GFA). Eyewitnesses reported seeing the aircraft flying low and performing unfamiliar manoeuvres before the engine silenced. The eyewitnesses also surmised that the pilot attempted to restart the engine as it descended, based on the cranking sound they heard. Thereafter, it flipped and spun to the left before it impacted the ground. The authorities were notified of the accident and promptly responded to the scene. The pilot and the passenger were fatally injured; the aircraft was destroyed.

## Occurrence Details

|                         |                                                                 |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Reference Number        | : CA18/2/3/10664                                                |
| Occurrence Category     | : Category 1 (Accident)                                         |
| Type of Operation       | : Training (Part 91)                                            |
| Name of Operator        | : Bird Aviation                                                 |
| Aircraft Registration   | : ZS-ESZ                                                        |
| Aircraft Make and Model | : Piper PA 28-180                                               |
| Nationality             | : South African                                                 |
| Place                   | : Elandsfontein Farm, south-east of Fochville, Gauteng province |
| Date and Time           | : 27 June 2026 at 1415Z                                         |
| Injuries                | : Two fatalities                                                |
| Damage                  | : Destroyed                                                     |

## Purpose of the Investigation

*In terms of Regulation 12.03.1 of the Civil Aviation Regulations (CAR) 2011, this report was compiled in the interest of the promotion of aviation safety and the reduction of the risk of aviation accidents or incidents and not to apportion blame or liability.*

*All times given in this report are Co-ordinated Universal Time (UTC) and will be denoted by (Z). South African Standard Time is UTC plus 2 hours.*

## Investigation Process

The Accident and Incident Investigations Division (AIID) was notified of an occurrence involving an aircraft in Fochville on 27 June 2026 at 1415Z. The occurrence was classified as an accident according to the CAR 2011 Part 12 and the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) STD Annex 13 definitions.

The AIID appointed an investigator-in-charge and a co-investigator to conduct a full investigation. The investigators were dispatched to the accident site. Notifications were sent to the State of Registry, Operator, Design and Manufacturer, and Nationality in accordance with the CAR 2011 Part 12 and the ICAO Annex 13 Chapter 4. The State of Manufacturer and the State of Nationality have appointed an accredited representative and advisor. The AIID will lead the investigation and issue the final report of this accident in accordance with the CAR 2011 Part 12 and the ICAO Annex 13.

The information contained in this preliminary report is derived from the information gathered during the on-going investigation into the occurrence. Later, an interim or final report may contain altered information in case new evidence is found during the on-going investigation that requires changes to the information depicted in this report.

The AIID reports are made available to the public at:

<https://www.caa.co.za/industry-information/accidents-and-incidents/>

### Notes:

1. *Whenever the following words are mentioned in this report, they shall mean the following:*

*Accident — this investigated accident*

*Aircraft— the Piper PA28-180 involved in this accident*

*Investigation — the investigation into the circumstances of this accident*

*Pilot — the pilot involved in this accident*

*Report — this accident report*

2. *Photos and figures used in this report were taken from different sources and may have been adjusted from the original for the sole purpose of improving clarity of the report. Modifications to images used in this report were limited to cropping, magnification, file compression; or enhancement of colour, brightness, contrast; or addition of text boxes, arrows, or lines.*

## **Disclaimer**

*This report is produced without prejudice to the rights of the South African Civil Aviation Authority (SACAA), which are reserved.*

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| Abbreviation | Description                                                        |
|--------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| °            | Degrees                                                            |
| °C           | Degrees Celsius                                                    |
| AIC          | Aeronautical Information Circular                                  |
| AIID         | Accident and Incident Investigations Division                      |
| AIP          | Aeronautical Information Publication                               |
| AGL          | Above Ground Level                                                 |
| AMO          | Aircraft Maintenance Organisation                                  |
| ATCO         | Air Traffic Control Officer                                        |
| ATO          | Approved Training Organisation                                     |
| C of A       | Certificate of Airworthiness                                       |
| C of R       | Certificate of Registration                                        |
| CRS          | Certificate of Release to Service                                  |
| FAD          | Flight Area Dangerous                                              |
| FALA         | Lanseria International Airport                                     |
| ft           | Feet                                                               |
| GPS          | Global Positioning System                                          |
| hPa          | Hectopascal                                                        |
| JHB          | Johannesburg                                                       |
| kt           | Knots                                                              |
| m            | Metres                                                             |
| METAR        | Meteorological Aerodrome Report                                    |
| nm           | Nautical Mile                                                      |
| NOTAM        | Notice to Airmen                                                   |
| PPL          | Private Pilot Licence                                              |
| SACAA        | South African Civil Aviation Authority                             |
| SAWS         | South African Weather Service                                      |
| TMA          | Terminal Monitoring Area                                           |
| QNH          | Altitude Above Mean Sea Level                                      |
| VNL          | Valid only with correction for defective near vision               |
| Z            | Zulu (Term for Universal Co-ordinated Time - Zero Hours Greenwich) |

## 1. FACTUAL INFORMATION

### 1.1. History of Flight

- 1.1.1. On Saturday afternoon, 27 June 2026, a pilot and a passenger (with a private Pilot Licence [PPL]) aboard a Piper PA28-180 aircraft registered ZS-ESZ took off on an hour-building flight from Lanseria International Airport (FALA) in Gauteng province with the intention to return to the same airport. The flight was conducted under visual meteorological conditions (VMC) and in accordance with the provisions of Part 91 of the Civil Aviation Regulations (CAR) 2011, as amended.
- 1.1.2. The take-off was planned for 0900Z, but due to persisting low visibility (hazy conditions) in the area, they delayed their departure until the weather had cleared. The take-off was at 1325Z from Runway 07, which was confirmed by the air traffic control officer (ATCO) at FALA. After departure, the aircraft flew to the Johannesburg General Flying Area (GFA) – Flight Area Dangerous (FAD) 182.
- 1.1.3. Multiple eyewitnesses spotted the aircraft flying unusually low in the GFA on Saturday afternoon. They described the aircraft as performing unfamiliar manoeuvres before the engine silenced. Thereafter, the aircraft flipped and began spinning to the left. The eyewitnesses reported hearing the pilot trying to restart (cranking) the engine during its descent. The aircraft subsequently impacted the ground. Relevant authorities were notified about the accident.
- 1.1.4. The accident occurred at a farm in Elandsfontein, south-east of Fochville in Gauteng province at Global Positioning System (GPS) co-ordinates determined to be 26° 35' 27.30" South 27° 33' 41.24" East, at a field elevation of 5 124 feet (ft).

### 1.2. Injuries to Persons

| Injuries     | Pilot    | Crew     | Pass.    | Total On-board | Other    |
|--------------|----------|----------|----------|----------------|----------|
| Fatal        | 1        | -        | 1        | 2              | -        |
| Serious      | -        | -        | -        | -              | -        |
| Minor        | -        | -        | -        | -              | -        |
| None         | -        | -        | -        | -              | -        |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>1</b> | <b>-</b> | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b>       | <b>-</b> |

Note: Other means people on the ground.

1.2.1. The pilot and the passenger were fatally injured in the accident.

### 1.3. Damage to Aircraft

1.3.1. The aircraft was destroyed during the accident.



**Figure 2:** The wreckage at the accident site.

### 1.4. Other Damage

1.4.1. None.

### 1.5. Personnel Information (Pilot-in-Command)

|                     |                             |               |      |     |    |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|------|-----|----|
| Nationality         | Indian                      | Gender        | Male | Age | 21 |
| Licence Type        | Private Pilot Licence (PPL) |               |      |     |    |
| Licence Valid       | Yes                         | Type Endorsed | Yes  |     |    |
| Ratings             | None                        |               |      |     |    |
| Medical Expiry Date | 31 March 2030               |               |      |     |    |
| Restrictions        | Yes                         |               |      |     |    |
| Previous Accidents  | None                        |               |      |     |    |

Note: Previous accidents refer to past accidents the pilot was involved in, when relevant to this accident.

**Flying Experience:**

|                            |       |
|----------------------------|-------|
| Total Hours                | 132.2 |
| Total Past 24 Hours        | 0     |
| Total Past 7 Days          | 19.4  |
| Total Past 90 Days         | 55.1  |
| Total on Type Past 90 Days | 43.8  |
| Total on Type              | 122.7 |

1.5.1. The pilot had a Private Pilot Licence (PPL) that was initially issued by the Regulator on 25 May 2026 with an expiry date of 30 April 2027. The aircraft type was endorsed in his licence. The pilot had a Class 2 aviation medical certificate that was issued on 26 March 2025 with an expiry date of 31 March 2030.

1.5.2. The pilot had accumulated a total of 122.7 hours on the Piper PA 28-180 aircraft.

1.5.3. The pilot was conducting an hour-building training towards acquiring a Commercial Pilot Licence (CPL) through the approved training organisation (ATO), and from which the aircraft was hired.

**1.6. Aircraft Information**

1.6.1. The Piper PA-28-180 is a four-seat, single-engine, all-metal frame, low-wing aircraft with fixed tricycle landing gear. It is powered by a four-cylinder, naturally aspirated, 180-horsepower Lycoming O-360 series engine.

**Airframe:**

|                                            |                               |                 |
|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|
| Manufacturer/Model                         | Piper Aircraft, Inc/PA-28-180 |                 |
| Serial Number                              | 28-3303                       |                 |
| Year of Manufacture                        | 1977                          |                 |
| Total Airframe Hours (At Time of Accident) | 3242.6                        |                 |
| Last Inspection (Date & Hours)             | 13 March 2026                 | 3 218.4         |
| Hours Since Last Inspection                | 24.2                          |                 |
| CRS Issue Date                             | 13 March 2026                 |                 |
| C of A (Issue Date & Expiry Date)          | 20 February 2017              | 31 October 2017 |
| C of R (Issue Date) (Present Owner)        | 17 November 2025              |                 |
| Type of Fuel Used                          | Avgas 100LL                   |                 |
| Operating Category                         | Private (Part 91)             |                 |
| Previous Accidents                         | None                          |                 |

Note: Previous accidents refer to past accidents the aircraft was involved in, when relevant to this accident.

**Engine:**

|                      |                  |
|----------------------|------------------|
| Manufacturer/Model   | Textron Lycoming |
| Serial Number        | L9765-36A        |
| Part Number          | O-360-A3A        |
| Hours Since New      | 3 248.7          |
| Hours Since Overhaul | 24.2             |

**Propeller:**

|                      |                      |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| Manufacturer/Model   | Sensenich Propellers |
| Serial Number        | CH19590              |
| Part Number          | 76EM8S5-0-60         |
| Hours Since New      | 1736.3               |
| Hours Since Overhaul | 24.2                 |

- 1.6.2. The aircraft had a valid Certificate of Registration (C of R) that was issued to the current owner on 19 September 2025, as well as a valid Certificate of Airworthiness (C of A) that was initially issued on 20 February 2017. The latest C of A had an expiry date of 31 October 2026.
- 1.6.3. Maintenance records indicated that the recent 100-hour mandatory periodic inspection (MPI) was signed off on 13 March 2026 at 3 218.4 total airframe hours after which a Certificate of Release to Service was issued with an expiry date of 12 March 2027 or at 3 318.4 total airframe hours, whichever comes first.
- 1.6.4. The aircraft was maintained by an aircraft maintenance organisation (AMO) with an AMO Certificate that was issued by the Regulator. The AMO Certificate had an expiry date of 30 June 2026. The AMO had a Category A and Category C ratings listed in its Operations Specifications (Ops Specs) for the aircraft airframe and engine.
- 1.6.5. According to the operator's fuel receipt, 111 litres of Aviation Gasoline 100 Low Lead (Avgas 100LL) was uplifted after the flight which was conducted on 26 June 2026. The pilot (who flew the aircraft at the time) refuelled the tanks before parking it. The Piper PA-28-180 has a fuel capacity of 189 litres, which equates to an endurance of approximately 6 hours.

**1.7. Meteorological Information**

- 1.7.1. The weather information below was obtained from the Meteorological Aerodrome Report (METAR) that was issued by the South African Weather Service (SAWS), recorded at FALA on 27 June 2026 at 1400Z. The accident site was approximately 43 nautical miles (nm) from FALA.

|                |       |             |           |            |         |
|----------------|-------|-------------|-----------|------------|---------|
| Wind Direction | 300°  | Wind Speed  | 07 kt     | Visibility | CAVOK   |
| Temperature    | 16 °C | Cloud Cover | Scattered | Cloud Base | 4500 ft |
| Dew Point      | 05°C  | QNH         | 1026 hPa  |            |         |

## 1.8. Aids to Navigation

1.8.1. The aircraft was equipped with standard navigational equipment as approved by the Regulator. There were no records indicating that the navigational equipment was unserviceable prior to the flight.

## 1.9. Communication

1.9.1. The aircraft was equipped with a standard communication system as approved by the Regulator. There were no recorded defects with the communication system prior to the flight.

## 1.10. Aerodrome Information

1.10.1. The accident occurred at a farm approximately 43nm south-west of FALA.

## 1.11. Flight Recorders

1.11.1. The aircraft was neither equipped with a flight data recorder (FDR) or a cockpit voice recorder (CVR), nor was it required by regulation to be fitted to the aircraft type.

## 1.12. Wreckage and Impact Information

1.12.1. The aircraft impacted the ground in a steep nose-down attitude at a high-speed with little forward momentum. The debris was localised at the point of impact; the crater was the only ground scar found after the accident. The aircraft was found resting facing south-east.

1.12.2. During the examination of the aircraft, all flight controls were confirmed but one, which was the flight control continuity. The ailerons could not be moved and were both in the Down position. The elevator and rudder moved freely (see Figure 3).

1.12.3. The undercarriage broke and collapsed rearwards during the accident (see Figure 3).



**Figure 3:** The rear view of the aircraft after the accident.

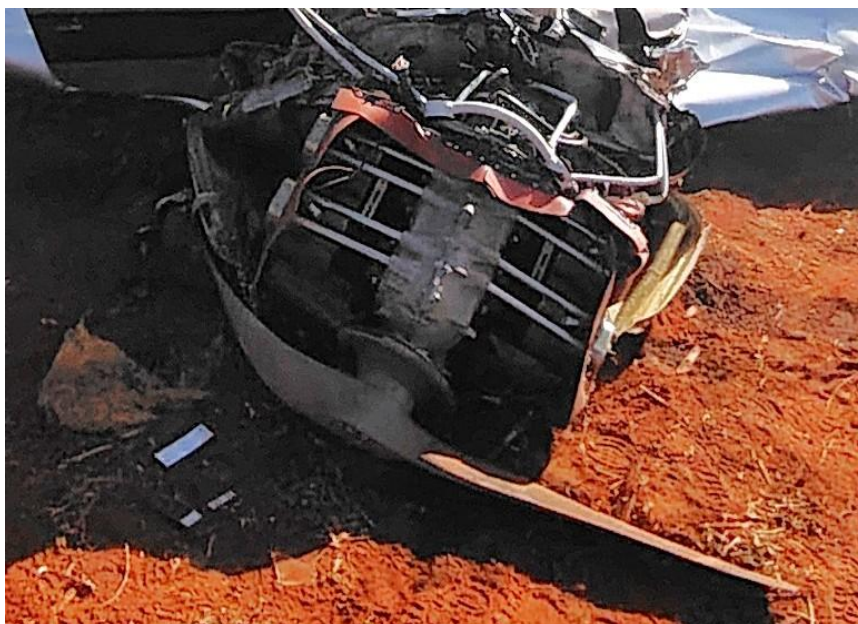
1.12.4. Both wings exhibited severe damage to the leading edges, along with accordion-like wrinkling (deformation) of the skin which ruptured the fuel tanks. The damage was consistent with compressive loading from the front of the wing during rapid deceleration, resulting from the steep nose-down impact (see Figure 4).



**Figure 4:** The damaged propeller and wings.

1.12.5. The top engine cowling had broken off and was found approximately 10 metres forward of the main wreckage. The engine cradle was deformed, and the engine was facing slightly to the right (see Figure 4).

1.12.6. The propeller exhibited asymmetrical damage. One of the two blades was bent rearwards and the other displayed little to no deformation. Neither blade showed evidence of S-curve bending. The damage pattern was consistent with a non-rotating propeller at the time of impact (see Figure 5).



**Figure 5:** The state of the propellers after the accident.

1.12.7. The instrument panel had broken into multiple pieces with various indicators found dislodged from their original positions (see Figure 6).



**Figure 6:** The aircraft's instrument panel.

### **1.13. Medical and Pathological Information**

1.13.1. To be discussed in the final report.

### **1.14. Fire**

1.14.1. There was no evidence of a pre- or post- impact fire.

### **1.15. Survival Aspects**

1.15.1. The accident was considered not survivable due to the extent of damaged in the cockpit during impact.

1.15.2. Emergency responders stated that the pilot-in-command was not wearing his seat belt at the time of the accident and was consequently thrown out of the aircraft.

### **1.16. Tests and Research**

1.16.1. To be discussed in the final report.

### **1.17. Organisational and Management Information**

1.17.1. The aircraft was operated privately on a hire-and-fly agreement.

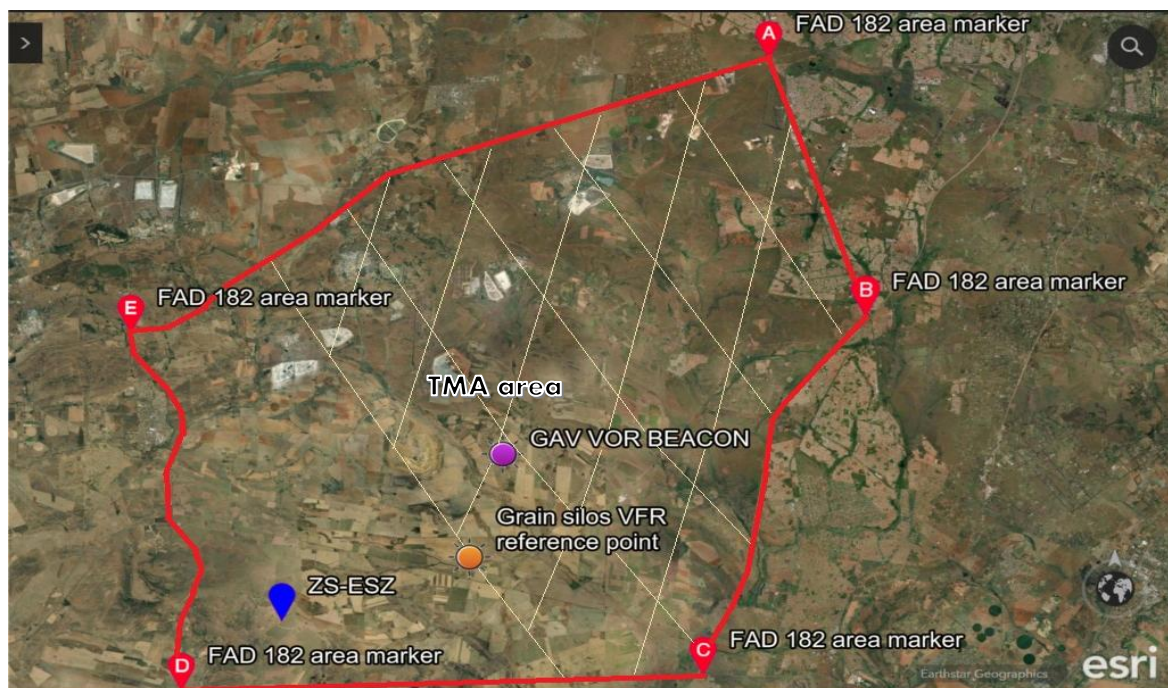
1.17.2. The aircraft belonged to the ATO which had a valid ATO Certificate that was renewed on 17 November 2025 with an expiry date of 28 February 2029.

1.17.3. The aircraft was maintained by the AMO that had a valid AMO Certificate with an expiry date of 30 June 2026. The AMO had Category A and Category C ratings listed in its Ops Specs for the aircraft airframe and engine.

## 1.18. Additional Information

1.18.1. The accident occurred in the Johannesburg GFA at FAD 182, outside of the terminal control area (TMA). The vertical limits of FAD 182 start from the ground to flight level 100 (10 000ft), except where it intersects the TMA (see Figure 7).

- *Flight danger area means an area of defined dimensions within which activities dangerous to the flight of aircraft may exist at specified times.*
- *Terminal control area means a control area established at the confluence of air traffic service routes in the vicinity of one or more major aerodromes as published in an aeronautical information publication (AIP), aeronautical information circular (AIC) or notice to airmen (NOTAM) and designated as a terminal control area.*



**Figure 7:** The accident site (blue mark) in the FAD 182 airspace with the TMA space denoted by the hatched area. (Source: ArcGIS Earth Esri Map)

1.18.2. The operator informed the investigating team that as an ATO, they use a tracking application, Safely Track Me, to monitor flights. The application uses the GPS signal of the pilot's cellular phone to track the aircraft. When the aircraft departed from FALA, the application was active; however, shortly after exiting the Johannesburg (JHB) Special Rules Area West TMA, the cellular phone stopped transmitting its GPS signal, and the aircraft's flight path could no longer be tracked.

## 1.19. Useful or Effective Investigation Techniques

1.19.1. None.

## 2. FINDINGS

### 2.1. General

From the available evidence, the following preliminary findings were made with respect to this accident. These shall not be read as apportioning blame or liability to any organisation or individual.

To serve the objective of this investigation, the following sections are included in the conclusions heading:

- **Findings** — are statements of all significant conditions, events, or circumstances in this accident. The findings are significant steps in this accident sequence, but they are not always causal or indicate deficiencies.

### 2.2. Findings

- 2.2.1. The pilot was qualified and medically fit to conduct the flight. He had a valid Private Pilot Licence (PPL) and a Class 2 medical certificate with an expiry date of 30 April 2027 and 31 March 2030, respectively.
- 2.2.2. The aircraft was operated by the pilot in private capacity as a hire-and-fly agreement for hour-building exercise.
- 2.2.3. The operator had a valid Approved Training Organisation (ATO) Certificate that was issued by the Regulator (SACAA) with an expiry date of 28 February 2029.
- 2.2.4. The aircraft was registered to the current owner by the Regulator on 19 September 2025; it had a valid Certificate of Airworthiness (C of A) with an expiry date of 31 October 2026.
- 2.2.5. The aircraft's maintenance record was up to date; the mandatory periodic inspection (MPI) was conducted after which a Certificate of Release to Service was issued with validity until 12 March 2027 or at 3 318.4 total airframe hours, whichever comes first.
- 2.2.6. The aircraft departed from FALA with full fuel tanks and with no technical issues; however, fuel was found leaking out of the aircraft after the accident.

- 2.2.7. The aircraft impacted the ground at high speed in a steep nose-down attitude with little forward momentum. It was found relatively intact with all flight control surfaces accounted for and with only the top engine cowling located approximately 10 metres from the main wreckage.
- 2.2.8. Damage to the propeller, as well as eyewitnesses' testimonies that the pilot cranked the engine, confirmed that it was not producing power at the time of impact.
- 2.2.9. Favourable weather conditions prevailed at the time of the flight; the weather was not a contributing factor in this accident.

### **3. ON-GOING INVESTIGATION**

- 3.1. The AIID investigation is on-going, and the investigators will investigate other aspects of this accident which may or may not have safety implications.

### **4. SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **4.1. General**

The safety recommendations listed in this report are proposed according to paragraph 6.8 of Annex 13 to the Convention on International Civil Aviation and are based on the conclusions listed in heading 3 of this report. The AIID expects that the receiving States and organisations address all safety issues identified by the investigation.

#### **4.2. Safety Recommendation/s**

- 4.2.1. To be discussed in the final report.

### **5. APPENDICES**

- 5.1 None.

**This report is issued by:**

**Accident and Incident Investigations Division  
South African Civil Aviation Authority  
Republic of South Africa**