

The Continent

with Mail & Guardian



ON THE FRONTLINE

Stories of heroism and hope



This newspaper will make you feel better about the world

Look around you. Look beyond the scary headlines. Look beyond the anxieties that grip us all. Look beyond the walls of wherever you might find yourself in lockdown.

Yes, these are strange times, and it's not always easy to keep our spirits up. But as soon as you start looking, it doesn't take long to realise that even now - especially now - the world is full of hope and inspiration.

In this edition, we have chronicled that hope, in the form of extraordinary Africans doing extraordinary things in extraordinary times.

Meet Martin Njoroge, the deaf Kenyan who realised that no one had told the deaf community what the coronavirus was all about - and so took it upon himself to do so.

Meet Jihan Ali, the 24-year-old doctor who spends 19 hours a day manning Somalia's coronavirus hotline, gently

reassuring and advising worried callers from all over the country.

Meet Justice Kenyatta Nyirenda, the judge who risked the wrath of the president to make sure that Malawi's poorest and most vulnerable citizens receive some measure of economic protection. Sure enough, the president was wrathful, but Nyirenda succeeded.

Their stories, and the others that we bring you in this special edition, are just a snapshot of the ordinary, everyday heroism that has characterised Africa's response to the pandemic. The good news is that there is plenty more of it - in every village, town and city on this continent.

Fela Kuti once said: "The music of Africa is big sound: it's the sound of a community." Today, in the face of an unprecedented threat, this is what our community sounds like. ■

Share real news

The Continent is free to read, and free to share. We have no delivery trucks or roadside newspaper traders: we rely on you, our readers, to disseminate our newspaper. If you like our journalism, please share it with your friends and family - not indiscriminately, but with people and networks who you think might value the work that we do.



Shout it from the rooftops: 49-year-old Gonzaga Yiga is an area chairperson in Kampala, Uganda. Every day, he uses his loudhailer to tell residents what they can do to curb the spread of Covid-19. (Photo: Badru Katumba for AFP via Getty Images)

YOU ARE OUR DISTRIBUTION MODEL.

People keep asking us how we've reached such a large audience, so quickly. The answer is simple: it's because of you. Our readers are sharing this far and wide, and we are enormously grateful.

That's exactly what we hoped would happen when we launched. Getting this news out there depends on you sharing this with your friends, family and colleagues - not indiscriminately, but only to people who would value it. So please keep sharing!

Inside:

- 'I was meant to be at my father's funeral. But I had to lay him to rest via video call'.
- **Exclusive:** Documents show the USA's plans to reinforce its military footprint in Africa
- **The News Quiz:** Are you the African Renaissance?
- **PLUS** reporting from Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Cameroon, Somalia, Madagascar, Malawi and more

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If you enjoyed this edition of *The Continent*, please share it with your friends and colleagues. You are a part of the work that we do.

Senegal invents \$1 testing kit

The Institute Pasteur in Senegal is developing a Covid-19 diagnostic kit that costs only \$1 and can provide results in 10 minutes. The kit works like a pregnancy test: a drop of saliva or blood is placed onto a testing strip, and a positive result is indicated if a line appears. Researcher Amadou Sall explains. “There’s no need for a highly equipped lab. It’s a simple test that can be done anywhere. The idea is to rapidly produce 2 to 4 million kits not just for us but for other African countries; so that we can detect and isolate patients quickly.” But before we get too excited, a word of caution: this test kit is still in its trial phase and its accuracy has yet to be confirmed. ■



Wanted: Guillaume Soro was convicted of buying a house with public money. He denies the charges
(Photo: Lionel Bonaventure for AFP)

Soro gets 20 years

Guillaume Soro, the Ivorian rebel leader-turned-presidential candidate, was convicted of embezzlement by a court in Abidjan and sentenced to 20 years in prison. The trial lasted only a few hours and was boycotted by Soro and his lawyers. Soro himself is currently in exile in Europe. The decision may spark tensions in Cote D’Ivoire ahead of the presidential election in late October. ■

US admits fatal airstrike

The United States admitted this week that it had killed two civilians and injured three others in an airstrike in Somalia. The attack occurred in early 2019. “We are deeply sorry this occurred,” said US Army General Stephen Townsend. The US has intensified its air war against

alleged Al Shabaab targets in Somalia over the past several years. Journalists and rights groups have repeatedly reported on civilian casualties as a result of these strikes, but this is only the second time that the US has admitted fault. ■

Zimbabwe's collapsing economy

Zimbabwe's finance minister Mthuli Ncube has said that the country may "suffer a health and economic catastrophe" unless it receives urgent assistance from international lenders. Writing in a letter to international finance institutions, Ncube said the economy was likely to contract by 15%-20% because of the impact of the pandemic. In an unprecedented admission, Ncube acknowledged that the government had failed previously to implement necessary economic reforms. ■



Going up in smoke: Zimbabwe's lucrative tobacco auction reopened this week. The crop is a major source of desperately-needed foreign currency (Photo: Jekesai Njikizana)

IMF to Nigeria's rescue

Nigeria's economy has been struck by the double whammy of the coronavirus pandemic and slumping oil prices. Africa's most populous country is in trouble, which is why the International Monetary Fund has approved an emergency loan of \$3.4 billion to help limit the damage. This is the largest financing that the institution has provided to any single country affected by the pandemic. Also this week, Nigeria's senate approved legislation to allow President Muhammadu Buhari to borrow \$2.36 billion from domestic sources. ■

Sudan makes FGM illegal

Carrying out Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is now a criminal offence in Sudan, punishable by three years in jail. The United Nations says that 87% of Sudanese women have undergone some form of FGM, which involves the partial or total removal of the female genitalia. It can cause serious health problems. Although a major step, the new law does not necessarily mean an end to the practise. "Sudan may face challenges in enforcing legislation. People who still believe in the practise might not report cases or act to stop FGM," said Faiza Mohamed, the Africa regional director for Equality Now. ■



Illustration: Francois Smit

How do you say 'coronavirus' in sign language?

Njeri Kimani

When President Uhuru Kenyatta first announced measures to combat the spread of coronavirus in Kenya in March, nearly a million of his countrymen couldn't hear him speak. Among them was Martin Ndung'u Njoroge, who was born deaf in Nakuru 28 years ago. He had to rely on his wife to explain that the Covid-19 pandemic had

arrived in Kenya.

It was a Damascus moment, he said. "It hit me that many hearing impaired might not understand the impact of the disease."

A teacher at the Horizon Sign Language Training Centre in Nakuru, Njoroge began creating videos to help keep the deaf community informed, and shared them on social media. They quickly went viral, with as many as three million views per video.

He says there were many myths and misconceptions to clear up. "I had to communicate the basics — including handwashing and what to do when one falls ill." He also shared emergency contact information, where to find quarantine facilities, and how to put on, take off and dispose of masks safely.

Njoroge is proud of how well his posts have been received, but still worries about the communication gap between the government and the deaf community, and has appealed for sign language interpreters to be present in hospitals and quarantine centres.

The posts went viral, with as many as 3 million views per video

He is also concerned about hearing impaired children being left behind in the government's e-learning programme for schools. "If they can't follow along, it will be hard for them to sit examinations at the end of the year," he says. ■



Illustration: Francois Smit

The doctor answering the phone at Mogadishu's Covid call centre

Samira Sawlani

If you have questions about the coronavirus, and you live in Somalia, you can dial 449 from your phone to speak to an expert.

Jihan Ali might pick up. The 24 year-old doctor is working 19-hour days at the government-run call centre, offering

advice and reassurance to anxious callers. It is advice that might save lives. "If we can just change one person's mind about this, urge them to take government advice seriously, they will

The 24 year-old is working 19-hour days

share that information with members of their community, and there will be a domino effect," she told the *Mail & Guardian*.

Ali's family left Somalia when she was just four years old. She returned two decades later, in June 2019, to bury her father.

She was not intending to stay, but when she was offered a volunteer position at the Dr Jimale Specialist Hospital in Mogadishu, she leapt at the chance to put her medical skills to use.

"One of the things my dad was most proud of was my being a doctor, and it felt like such a fitting way to honour him by doing this in the country which he loved," she said.

The call centre experiences a huge volume of calls - nearly 16,000 in the first week alone. Often people will share their symptoms, and the medical team on call will decide whether the case is an emergency that requires hospitalisation, or what other advice to give.

It's exhausting, draining work. What keeps Ali going is empathy - and lots of coffee. "When someone calls in and they are in pain, I know what steps to take." ■



Illustration: Francois Smit

When John Nkengasong talks, presidents listen

Simon Allison

The Ebola outbreak in West Africa ended officially in June 2016. In January 2017, John Nkengasong began work as head of Africa's brand new Centres for Disease Control (CDC) - the agency created to ensure that Africa was better prepared for the next public health crisis. Now that crisis is here.

Nkengasong, a Cameroonian

biologist with decades of public health experience, spent most of his career at the US CDC. Moving to Addis Ababa to take up his new job was initially something of a shock - he didn't even have an office for the first year.

The Africa CDC identified the threat posed by the coronavirus early. In the first week of February, it warned health

The Africa CDC identified the threat early. By the end of the month, 43 countries could test

ministers that this was serious, and identified a crucial weakness: at that time, only two African nations (Senegal and South Africa) had capacity to test for Covid-19. By the end of the month, 43 countries could test - thanks to training from the Africa CDC. "People don't know the heroic effort that we did in three weeks," said Nkengasong.

Despite his clear pride in how this response has gone so far - and in his key role in it - Nkengasong stresses that there is a long way still to go. "We just don't know many things on the continent. Our young population, how is that going to play out? Seventy percent is less than 30 years old. We know that older people are dying more, so what will happen to Africans? But because we are young, we are also poor. We have a poor health system. There are many unknowns that make me extremely worried." ■

The Week in Numbers

300

The number of flower bouquets that Kenya's President Uhuru Kenyatta sent to the United Kingdom. The gift was intended as a show of solidarity as the UK struggles to contain the coronavirus pandemic. Each bouquet, delivered to health workers, bore an inscription from Kenyatta: "Whatever the adversity, no matter the foe, we shall triumph together."

July 1

The date that the African Continental Free Trade Area was supposed to be implemented. It is impossible for this date to be met now that South Africa has cancelled a planned African Union summit in May. "It is only after the summit that you can say we have a new trading date. The next opportunity of a summit is on 2 January 2021," said Wamkele Mene, the Free Trade Area's secretary-general.



(Photo: supplied)

1964

The year that Tony Allen started making music with Fela Kuti. Together, the pair created Afrobeat - and, well, music has never been the same again. Allen died in Paris this week, age 79. He was widely considered to be one of the world's greatest drummers. "I try to make my drums sing and turn them into an orchestra. I don't bash my drums. Instead of bashing, I caress. If you caress your wife, you'll get good things from your wife; if you beat her up, I'm sure she'll be your enemy," he once said.

400,000

The number of refugees housed in Dadaab and Kakuma, the two biggest refugee camps in Kenya. Interior Minister Fred Mwangi said the government would be banning movement in and out of the camps as part of containment measures aimed at preventing the spread of the coronavirus.

300%

The increase in incidents of political violence in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province so far this year, as compared to the same time period in 2019. The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project has recorded more than 100 incidents of political violence in the region.

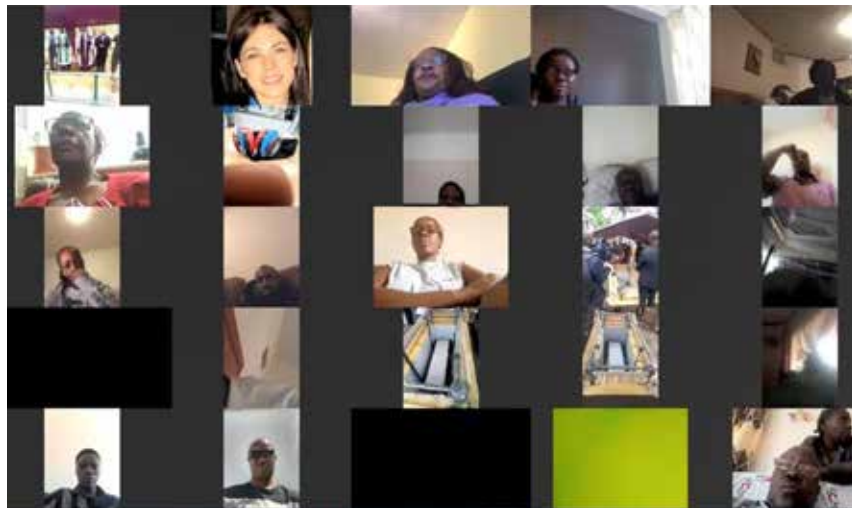
22 years

The number of years anti-apartheid activist Denis Goldberg spent in prison for armed resistance against the apartheid government. He passed away this week, aged 87.

I buried my father on Zoom

Was I laying my culture to rest at the same time?

Eric Mugaju



Laid to rest: It was not possible for Eric Mugaju to attend his father's funeral in person (Photo: supplied)

As I watch my father's casket being lowered into the grave from thousands of miles away in a London flat, I wonder what my dad would have made of it all.

The Banyankole culture has strict cultural mores that have guided generations through life and stipulated how they should be buried at its end. It demanded my presence at my father's funeral, to perform certain cultural rites and to pay my last respects.

But the Covid-19 pandemic has robbed me of the chance to travel back to Ishaka in southwestern Uganda. Instead, a centuries-old tradition has been reduced to just another event tunnelling through shaky internet to Zoom on my laptop.

My dad was a strong advocate of our culture. He was 94. I saw him in February during a short visit and, yes, age was slowing him but even with dementia he seemed invincible.

In normal times a man of my father's stature would be given a fitting funeral: a two-week mourning period, with elaborate cultural rites and hundreds of people paying their respects.

And yet here I am on Zoom, with my three siblings, trapped in London in a country under a lockdown to stop the spread of Covid-19. The once unchallenged permanence of our vibrant, colourful and proud culture feels uncertain.

Our situation is hardly unique: Uganda itself has implemented a strict lockdown. Movement has been restricted, and funerals affected. Days after my dad's funeral President Yoweri Museveni will order that people be buried where they die, a taboo in most cultures where someone's final resting place is of such personal and communal importance.

Although my dad did not die from Covid-19, he died in a peculiar new world order

Here in the United Kingdom funerals are private, usually invite-only, and some not lasting more than 45 minutes. Within this globalised Covid-19 era, both cultures are now awkwardly connected by small, private burials.

The funeral had originally been scheduled for midday in Uganda — 10am UK time. But officials insisted that the funeral start at 9am in Ishaka. And, so, I changed the time, causing waves of

shock and disbelief: a morning funeral is unheard of in Uganda.

Under lockdown, the Ugandan government allows only 10 people at funerals yet 13 people live permanently at my parent's compound. Twenty people have been allowed after police inspection. More are watching the funeral online than are physically present.

As we go live, mourners there in person are scattered and apart; instead of embracing they are barely interacting. The only sound piercing the awkward silence is a rooster's screeching cock-a-doodle-doo.

After a 30-minute delay, the funeral starts. Scattered mourners sing in unison. Only a few speeches are allowed and the mood is sombre and subdued. A strange experience, to say the least. Even days later it still won't feel totally real.

Although my dad did not die from Covid-19, he died in a peculiar new world order. Words like "social distancing" govern us now, though we have no direct translation in my language.

Technology has never shown such importance in uniting the world, quickly adapting to cultural practices and helping us retain at least some elements of our customs. But not all.

As the last shovel of soil begins to form a mound on my dad's grave, I feel that I have lost more than him. Part of our culture has gone with him, forever. ■

Eric Mugaju is a Ugandan freelance journalist based in London.



Illustration: Francois Smit

Fighting the virus with needle and thread

Amindeh Blaise Atabong

On April 13, the wearing of face masks in public became compulsory in Cameroon. But surgical masks have been in short supply, and expensive.

Fortunately, the use of reusable cloth masks is being encouraged as an alternative, and a burgeoning industry has sprung up to meet the sudden and urgent demand. Among those who have stepped up is Ange Goufack in Douala. The 27-year-old seamstress is producing face masks sewn, like many

others, from the traditional fabrics of the Cameroonian grasslands. But her distinctive designs literally stand above the rest, as Goufack has incorporated into them a transparent plastic visor.

As such, her masks cover the mouth, nose and eyes – through which the virus is known to enter the body.

Goufack was moved to design these masks after realising that health workers

Her designs stand above the rest, incorporated in a transparent plastic visor

in the economic capital Douala would be putting themselves at great risk, and yet many lacked essential personal protective equipment.

The more she made, the greater the demand grew, and soon Goufack and her sister were producing 100 of her masks every day, each of which sells for 1,500 CFA francs (\$2.50 US) to keep the initiative sustainable.

She holds a bachelor's degree in management and operational marketing, but as an entrepreneur who gets to follow her own creativity while helping her fellow Cameroonians during such a difficult time, she seems disinclined to worry about finding an office job. With her needle and thread and inspired designs, Ange Goufack is determined to carry on with the work at hand. She's tailor-made for it. ■

Amindeh Blaise Atabong is a media fellow with Germany's Konrad Adenauer Stiftung



Illustration: Francois Smit

The people's judge

Golden Matonga

Justice Kenyatta Nyirenda's father - himself a member of Malawi's liberation movement, and a committed pan-Africanist - named his son after Kenya's first president, Jomo Kenyatta. He could not have imagined that one day, his son would go on to help draft Kenya's current Constitution.

Nyirenda's impact in his own country, Malawi, has been even greater. As a high court judge he has presided over seminal cases, including the disputed presidential election in 2014. But recently he has been in the headlines more than ever before.

First, Nyirenda controversially ruled

in March that four Chinese nationals should be released from quarantine in Lilongwe. He said the emergency legislation used to detain them was archaic and invalid.

Then, last month, when President Peter Mutharika announced a national lockdown, Nyirenda ordered that its implementation be suspended - until the government could come up with some way to protect the country's poorest and most vulnerable citizens.

This ruling forced Mutharika to announce a nationwide monthly cash transfer to poor households, equivalent to the minimum wage. It also forced him to create a Covid-19 task force that included opposition leaders, civil society and public health experts.

Nyirenda has come under fierce criticism from government officials, who said that if the virus spread quickly then "the nation knows who to blame".

Nyirenda ordered the lockdown to be suspended until plans were made to protect the country's poor and vulnerable

But Gift Trapence, the chair of the Human Rights Defenders Coalition - the civil society group that initially opposed the government's lockdown plans - praised the judge. "Justice Kenyatta is an example of how independent our courts are. They make their own judgments based on law and evidence." ■



Illustration: Francois Smit

The doctor who gave her life to stop Ebola

Shola Lawal

When the first Covid-19 case was diagnosed in Nigeria in February, many Nigerians had flashbacks to 2014 - when the Ebola disease showed up in the country.

As the virus infected and killed thousands in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea, unsuspecting health workers at First Consultants Medical Center in Lagos examined Patrick Sawyer, a Liberian national who had collapsed on arrival at the airport in Lagos. Sawyer

was weak and feverish.

Watching him deteriorate, Dr Ameyo Stella Adadevoh suspected there was more to Sawyer's fever and refused to release him - despite coming under immense political pressure to do so (Sawyer was expected at a diplomatic conference).

Dr Adadevoh, the lead physician and endocrinologist at the hospital, felt strongly she was dealing with the Ebola virus and was determined to keep Sawyer from leaving the hospital. Tests eventually revealed that she was right.

Sawyer died four days after being admitted. The same day, his Ebola test results came back positive. By then, Dr Adadevoh and several others linked to Sawyer contracted the disease.

The WHO declared Nigeria Ebola-free, largely due to Dr Adadevoh's efforts

Dr Adadevoh died on August 19 at the age of 57. Several health workers at the hospital died too. One of them, Mrs Ukoh, was a ward maid. Another, Nurse Justina Ejelonu, attended to Sawyer on her first day on the job. She was pregnant.

Some four months after Sawyer flew into Lagos, on October 20, the World Health Organisation declared Nigeria Ebola-free, largely due to Dr Adadevoh's efforts. In Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea, the virus raged on.

Now, Nigeria is back in the nightmare of 2014. ■



Illustration: Francois Smit

“The effort to confront the pandemic is insane”

Dr Chikwe Ihekweazu, the head of Nigeria’s Centre for Disease Control, on his pandemic heroes.

As told to Aanu Adeoye and Simon Allison

You know, there’s hardly ever one hero in a situation like this. Because never before, not in my lifetime at least, have we faced a challenge that is so diverse, so widespread.

I’ve dealt with many outbreaks in my life, in my career. This is the kind of work I’ve done literally since I left University. [Previous outbreaks] are much slower to evolve, and you could come up with strategies and most times you know how they’re transmitted, you know the expected mortality, you know what to do, what the response measures are. But in this one, it is new. It’s all over the place, there’s nowhere to run to because it’s happening everywhere at the same time.

It takes so many people at so many points in the spectrum to keep pushing. The challenge with this outbreak is you can’t push for two or three days, or two weeks, and think ‘let me push hard, there’s light at the end of the tunnel’.

You’re pushing without seeing the light. So in all of this, it’s the guys in the hospitals, public healthcare, the supply chain guys making sure that the hospitals are supplied with personal protective equipment...

There’s a consistent effort in confronting the pandemic that is so insane. I know it’s a cliché but there are heroes everywhere. Those people at each point, one spoke of the wheel that makes everything work. One interruption in the chain leads to the whole cycle collapsing. ■



Base camp: Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti is a key hub for the US military's counter-terrorism operations in Somalia and Yemen (Photo: supplied)

US to cement its military footprint in Africa

Late last year, the United States was reportedly planning to reduce its military presence in Africa. Documents obtained by the *Mail & Guardian* suggest that the opposite is true. If anything, the US military is digging in. Literally.

Nick Turse

Internal documents from the US military's Africa Command (Africom) reveal ambitious plans to extend and reinforce a network of low-profile military bases and outposts across the continent. The files detail more than \$330 million of spending planned for Africa.

This spending is designated for infrastructure investments on US bases stretching from one side of Africa to the other. The files also suggest that Africom's long-term planning extends for up to 20 years.

The formerly secret documents, issued in October 2018, detail 12 construction projects planned for four US outposts in three countries

- Djibouti, Kenya, and Niger - that have long been integral to American counter-terrorism (CT) and counter violent extremist (CVEO) missions in Africa, suggesting these efforts will continue in the years ahead.

Africom spokesperson John Manley told the *Mail & Guardian* by email that the projects detailed in the plans “continue on course and are in various stages of planning and/or execution.”

“The plans,” said Salih Booker, the president and chief executive officer of the Washington, DC-based Center for International Policy, “whether they materialize or not, seem to indicate that the Pentagon is interested in expanding its infrastructure in Africa, for drone ISR [intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance] and drone warfare as well as training camps and lily-pad bases for increasing the US capacity to project force in key regions, the Horn of Africa, East Africa and the Sahel.”

American priorities may change following the US presidential election in November, and it is also too soon to know what impact the coronavirus pandemic may have on the US military’s long-term agenda. America’s top generals in Africa are nonetheless touting an enduring presence here. “The bottom line is, the United States is not walking away from Africa. We’re committed and we remain engaged,” said US Army Major General Roger Cloutier, the commander of US Army Africa, on





Fire power: A US military hovercraft comes ashore in Djibouti (Photo: US Navy)

a February teleconference with the *Mail & Guardian* and other media outlets.

Africom's extensive planning appears to put them at odds with Defence Secretary Mark Esper, who is reportedly considering proposals for a major reduction — or even a complete withdrawal — of American forces from West Africa.

The Pentagon publicly claims that the US has almost no physical footprint in Africa. “[W]e have one base on the continent,” Pentagon spokesperson Candice Tresch wrote in an email to the *Mail & Guardian*, referring to Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti.

But previous investigative reporting has uncovered a network of 27 outposts scattered across Africa. This includes 15 “enduring locations” and 12 less permanent “contingency locations,” with the highest concentrations in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa.

The largest number of US bases on the continent can be found in Niger, including the drone base in Agadez, which is America's key regional hub for air operations. The biggest single base - and the only base that the US will publicly acknowledge - is Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti, a former French Foreign Legion outpost. Extensive upgrades are also planned for Manda Bay, an airport in Kenya which was the site of a deadly attack by Somali militant group Al Shabaab in January this year. The proposed additions to Manda Bay will allow it to house up to 325 personnel.

“What do the people of these three countries know and think about these plans?” asked Salih Booker, president of the Center for International Policy in Washington, DC. “And what do the African Union – which South Africa currently chairs – and the Regional Economic Communities think about these plans?” ■

This investigation has been edited for length. For more details, see <https://bit.ly/MG-USBases>



SO, YOU THINK YOU'RE A REAL PAN-AFRICAN?

Take this quiz to find out how well you really know our continent.

- 1** Which reggae star performed at Zimbabwe's Independence Day in 1980?
- 2** The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam is being built on which river?
- 3** The oldest continuously-operating university in the world is in which city?
- 4** Who won the 2020 Grammy Award for the Best World Music album?
- 5** The African Union was founded in which year?
- 6** Malabo is the capital of which country?
- 7** By passenger numbers, what is the largest airline in Africa?
- 8** Cuban revolutionary Che Guevara fought in which African country?
- 9** What currency is used in Ghana?
- 10** Dodoma is the capital city of which country?
- 11** Nelson Mandela was imprisoned on which island?
- 12** What are Rwanda's four official languages?

How did I do?

WhatsApp 'ANSWERS' to +27 73 805 6068 and we will send you the answers immediately.

0-4

"I think I need to start reading more newspapers."

5-8

"I can't wait to explore more of this continent."

9-12

"Is my AU passport ready yet?"



Illustration: Francois Smit

Breathe in. Breathe out. Look after yourself.

Flora Pasquereau

I am a clinical psychologist in Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic. I was until recently the only practising clinical psychologist in my country of four million people.

The CAR has been in conflict since 2013. The conflict has affected everyone, from all walks of life. Everyone lives with stress and trauma, even if they do not realise it. I founded my organisation, Obouni, in 2017, specifically to help people to manage this stress.

The arrival of the coronavirus means that these are stressful times everywhere in the world. We are anxious about ourselves or our loved ones contracting the disease. We are fed up with being stuck at home. We are nervous about losing our jobs.

The good news is that stress can be managed.

The first thing to do is to stop watching and reading so much news. It does not help to be fixated on the latest developments. The same goes for social media. These activities are best enjoyed in small doses, otherwise they risk becoming overwhelming.

Next is to try and create boundaries at home. If you are working from home, then make sure you get dressed for work, and try to observe strict working hours. It is important to have a distinction between your work life and your home life, even if it all happens in the same space. Also do not try to work too hard, as this adds even more pressure - your boss will be stressed too, and should understand.

Finally, take five minutes to meditate. It's easy. Put on a slow, relaxing song. Close your eyes. Imagine somewhere quiet and tranquil. I always picture myself in a beautiful garden. Focus on your breathing. Breathe in, breathe out. What can you smell? What can you hear? Breathe in, breathe out. Breathe in, breathe out.

When you have finished, open your eyes, and ask yourself: how do I feel? For sure you will feel better. ■

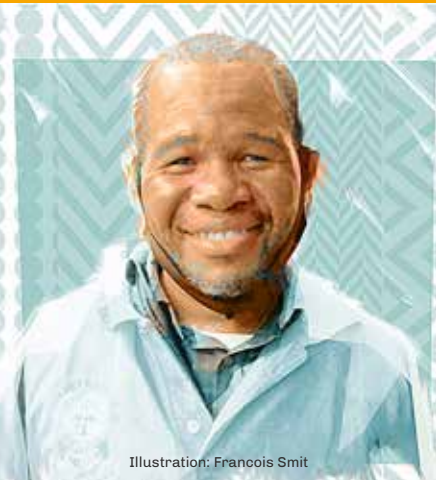


Illustration: Francois Smit

“We’re trying to avoid the police with their rubber bullets”

Simon Allison

Yeoville, a densely-populated Johannesburg suburb, is still bustling during the lockdown. Even though all its bars and restaurants and trading stores are closed because of the national lockdown, three large supermarkets are still open during daylight hours. Long, orderly queues have formed outside the doors of each shop, as residents wait for hours for their chance to replenish their

dwindling supplies of essential groceries.

Joseph Dube and his team of 20 volunteers, each clad in bright orange polo shirts, are the reason those queues are so orderly. He is the chair of Yeoville’s Community Policing Forum, which has been leading the efforts to enforce the national lockdown in Yeoville.

Dube and his team are the reason those queues are so orderly

Starting from about 10am, the team patrols the streets of the suburb, and stations marshalls outside each supermarket to make sure there are no troubles in the queue. They try to get people to maintain social distance, with mixed results, and break up any fights and disagreements. Dube has had to persuade an enthusiastic pastor that he can’t preach to the queues; and call in the cops to shut down an illegal tavern.

Generally, however, Dube tries to avoid involving the police. “One of the things we are trying to avoid is that we don’t have police coming in with their rubber bullets, shooting,” said Dube, gesturing towards next-door Hillbrow, where police have been using rubber bullets and whips to keep people at home.

Only at 6pm do the team go home, although they will do one last patrol around the neighbourhood, just to make sure everyone’s safely inside for the night. ■

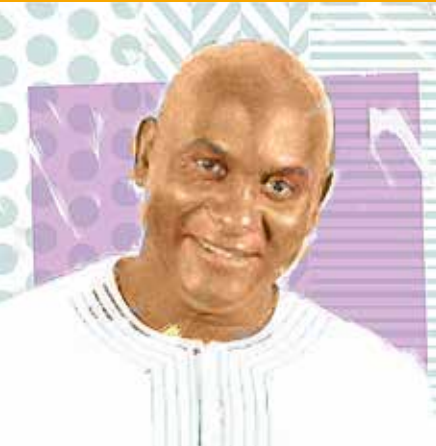


Illustration: Francois Smit

Clean wards, clean cells, clean conscience

Samira Sawlani

Nsibirwa Semu arrives at Entebbe Referral Hospital at 3pm each day. Cleaning products in tow, the 45-year-old IT consultant and sales manager dons protective gear and begins to disinfect the hospital — from the wards where Covid-19 patients and those awaiting results are receiving treatment, to the nurses' stations and corridors.

He then heads to the police station nearby, greeting officers and detainees

alike before proceeding to disinfect the entire premises — and the prisoners themselves.

From there he will move on to Kisubi and Kajjansi police stations, where again he will disinfect every nook and cranny before finally heading home.

While many might be reluctant to volunteer, Semu believes in “faith over fear”

Uganda announced its first Covid-19 case on March 22. Eager to help, Semu drove to the hospital with protective equipment and cleaning supplies and asked if he could help disinfect the premises — to which staff happily agreed.

Afterwards, he remembered the police station nearby and, knowing officers were sometimes called upon to transport suspected Covid-19 patients from their homes to the hospital, decided the same should be done there.

“From the patients to the prisoners, the appreciation they have shown me is incredible,” says Semu. “It’s kept me going back every day.” While many might be reluctant to volunteer such a service for fear of contracting the virus, Semu believes in “faith over fear”. As a practising Christian, he is grateful he has both the opportunity and means to help.

“I’m giving my resources and time,” he says. “As long as I have those, I will keep going.” ■

Civil war, Ebola - and now this

Abdul Brima

First there was the bloody civil war, which lasted from 1991 to 2002. Then there was the Ebola outbreak from 2014 to 2016 which killed nearly 3,589 people. Now, it's the Covid-19 pandemic. Sometimes it feels like Sierra Leone is on the wrong side of destiny.

Lieutenant-Colonel Henry S. Bangura has lived through it all. He is the Director of Defence Medical Services at the Ministry of Defence, and is leading efforts to trace contacts of infected persons at the 34 Military Hospital, which is a major Covid-19 treatment centre in the capital Freetown.

Bangura was in a similar position during the Ebola outbreak. This time, he says, Sierra Leone is better prepared. "The lessons learnt from the Ebola outbreak and the fact that the government did not want to be taken unaware must have helped in the early preparedness plan that has made the response somehow simple," he says.

It helps that healthcare professionals across the country are already familiar

with the basic principles of infection control and case management, and authorities already have systems in place to trace the contacts of infected patients.

Nonetheless, Sierra Leone's inadequate healthcare system remains vulnerable. There is only one nurse or midwife for every 10,000 people (the World Health Organization recommends at least one doctor per 1000 people). Nearly half of the country's 19,030 health workers are unpaid.

For Bangura, resources mean that he does not have access to electronic devices which would make it much simpler

As Director of Defence Medical Services, Bangura is leading efforts to trace contacts of infected persons at a major Covid-19 treatment centre in Freetown

for him to do his job. "If government can provide adequate resources for quality case investigation, regular contact tracing and carry out extensive sensitization of the communities with the key prevention and control messages, the control of Covid-19 will be simple," he said. ■

Abdul Brima is a media fellow with Germany's Konrad Adenauer Stiftung

How fake news is undermining the fight against coronavirus

Combating the spread of the virus also means limiting the spread of viral messaging. **Nic Cheeseman**

Whenever there is a major crisis in the world, you can be sure that fake news will be blamed for making it worse. The coronavirus is no exception. As soon as cases started to be recorded in Africa, misinformation began to be circulated about the disease - much like in the rest of the world. This has included the baseless claims that Africans may somehow be immune to coronavirus.

People who believe this information are less likely to take effective precautions and so are more likely to get sick. The World Health Organization has even branded the surge of fake news in recent months as a dangerous “info-demic”. For this reason, the social messaging platform WhatsApp has tried to stop the spread of misleading “viral” stories by limiting the number of times that frequently forwarded messages can be shared. Once this was done, the number of “highly forwarded” messages dropped by 70%.

While quantity is important, however, we also need to think about quality. Not all fake news stories change the way that people behave. In most African countries, citizens are suspicious about

the information they get on WhatsApp. Only 18% of Kenyans trust WhatsApp “a lot”, as a source of news for example, compared to 49% for television. In line with this, recent research on Nigeria by CDD-West Africa and the University of Birmingham has found that the most effective fake stories are those that resonate with past experience or contain small fragments of the truth.

Take the idea that Africans are immune to Covid-19. This is not true, as the growing number of deaths on the continent reveals. But one reason that many people believed this story was that infection rates were initially much lower in most African countries than in Europe, which made it seem more plausible. To fully counter fake news like this we need to go beyond limiting the spread of viral messages to work out why some stories are more believable than others. Only then can we provide carefully targeted information, education and digital literacy to put these misperceptions right. ■

Nic Cheeseman is Professor of Democracy at the University of Birmingham.



Illustration: Francois Smit

Meet the doctor leading the fight to contain the pandemic

Simon Allison

Dr Matshidiso Moeti is the World Health Organization's regional director for Africa. With her regular weekly media briefings, the doctor from Botswana has become the continent's public face for this fight: a reassuring voice in the midst of our collective panic; an anchor in the gathering storm.

It helps that she has seen this all before. During her decades-long career in public health, she has battled two other major epidemics: HIV/Aids (where she played a crucial role in making antiretrovirals more widely accessible) and Ebola.

She doesn't get much sleep at the moment. It's her job to figure out how best to respond to the pandemic, and then to convince leaders across Africa to make the difficult decisions that must

During her decades-long career, she has battled two other major epidemics: HIV/Aids and Ebola

be made. Nor can she forget any of the continent's other health crises - which, in normal circumstances, would take up all of her time.

These are not normal circumstances, of course. But there are some compensations. Because of travel restrictions, she can spend more time at home in Brazzaville.

After a long day, when she gets home, she puts on some jazz - she likes Miles Davis and Sarah Vaughan - and gets onto her exercise bike. Despite everything, she says, "I'm feeling a bit healthier. I'm positive," she told the *Mail & Guardian*.

And if Dr Matshidiso Moeti - who knows more about this crisis than almost anyone else on this continent - can stay positive, there's no reason for the rest of us not to. ■



Illustration: Francois Smit

The journalist jailed for doing her job

Simon Allison

The journalist Arphine Helisoa is in jail in Madagascar, facing legal action for allegedly spreading fake news and ‘inciting hatred’ against President Andry Rajoelina. The offending article, which accused Rajoelina of mismanaging the response to the pandemic, appeared on the *Ny Valosoa Vaovao* (The New Reward) news website.

But Helisoa does not work for *Ny Valosoa Vaovao*. She is the director of the similarly-named but totally unconnected *Ny Valosoa* (The Reward) newspaper.

So far Malagasy authorities have

ignored all calls for Helisoa’s release. Miary Rasolofoarijaona, the secretary general of the Order of Journalists of Madagascar, said that Helisoa’s detention may be related to her record of being outspoken against the government.

While her case might be the most extreme, it fits into a wider pattern of journalists being targeted for their coverage of the coronavirus pandemic - especially when their coverage is perceived as being critical of the government.

The Committee to Protect Journalists has tracked more than 120 violations of press freedom this month alone.

“The Covid-19 pandemic has given many governments across Africa the cover of a legitimate global health crisis to try to opportunistically control the press and the public’s right to know,” said Angela Quintal, the CPJ’s Africa Program Coordinator.

**While her case
might be the most
extreme, it fits into
a wider pattern**

Quintal added: “We have seen it in Madagascar, where the government of Andry Rajoelina has detained a journalist for a report she didn’t even write, and we continue to document violations related to the media’s coverage of the coronavirus including in Uganda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Ethiopia, Eswatini, Nigeria and Zimbabwe.” ■

We lost an intellectual giant

The Malawian luminary believed in developing Africa and equipping Africans to do so themselves. Carlos Lopes

Professor Thandika Mkandawire, the Malawian economist, passed away in late March. The disheartening news hit me while under confinement in Cape Town, thinking about the impact Covid-19 was going to provoke across the continent. My first thoughts were about the paradoxes of life.

At a time when we were going to need Mkandawire so much, to shepherd us with his constant enthusiasm for finding solutions, he was gone.

Mkandawire was born almost 80 years ago in Zimbabwe. His early life was punctuated with difficulties before he moved abroad to study at Ohio State University. Political choices marked his life from that time, obliging him to live in Sweden (where he acquired nationality), Zimbabwe and Senegal, where he led the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (Codesria).

It was at the Fann-Residence neighborhood of Dakar, where Codesria headquarters in the early 1980s was located, that I first met him. He was instrumental in supporting my career, and shaping my view of the continent

and the world.

Mkandawire will be remembered as one of the most important contributors for the construction of a new African narrative. During his decade as Codesria's Executive Secretary he became the glue for social sciences across the continent, decisively unifying its various artificial linguistic borders and academic traditions.

He believed that African intellectuals were too often forgotten when it came to describing and understanding

our own continent. His work serves as a brilliant riposte to that trend. Perhaps most significantly - although it is impossible to choose from among his many contributions - his searing critique of the structural adjustment approach to economic development was a foundation of resistance to that approach.

Mkandawire was a tree that I and others would lean on constantly. Now that tree is gone, but we continue to lean on his memory. ■

Carlos Lopes is one of Africa's most influential economists, and former head of the UN Economic Commission for Africa.

Mkandawire was one of the most important contributors to a new African narrative



The Big Picture

Fishing for plastic: in Cairo, volunteers are sifting through the murky waters of the Nile for plastic bags, soft drink bottles and other trash that is clogging up the river. Over the past three years, this team of 300-odd volunteers has collected 37 tonnes of rubbish. The river is the source of 97% of Egypt's water, but is coming under increasing threat from pollution and climate change.

(Photo: Khaled Desouki for AFP)

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