

The Continent

with Mail & Guardian



Photo: Olivier van Beemen

Searching for Kwabena

His image was used to sell pineapples in Europe. But he knew nothing about it – and they got his name wrong.



Happy Birthday, Nigeria!

The Federal Republic of Nigeria turned 60 this week. Much has changed since the day that this photograph was taken, in Enugu in the south-east of the country at a dancing and sports festival held to commemorate the birth of the new nation. But too much, arguably, has stayed the same. As *The Punch* observed in a stinging editorial: "Sixty years after independence, the abject condition of the Nigerian state is everywhere in evidence: rancour, distrust, fear of implosion and deprivation are the talking points." Not even Nigeria's leaders are especially upbeat. "Fortunately for us, our walls are not yet broken," said vice-president Yemi Osinbajo at a commemorative church service in Abuja. "But there are obvious cracks that could lead to a break if not properly addressed." (Photo: Archive Photos/Getty Images)

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The Week in Numbers

\$36-million

The amount embezzled by South Sudanese government officials since 2016, according to a United Nations report. The real figure may be even higher. "This is just what we were able to trace," the report said.

10 years

The length of a new military cooperation deal signed between Tunisia and the United States. The deal is designed to secure Tunisia's long border with Libya, which is in the midst of a complex war.

200,000

The number of free condoms rejected by Malawi's parliament. The donation was offered by the Aids Health Foundation. Parliamentarians can afford their own condoms, said the majority leader.



Sweet deal: President Ouattara announcing the new cocoa price on Thursday

1,000 CFA

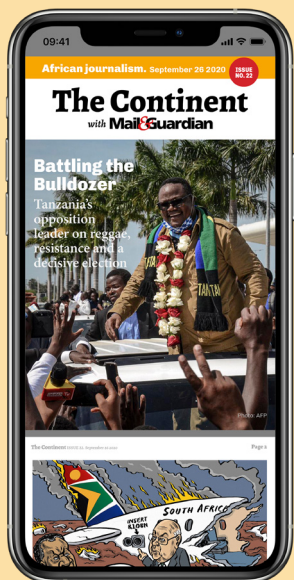
The price paid to Ivorian farmers per kilo of raw cocoa for the 2020-2021 harvest, equivalent to \$1.79. The price is set by the government, and is up 21% on last year. It is probably no coincidence that the increase comes just weeks before the presidential election.

60

The number of countries on South Africa's 'Red List', including Brazil, India, the UK and US. Although the country opened its borders to international travel this week, tourists from countries on the list – considered high risk for Covid-19 infections – are not allowed in.

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South Africa

Wave of arrests to nab high-profile politicians

Sabelo Skiti

South Africa's most elite investigative unit this week made a series of high-profile arrests relating to major corruption scandals – and have promised that there is more to come.

Seven people were arrested by the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation, more commonly known as the Hawks, in connection with a R250-million contract to audit asbestos in a housing project. The job could have been done for R21-million, said an expert. The suspects include the former mayor of Mangaung, which is home to South Africa's judicial capital Bloemfontein.

Sources close to the investigation have told the *Mail & Guardian* that this is just the beginning of a wave of arrests. The next focus will be on suspects implicated in the looting of VBS Mutual Bank, which was liquidated after nearly R2.5-billion in deposits disappeared. The deposits

were from some of the country's most vulnerable communities, including pensioners. These suspects being targeted include ruling party politicians in Limpopo province, and the arrest warrants have already been signed.

There is a major political aspect to this anti-corruption crackdown, which marks a milestone in President Cyril Ramaphosa's efforts to take full control of the party. Both the VBS and asbestos matters highlight the role the African National Congress (ANC), through its leaders, plays in the looting of state funds. It is no coincidence that both occurred during the tenure of former president Jacob Zuma, who still enjoys considerable support within party structures.

Suspects include the former mayor of Mangaung, home to the country's judicial capital

In August, President Ramaphosa wrote an unprecedented letter to ANC members, saying that their collective failure to tackle corruption had allowed it to flourish. The letter was met with disdain from some quarters, including former president Jacob Zuma, who said it brought the organisation into disrepute. ■

Sierra Leone

President slaps travel ban on predecessor

A major crackdown on corruption could inflame existing tensions

Abdul Samba Brima

Sierra Leone's President Julius Maada Bio has banned over 100 top officials from the previous administration from leaving the country either by air, land, or sea – including former president Ernest Bai Koroma. The former president has also been summoned to appear before the country's anti-corruption court this coming Monday, October 5.

They have been asked to repay all stolen monies and return any property deemed to have been acquired through corruption. The former officials are not allowed to travel outside Sierra Leone until their names are cleared or they are granted permits.

Earlier, Bio pledged to fully implement findings of the Commissions of Inquiry set up to investigate allegations of corruption by former government officials.

In a joint report, the commissions concluded that corruption was endemic in Koroma's administration. But the former president's party, the All People's Congress (APC), has dismissed the findings as "products of a process marred by unconstitutionality, illegality, procedural corruption and political vindictiveness and malice".

The money that was said to have been unaccounted for ran to well over \$100-million.

"It is shocking and to be honest surprising in some cases. But, we were all here and we knew that some things were going wrong, terribly wrong," said Ibrahim Tommy, the head of the Center for Accountability and Rule of Law.

Political analysts say that unfolding events in the next couple of days will be decisive for the country's democratic future. The crackdown on corruption takes place against the backdrop of increased political polarisation between supporters of President Bio and those aligned with the APC. ■



President Koroma (right) will appear before President Bio's anti-corruption commission (Photos: Getty)



THE AFRICAN UNION'S (UN)OFFICIAL STATEMENT ON THE US ELECTIONS

Babatunde Fagbayibo

Addis Ababa, 1 October 2020: The African Union (AU) remains concerned about the worrying political developments in the United States of America.

The AU is an institution that is built on the fundamentals of liberal democratic values and good governance. The AU is, therefore, disturbed by the statements of the incumbent US President, Mr Donald J. Trump, on the possibility of electoral fraud during the forthcoming presidential election in November. To this effect, he has expressed the possibility of rejecting the election result.

It is in this context that the AU has decided to intervene in this matter, to ensure that there is peace and order during and after the forthcoming elections; and to avoid the possibility of a flood of refugees into neighbouring Canada and Mexico.

Our intervention is predicated on two factors. Firstly, the African-American population is recognised as part of Africa's Diaspora, and as such, we are responsible for their safety and well-being in the case of any election-related violence. Secondly, we are inspired by the way in which US institutions have for decades passed judgment on the quality of African elections.

The AU has therefore resolved to establish a high-level committee to assess Mr Trump's claims. It will be led by HE Mr Paul Biya (Cameroon) and HE Mr Teodoro Obiang (Equatorial Guinea). As Africa's longest-serving heads of state, they have all the expertise necessary to recognise electoral fraud when it occurs. The AU will establish an electoral observer mission, to be deployed to the US with immediate effect.

Should the US government refuse to cooperate, the AU will not hesitate to trigger other measures, including but not limited to: refusing to accept further US aid; recalling diplomatic staff stationed in the US; opening our borders to African-Americans seeking to flee violence; and referring US individuals implicated in human rights violations to the International Criminal Court.

We await positive feedback from the US government in this regard. ■

Africa to get its share of rapid Covid-19 tests



Laura López González

Covid-19 tests that can diagnose people in just minutes could be available in up to 20 African countries as early as next month, the World Health Organisation (WHO) announced this week.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has secured agreements with two large pharmaceutical companies, Abbott and SD Biosensor, to allow low and middle-income countries to buy the rapid tests for US\$5 or less, the WHO says. The Africa Centres for Disease Control and the global health initiative Unitaid plan to begin rolling out the tests on the continent in October in a multi-million dollar programme.

Currently, diagnosing Covid-19 involves sending nose or throat swabs to laboratories for molecular testing, which

detects pieces of the coronavirus' DNA in samples. The catch? In most countries in Africa, this kind of testing can only happen at district laboratories, and getting samples to and from clinics can take days if not weeks.

But these new rapid tests can be done in clinics by healthcare workers using nasal swabs, and return results in 15-30 minutes. They work by detecting proteins produced by the virus, which are also known as antigens.

The test could help African countries diagnose more people and faster. This means that more people with the virus will know that they are infected, and will be able to take steps to prevent any further transmission.

The manufacturers have set aside 20% of the diagnostics they produce for low and middle-income countries, the Guardian reported Monday. The WHO says that the deal will guarantee ultimately 120-million rapid tests for these countries globally.

The tests are expected to be rolled out across the continent in October

The United States government announced in August that it had already bought 150-million of the Abbot tests – a stark reminder of the race for Covid-19 tests and a potential vaccine in the future.





Dubbel lekker

Ons fruit smaakt niet alleen hartstikke lekker, het geeft je ook een lekker gevoel. Dat komt doordat onze telers samen met de AH Foundation bijdragen aan betere leefomstandigheden voor de lokale gemeenschap.



Searching for Kwabena

At a supermarket chain in the Netherlands, the beaming face of 'Kwabena from Ghana' promises that his produce not only tastes good, but improves the lives of the community. But when Olivier van Beemen tracked down 'Kwabena', he found that it is not so simple.

Albert Heijn is the largest supermarket chain in the Netherlands. In the fruit and vegetable section of many of its stores was, until recently, a poster of "Kwabena" a Ghanaian pineapple farmer. It reads. "Double nice: Our fruit not only tastes nice, it also gives you a nice feeling. That's because our growers, together with the AH Foundation, contribute to better living conditions for the local community."

The message is clear: buy a plastic container of fresh fruit and do your bit to make the world a better place.

But what do these "better living conditions" look like? And what does 'Kwabena' think of his image being used to sell pineapples in the Netherlands? The only way to find out was to ask him.

A development darling

The search began in the hilly, fertile landscape in and around the duty-free zone in Nsawam, a town thirty kilometres north of Ghana's capital Accra. The town hosts the factory and local headquarters of Blue Skies, a British multinational which supplies fruit and vegetables to supermarkets in Europe – including Albert Heijn.

Blue Skies is owned by the entrepreneur Anthony Pile, and counts singer and self-proclaimed philanthropist Bob Geldof among its investors. It enjoys a good reputation in the development sector. By having fruits peeled, cut and packaged locally, it creates employment and adds value to the local economy: the price per kilo for fresh fruit chunks is considerably higher than for whole fruits. In Ghana, Blue Skies employs over 1,000 people – on permanent and temporary contracts – and hundreds of day labourers.

The impact of Blue Skies' charitable projects is debatable. Two out of three classrooms in Fotobi are not in use and the public toilet block in Amanfrom has been demolished

This makes them a major employer in this area. They also buy much of the pineapples, papayas, bananas, mangos and coconuts sold by local farmers. One such farmer, Daniel Djan in the village of Fotobi, thought he recognised Kwabena's photograph. "That's Attakra," he says firmly. "He lives nearby."

But before traveling any further, we visited some of the charitable projects supported by Albert Heijn, Blue Skies and other European supermarkets (last year, Albert Heijn contributed 58,000 euros to projects in Ghana, which equals the weekly turnover of a small Dutch supermarket).

These are the projects that are supposed to "contribute to better living conditions for the local community". But their impact is debatable. Two of the three classrooms built in Fotobi are not in use; the public toilet block in Amanfrom has already been demolished by the government, which installed better facilities; and only two of the 12 toilets built in Pokrom – where Attakra lives – are functional.

In nearby Obodan, the classrooms built by the foundations look better. "This is the model school, usually with 40 to 50 children in a class," says Ibrahim Mohammed, one of the teachers, who was sitting under a tree having lunch. "Blue Skies regularly comes here with delegations from Europe." A photo of this school can be found on the website of Bob Geldof's investment fund.



Mixed results: While students attended some of the schools supported by Albert Heijn and Blue Skies, some classrooms appeared to be derelict (Photos: Olivier van Beemen)

In a response, Blue Skies says that the Ghana Education Service and the schools themselves are responsible for maintenance, and there's an agreement that local communities should keep the toilets clean. It says that the government probably would not have built the new toilets in Amanfrom "had we not taken the original initiative".

Contested legacy

At market stalls along the main road in Pokrom, no one recognises Kwabena (or Attakra). "Go to the farm just outside the village. If he lives around here, they should know him."

That farm is the giant Golden Riverside. Its manager John Akafia takes care of 600 acres of land that extends to the ridges on the other side of the valley. A tractor stands in the field in front of him, where seven field workers pick fresh pineapples for Blue Skies.

According to Akafia, the workers earn nearly double the minimum wage. He is pleased with the partnership with Blue Skies, which started in 1999. "They have created a larger market for us. Production has increased thanks to fertilisers and the techniques we have learned."

And Kwabena? No, unfortunately, Akafia doesn't know him.

Not everyone has had such a positive experience with Blue Skies. After speaking with twelve former Blue Skies employees, and one current staff member, it is clear that they believe that Blue Skies could do better. A common complaint is that although factory workers earn more than twice the minimum wage, it is still not enough to cover basic necessities.



Rich harvest:
At the Golden
Riverside Farm
in Pokrom,
workers
pick fresh
pineapples
for Blue Skies
 (Photo: Olivier
 van Beemen)

Moreover, the majority of employees do not have a fixed income, but work on temporary contracts or on an on-call basis.

Both Blue Skies and Albert Heijn are unimpressed by the criticism from workers. Blue Skies CEO Hugh Pile said: ‘We go out of our way to provide the best possible working environment for our people.’ They refer to a SMETA ethical trade audit which gave Blue Skies’ a positive review last year, but did not grant access to this report.

My name is not Kwabena

There’s news from Pokrom. Attakra has been tracked down, but the meeting ends in disappointment: he is indeed a pineapple farmer, but he is not Kwabena or even a supplier for Blue Skies.

The quest takes a surprising turn that same day, when a local representative of the Blue Skies Foundation gets in touch to say that Kwabena is not from this region at all. He lives more than three hours away in the Central Region. The proof: the pineapple he shows on the poster is not a smooth cayenne or MD2, the varieties cultivated around Nsawam, but a sugarloaf that grows over there.

The representative shares Kwabena’s contact details, and we travel to meet him in his village, Ekumfi Nanabin. This time, there is no doubt. Here’s the pineapple farmer who provides European customers with ‘double nice’ fruit, approaching with a smile on his face.

First, however, he wants to make a correction. His name is not Kwabena, but Okwesi Johnston. His middle name is Kobena, a different way to spell



Found: Okyesi Johnson in his fields outside Ekumfi Nanabin (Photo: Olivier van Beemen)

Kwabena, but nobody calls him that. “I’ve let Blue Skies know my name is Okwesi a long time ago, but they have never changed it,” he says.

Business is not going so well. His sales to Blue Skies have dropped sharply in recent years.

Nor is he aware that his photograph is being used to sell fruit in Europe. “That photo was taken about fifteen years ago. They never told me it could be used for marketing purposes and I didn’t get any money for it.”

Albert Heijn tells a different story. According to the supermarket chain, Okwesi is aware of his image being used and is “completely happy” with it. The Dutch retailer claims to have permission from Blue Skies to use the photo.

There may yet be a happy ending for Okwesi: after hearing his story, a Dutch lawyer offered to file a pro-bono claim against Albert Heijn on his behalf. Okwesi agreed, and the supermarket chain and the lawyer are currently discussing a solution.

After a short visit to Okwesi’s village, we hurry to his fields to take a new picture of him and his sugarloaves before sunset. Standing in his fields, he cuts open a pineapple with a machete and lets us taste the ripe, sweet fruit. That’s a good feeling, undeniably. Maybe even double good. ■

The names of all anonymous sources are known to the editors. The travel and accommodation costs for this article have been reimbursed with a Free Press Unlimited grant. This story was originally published on the Dutch website Follow the Money.



Inside the war on elephants

In Kenya's Tsavo West National Park, a bloody war pits villagers against international organised crime syndicates. At its centre are the elephants that roam the park, whose tusks are worth several thousand dollars to whoever can get to them first. Law enforcement is helplessly under-resourced – and sometimes complicit.

It is this bloody conflict that is explored in *Poacher*, a Kenyan thriller that as of this week is available on Netflix. It is the first Kenyan short film to be featured by the

global streaming giant, according to *The Standard*.

The film's protagonist, played by Brian Ogola – who also featured in *Lusala* and *Kati Kati* – gets himself into trouble when he steals a truckload of ivory from a gang of well-armed thieves.

As he tries to make his getaway, we get an insight into the dangerous, violent and high-stakes world of elephant poaching – and its impact on the families who are caught, sometimes literally, in the crossfire. ■

They won South Africa's biggest ever land claim. But the struggle was far from over

Lucas Ledwaba

The biggest successful land claim in South Africa's history was officially resolved in 2014, when a small crowd gathered for an official ceremony in Lilydale village in Mpumalanga. The then-president, Jacob Zuma, was there for the ceremonial handover of land back to the N'wandlamhari Communal Property Association (NCPA), which represented the community which had been dispossessed.

The community had lodged claims against 21 properties adding up to 65,000 hectares in total. Most of the land was occupied by one of the most exclusive luxury safari lodges in South Africa, the Mala Mala Game Reserve.

A total of five farms totalling 13,184 hectares were restored to the community, as well as a cash settlement totalling nearly R1-billion. A deal was reached for the game reserve to pay annual royalties to the community.

Centenarian Spokes Sithole was among the attendees at the ceremony. But, six years later, he and many of the claimants say resolution from the deal remains a pipe dream.



Long wait for justice: Spokes Sithole recalls being dispossessed in the 1930s (Photo:Lucas Ledwaba)

The settlement has been beset by problems including court battles pitting different factions from the community and the NCPA against each other, corruption allegations, nepotism and a lack of transparency.

In the latest attempt to resolve the problems plaguing the community, some of the claimants have written a letter to the ministry of agriculture, land reform and rural development, asking for intervention.

"Ever since the land has been restituted to us, we have never seen a single audited financial statement," said one of the claimants, Dion Mnisi. He has threatened



Too late: Shinganyiso Simeon Marimane died without receiving compensation (Photo: Lucas Ledwaba)

to institute legal proceedings if their latest attempts to resolve the issues fail. “We have been misled for quite some time. If the minister doesn’t come, it’s then that we will consider opening a criminal case.”

Mnisi was elected chair of the NCPA last year – but the sitting committee members have refused to recognise these elections, and said that Mnisi is trying to set up a parallel structure.

So far, the NCPA has distributed R16-million to beneficiaries, according to its lawyer Louise du Plessis. In 2015-16, about \$605 was paid per household to 250 homes; during the next financial year, \$1,815; and \$3,630 in 2017-18. But payments have halted until the disputes within the community have been resolved.

Dreams deferred

As the court and boardroom battles rage, elders like Sithole worry they may never live to see the prosperity they expected when they initially lodged the claim before the December 31 1998 cut-off period.

“Most of the elderly beneficiaries are dying while the challenges remain unresolved,” Sithole and 14 others said in the letter last month.

Shinganyiso Simeon Maremane,

97, is one of the beneficiaries who died without ever seeing a resolution to the ongoing problems. He died in January at his home in Utah, a remote village east of Acornhoek. Marimane was buried by the wall of his homestead.

“My father died of a very broken heart. That I am sure about because he was always talking about this issue of the land claim,” said one of his sons, Oscar Marimane.

Sithole, who was born in 1918, is equally worried. He spends his days nursing the aches of old age and a broken heart at his home in Huntingdon village. To this day, he is still troubled by memories of the violent uprooting of his community “by white men carrying guns” in the 1930s.

“They just came and said the government had given them the land. They said the land belongs to the government. It does not belong to us. And we were required to leave the place because they want to start a business [a game reserve]. We followed the orders as we were told. Those who were left behind, they were used as slaves.”

With that, the community lost everything that they had known all their lives: the land and their prized cattle, some of which were shot and buried in a pit. “Some of them were left behind and eaten by the wild animals. There was nothing that could be done. We did not have the means to fight,” Sithole said. — *Mukurukuru Media* ■

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

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

1. His middle names were Isidore Noël and he is often called "Africa's Che Guevara". Who is he?
2. True or false? Africa emits about 4% of the world's total carbon dioxide emissions.
3. Most of the world's reserve of chromium is found in: Central Africa, West Africa or Southern Africa?
4. The African National Congress is known as the continent's oldest liberation movement. Who founded it in 1912?
5. In which country are you most likely to eat Kedjenou, spicy chicken stew cooked over fire in a terracotta pot?
6. Which country

- celebrated its 60th anniversary of independence on October 1 this week?
7. Lilongwe is the capital of which country?
 8. South African Pitso Mosimane was recently appointed head coach of which elite African football club?
 9. What is the second tallest peak in Africa?
 10. Which city is widely regarded as the cleanest city in Africa (pictured)?
 11. Which Zimbabwean writer and activist wrote her debut novel *Nervous Conditions* in 1988?
 12. *John Cena* and *Huku* are the mega hit tracks by which South African artist?

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

"This land is my land."

Zambia's president is planning to rig the election. This is how.

Sishuwa Sishuwa

Common election-rigging strategies across Africa include: ballot-box stuffing, electoral bribery, violence against political opponents and the emasculation of the independent media. Other tactics involve putting dead voters on the electoral register, creating irregularities to obstruct voters and, more recently, using fake news to sway the electoral outcome.

These strategies have been used to varying success, but they are not as common as they once were. For once thing, judiciaries have wised up – just ask the judges in Kenya in 2017 and Malawi in 2020 who annulled their country's votes.

This has prompted presidents to devise more sophisticated and subtle ways of guaranteeing they stay in power. A clear example is Zambia's President Edgar Lungu. Ahead of the general election in August 2021, he is implementing a twofold strategy that would make it

nearly impossible to vote him out of office.

Step 1: Amend the Constitution

Lungu barely scraped a victory in the last general election in 2016, winning by 50.3%. This time, he is not taking any chances. His governing Patriotic Front (PF) party has taken a Constitutional amendment to parliament, which proposes another stage to Zambia's election between the first vote and a potential run-off.

In this stage, if no presidential candidate has won more than 50% of the vote, the leading candidate could propose a coalition with a losing candidate of their choice – as long as together their votes add up to more than 50%.

This suggests Lungu is anticipating another close election where he may emerge with more votes than his rivals but fall short of the required 50% + 1 vote threshold. In this instance, just an extra 2% or 3% may be needed to form a winning majority. This will probably come from smaller, Lungu-friendly parties that are in opposition in name only. Their votes total may be tiny, but this amendment could turn them into kingmakers.

Step 2: Abolish the voter's roll

Lungu is reported to have exerted considerable pressure on the electoral commission to abolish the current voters' register, which numbers 6-million voters. In June, the electoral commission announced that it would do exactly that.



Kicker: Incumbent Zambian President Edward Lungu delivers a speech during his presidential campaign closing rally in 2016 (Photo: Gianluigi Guercia/ AFP)

Instead of updating the voters' register, the electoral commission will draw up an entirely new one. This means that current voting cards will not be accepted at polling stations next year. Every voter is required to register again, and they must do so in a 30-day window that begins on October 28.

This risks disenfranchising millions of voters who are not able to re-register in the allotted time. The majority of these are likely to be opposition voters. Three of the four provinces in which Lungu's main opponent Hakainde Hichilema retains huge support are predominantly rural areas. Limited publicity about the commission's plans to abolish the existing register, the long distances to the nearest administrative centres, the onset of the rainy season (which starts in late October), and the limited time available to complete the exercise will undermine the capacity of voters in these areas to take part in the voter registration. Moreover, the commission has admitted that the government has not provided it with sufficient funds for the exercise.

Taken together, these developments suggest that Lungu is, in effect, establishing the administrative, legal and constitutional

mechanism for perpetuating his stay in office. Should his two main strategies fail, he is reported to have another card up his sleeve: to strike a major blow against the opposition using electoral exclusion. Recent weeks have seen intense speculation in local media that Lungu harbours plans to arrest Hichilema on a trumped-up charge. If there is substance to this allegation, the objective would presumably be to secure a dubious conviction that would disqualify his main rival from the 2021 race.

By undermining elections, the Constitution and the judiciary, Lungu is weakening the very institutions that offer long-term hope for democratic consolidation – and increasing the threat of popular protests against his rule.

Zambia was once highly regarded as a model of democracy in Africa. It is now deep into a slide, not so much into dictatorship as chaos. Many people within and beyond have yet to come to terms with the country's changing political character. By the time they do, it might be too late. ■

Sishuwa Sishuwa is a Zambian historian and political commentator

Recipes from the Presidential Cookbook

Samira Sawlani

2020 has been the year that many of us have rediscovered our kitchens. But while some of us are trying to be creative with our recipes, our favourite leaders have been relying on the same old staples.

In Guinea, President Alpha Condé of Guinea is cooking up a third term in office, and things are already heating up. This week, Amnesty International reported that at least 50 people have been killed after protesting against his bid to stay in power. With elections just weeks away, there is a real danger of things boiling over.

Tanzania is also going to the polls this month, and authorities there seem to think that teargas is an essential ingredient in the democratic process. It was used against Tundu Lissu and his supporters, just a few days before the electoral commission suspended his campaign for seven days in response to an alleged ethics violation.

In yet another October election, Ivorian President Alassane Ouattara is preparing his own third-term feast – but has neglected to invite his main rivals to the dinner party. The candidacies of former presidents Laurent Gbagbo and Henri Konan Bédié, as well as former



On the menu: Alpha Condé contemplates a third term

rebel leader Guillaume Soro, have been disqualified. Nor were any women allowed to run for president.

Taking his culinary cues from Gordon Ramsay, perhaps, President Ouattara described Soro as “a young man who has lost his head and is drunk with power and belongs in prison” – leaving Soro choking on his kedjenou. Then again, if you can’t take the heat, get out of the kitchen.

Hands in the cookie jar

Meanwhile, former Sierra Leonean President Ernest Bai Koroma is feeling the pressure after being banned from leaving the country, and summoned to the anti-corruption commission to answer for the corruption alleged to have occurred during his tenure. He was cooking the books all along, the current president Julia Maada Bio claims.

Speaking of cooked books: Kenya’s auditor-general presented a report earlier this week stating that the country stands to lose \$21-million as a result of the Covid-19 equipment procurement scandal at the Kenya Medical Supplies Agency. Well, when it’s your turn to eat ...

Feeling the heat

A phenomenon that has always puzzled us: although Western countries colonised much of the globe, giving them access to all the world’s spices, their food remains inexplicably bland. Well, throwing some spice towards a whole load of former colonisers is the South African government. France, Belgium, the United Kingdom and The Netherlands to name a few are all on the country’s new “red list”: the list of countries at high risk for Covid-19 and from which it will not accept tourists, even with its borders

opening.

Making things spicier still is activist Mwazulu Diyabanza and his colleagues in Paris, who appeared in court this week after being arrested in June for removing a sculpture from the Quai Branly Museum in Paris. (In another act of colonial erasure, Western media outlets keep describing the sculpture as “an African funeral pole”, whatever that means. It is, in fact, a 19th century wooden post used in funeral rituals in the border regions of modern day Chad and Sudan.)

The group say their aim is to “recover all art acquired through theft during the colonial era”, and have carried out similar acts in Marseille and at the Afrika Museum in The Netherlands.

Kitchen nightmares

Some of us often take the ability to cook and eat whatever we want for granted. But for many, putting food on the table is no easy feat.

It was therefore horrifying to read a new investigation by Thompson Reuters Foundation and The New Humanitarian (see p26) which found that over 50 women had accused aid workers – from a range of high profile organisations – of sexual abuse during the 2018-2020 Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Overwhelmingly, the women’s need to get or keep employment – to put food on their table – was used to exploit them, by the very people who were meant to be helping. And you can be sure that the perpetrators of this abuse are not going hungry. ■

When will a woman be president of Côte d'Ivoire?

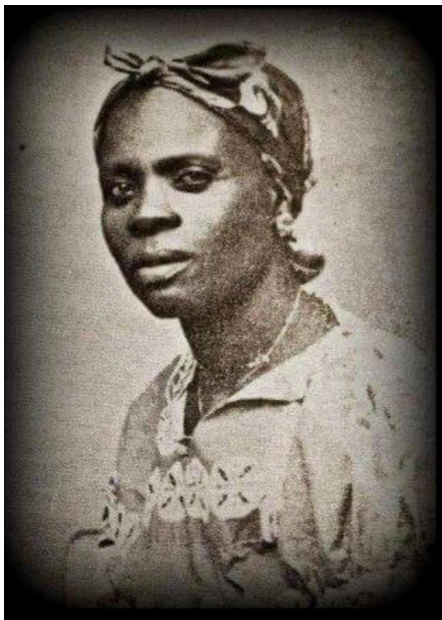
Leanne de Bassompierre
in Abidjan

As two of Côte d'Ivoire's most bitter political rivals are expected to square off in elections next month, Edwige-Renee Dro remains hopeful that a woman will one day be president of the nation.

Historically, women have played a major role in Ivorian politics. Dro — a 36-year-old writer, literary activist and mother-of-one — recounts the story of Marie Kore, who led a march against colonial rule in 1949. In Kore's honour, Dro has named her feminist library "1949". She is also writing a biography of Kore that she hopes will inspire a new generation of female political leaders.

Dro's library, situated in the populous Abidjan neighbourhood of Yopougon, is focused on women's writing from the African continent and the black diaspora.

"The same three men have been competing with each other for years," she says, referring to former presidents Laurent Gbagbo and Henri Konan Bedie, as well as incumbent Alassane Ouattara, who will seek a controversial third



Pioneer: Marie Kore led a march against colonial rule in 1949

mandate in elections next month. "Bedie says he wants to finish the work he started," Dro said. "But what work? What did he actually do?"

Of the 44 people, including three women who had applied to run in the much-anticipated election, only four were cleared to run by the constitutional council on September 14. They include Ouattara, Bedie, Pascale Affi N'Guessan and Bertin Konan Kouadio. Gbagbo's application was not accepted, and neither was ex-speaker of Parliament and rebel leader Guillaume Soro.



Legacy: Marie Kore's name is invoked at a demonstration last week in Paris in support of a prominent Ivorian political figure (Photo: Xose Bouzas)

It flies in the face of Article 36 of the new Constitution, introduced in 2016, that says the state must seek “the promotion of political rights for women by increasing their representation in elected assemblies”. Women remain largely under-represented in all spheres of government with only 15% of Cabinet ministers being female. In an effort to boost women’s historically low participation in politics, the government last year adopted a new law requiring that at least 30% of seats in Parliament and the senate should be held by women. Currently, only 11% of lawmakers in the lower house of Parliament are female, placing the West African nation number 161 out of 191 countries in the ranking of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, a Geneva-based advocacy group that tallies representation.

Yet, women were leading figures in the Ivorian anti-colonial movement. Beyond their 1949 march on Grand-Bassam, some 40km from Abidjan, women were vital to disseminating the message of the country’s

oldest political party, the Democratic Party of Côte d’Ivoire throughout the colony, according to Elizabeth Jacob, a Stanford University researcher with a focus on histories of gender, labour and violence in West Africa.

“Though their members were largely illiterate, the women’s sections of the party demonstrated an important capacity for political organisation, galvanizing their communities to challenge the abuses of the French colonial administration,” said Jacob. “But upon national independence in 1960, few activist women obtained positions in the post-colonial government”.

It was only in 1976 that Côte d’Ivoire named its first woman to a ministerial post. Jeanne Gervais was the first head of the ministry of women’s affairs. “Women are not absent from contemporary political life, yet their participation can often seem superficial, limited to public displays of support for political candidates, typically by marching en masse while clad in uniforms of party pagne,” she said. ■

Politics in Sierra Leone is becoming more polarised

Ibrahim Barrie

Last month a press release from the Sierra Leone Police warned “against anything that will disrupt peace and security”. While the rest of the world has been focussing on the ongoing global impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, Sierra Leone has been consumed by growing political tensions. Existing rivalries and disagreements have been exacerbated since the 2018 general elections by ongoing unemployment, economic hardship and accusations that the ruling Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP) is on a witch-hunt of All People’s Congress (APC) officials. Having been dumped out of office, APC leaders are now vulnerable over accusations of corruption and other forms of abuse. So what happens next?

Covid-19 has further exacerbated these tensions by hurting the already struggling economy and placing restrictions on citizens, including curfews and freedom of movement. The combination of these factors has led to riots, primarily in the

North, an area traditionally affiliated with the APC. Their lack of trust in the government has made them suspicious of Covid-19 regulations which has made them reluctant to comply. In turn, the government has accused the opposition of making the country ungovernable.

In late April, riots broke out in the northern town of Lunsar and Tombo and more recently, in Makeni city – the capital of the APC’s norther stronghold – in July. Led primarily by youth, the Makeni protest was a response to the government’s decision to reallocate the city’s standby generator to another town. The death of six people at the hands of the security forces led to a further deterioration in trust and the security situation. Against this dangerous backdrop, social media is being used to inflame passions on both sides – with many messages adopting a dangerous, ethnic undertone.

The situation needs careful and inclusive government – but it is not getting it. President Julius Maada Bio is a former military leader and there are hints that a firmer crackdown could be on the way. Along with further economic decline, this could trigger further violent clashes in the north – and beyond. ■

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WhatsApp is changing politics in The Gambia, both online and offline

Idayat Hassan
and Jamie Hitchen

There are 370,000 social media users in The Gambia, according to the Digital in 2020 report by We Are Social. That's equivalent to 16% of the population.

The 16% of Gambians who are active on social media are disproportionately influential. In urban areas these can be political activists, journalists, social commentators and religious figures; the types of people who would conventionally shape political debate across traditional media.

But that statistic does not tell the whole story, because online information is increasingly able to penetrate into offline spaces. For example, many more Gambians have access to content shared on platforms such as WhatsApp due to phone sharing. And recent studies from Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and Uganda have illustrated the ways in which social media content is used by, and can shape, traditional media such as radio, TV and print.

In rural areas, just one or two smartphones may be owned in a village, but these will often be in the possession of community, religious, or women leaders whose standing in society makes them more trusted arbiters.

With the prominence of WhatsApp voice notes in the two main languages of Wolof and Mandinka, smartphones increasingly act as quasi-radios in Gambian villages where education levels remain low or mobile penetration is limited. "Even if a rural village has just one phone, WhatsApp can make an impact", says Dr Ismaila Cessay, a political science lecturer at the University of The Gambia.

"Even if a rural village has just one phone, WhatsApp can make an impact"

This is being recognised by political parties across The Gambia – and across the continent more generally – who are using the private messenger application to organise online. Several have more than 50 WhatsApp groups – each at the 256 member capacity – which they use to spread messages, mobilise supporters and even raise funds. This points to a convergence between online tools and traditional offline campaign activities, and suggests that WhatsApp will be an increasingly important communication tool for all political parties in the 2021 presidential election. ■

Idayat Hassan is Director of the Centre for Democracy and Development. Jamie Hitchen is an independent researcher



Betrayed by aid workers

More than 50 women have accused aid workers of sexual abuse during the DRC's Ebola crisis

(Illustration: Robert Flummerfelt/The New Humanitarian)

**Robert Flummerfelt
and Nellie Peyton**

More than 50 women have accused Ebola aid workers from the World Health Organisation (WHO) and other leading nongovernmental organisations of sexual exploitation and abuse in the Democratic Republic of Congo, an investigation by the nonprofit news agency *The New Humanitarian* and the Thomson Reuters Foundation has revealed.

In interviews, 51 women – many of whose accounts were backed up by aid agency drivers and local NGO workers – recounted multiple incidents of abuse, mainly by men who said they were international workers, during the 2018 to 2020 Ebola crisis. Women described at least 30 instances of exploitation by men who said they were from the WHO, which sent more than 1,500 people to the

government-led operation to control the outbreak.

The women said men had either propositioned them, forced them to have sex in exchange for a job or terminated contracts when they refused.

The number and similarity of many of the accounts from women in the northeastern DRC, including the city of Beni, suggests the practice was widespread. Three organisations have promised to investigate the accusations.

Some women said they were plied with drinks or were ambushed in offices and hospitals, and some were locked in rooms by men who promised jobs or threatened to fire them if they did not comply.

“So many women were affected by this,” said a 44-year-old woman, who told reporters that to get a job she had sex with a man who said he was a WHO worker. She and the other women spoke

on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals. Some details have been removed to protect their identities. “I can’t think of someone who worked in the response [to the Ebola outbreak] who didn’t have to offer something,” she added.

Some women were cooks, cleaners and community outreach workers hired on short-term contracts, earning \$50 to \$100 a month – more than twice the normal wage. One woman was an Ebola survivor seeking psychological help.

At least two women said they became pregnant.

The WHO said it was reviewing a “small number” of sexual abuse or exploitation reports in the DRC but declined to say whether they may have taken place during the Ebola outbreak in the northeast of the country, which ended in June after more than 2,200 deaths.

A WHO spokesperson said the allegations stemming from the investigation were under review internally and encouraged the women involved to contact the WHO.

Many women said they had never reported the incidents for fear of reprisals or losing their jobs. Most also said they were ashamed. Some women said abuse occurred as recently as March.

“We would not tolerate such behaviour by any of our staff, contractors or partners,” said WHO spokeswoman Fadela Chaib, reiterating the agency’s “zero tolerance” policy.

Most aid agencies said they had received few or no claims of sexual abuse or exploitation against their workers in the DRC.

‘Passport to employment’

Many women said they were approached outside Beni’s main supermarkets, in job recruitment centres or outside hospitals where lists of successful candidates were posted.

Some said men approached them after they found out they had been passed over for jobs.

One woman said the practice of men demanding sex had become so common it was the only way of finding a job in the response to the Ebola crisis. Another called it a “passport to employment”.

“You’d look to see if your name was on the lists they posted outside,” said a 32-year-old woman, who said she was made pregnant by a man who identified himself as a WHO doctor. “And every day we’d be disappointed. There is no work here.”

Women said men routinely refused to wear condoms – at a time when physical contact was being discouraged to halt the spread of the deadly Ebola virus. Many knew the men’s names.

Though relief efforts in Ebola-affected areas have been scaled down amid budget constraints and more pressing concerns – from Covid-19 to a new Ebola outbreak in northwestern DRC – the experiences haunt many of the women.

“If they really wanted to help people, they would have done it unconditionally,” said a 24-year-old woman. “Instead of helping us, they destroyed our lives.” ■

This investigation was produced by the Thomson Reuters Foundation and The New Humanitarian. It has been edited for length.



(Photo:
NBAE/
Getty)

Bubble, bubble, the Heat's in trouble?

Refiloe Seiboko

Against all odds the NBA has managed to wield its season all the way to its concluding games. After having to suspend play in March because of the coronavirus pandemic, the league resumed play after almost five months of stoppage in what would become a revolutionary format that came to be known as “the bubble”.

Qualifying teams set up camp on the Walt Disney campus in Florida at the end of July, where they would play and live until they were knocked out of playoff

contention – all the while submitting to strict pandemic protocols and being separated from loved ones.

To all intents and purposes proceedings have gone on without a hitch. No-one has contracted the virus and the bubble that first housed 22 teams, and over 300 players, has whittled down its inhabitants to two teams: the Los Angeles Lakers and the Miami Heat.

Only one of the two was touted to make it to the NBA finals from the day the season tipped. The silver-screen Lakers, now led by perennial face-of-the-

league LeBron James and complemented by inimitably talented Anthony Davis as well as an experienced supporting cast of teammates, had not been to the top of the Western Conference, let alone the league, in a decade. Not even prodigal son of the franchise Kobe Bryant could will the team back to the top before retiring in 2016.

Fast forward four years and the famous purple-and-gold are a few games away from becoming the NBA's most decorated team with 17 championships – a feat they would finally share with arch rivals the Boston Celtics. To clinch the title, they have to put together four wins against the Eastern Conference's best, and a team James previously won two championships with, in the Heat.

Much has also changed for the Heat in the six years since James' departure. The team has made chess move upon chess move to secure players who fit in with the team's gritty culture. Miami's new "big three" that emerged for this season's playoffs consists of Jimmy Butler, Bam Adebayo and Goran Dragić, and is supported by rookie marksman Tyler Herro, journeyman Duncan Robinson, veteran Jae Crowder and former champion Andre Iguodala. Adebayo, Iguodala and rookie Gabe Vincent, interestingly, all have Nigerian fathers with Vincent having represented Nigeria nationally.

Game one of the best-of-seven series tipped off at 3am on Thursday for African fans and produced more consequential implications than are typically yielded in a first game. After the Heat took a 13-point lead early in the first quarter, the Lakers found their rhythm and came back to close

out the quarter 31-28.

They kept their momentum and closed out the first half of the game leading 65-48. Unfortunately for Miami, the blowout scoreline was not the worst news as their dependable point guard Dragić left the court with what would later be diagnosed as a plantar fascia tear in his left foot. This was in addition to Butler rolling his ankle quite significantly before halftime but still continuing to play.

To add insult to literal injury, Adebayo left the court in the third quarter after aggravating a previous shoulder injury and a later diagnosis of a neck strain.

The Lakers, on the other hand, played unaffectedly and finished the game 116-98, with James almost notching a triple-double with 25 points, 13 rebounds and nine assists.

Usually, one blowout game-one loss for any team does not signal a lost series. With the Heat having racked up such trajectory-altering injuries to such significant players, however, some fans and pundits have cued the violins and predicted a 4-0 sweep.

It's still very early, though. The Heat were not projected by anyone but themselves to get this far this season and have shown incredible fearlessness in these playoffs – lest we forget they knocked out the league-best Milwaukee Bucks.

By the time this article is published, the Lakers will have either taken a very likely 2-0 series lead or the Heat will have willed themselves to an equaliser. Regardless, NBA fans will still have at least two more critical finals games to look forward to and the league's bubble, as well as Miami or L.A.'s, will live to burst another day. ■



The Big Picture

Rising tides: A woman surveys the damage outside her house in Bargny, a seaside settlement on the coast of Senegal. The residents of Bargny have been battling rising seas for decades, along with frequent storms that speed up coastal erosion. Hundreds of houses have been lost, and families displaced. The situation is worst between the months of July and September.

(Photo: John Wessels/AFP)

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