

with Mail & Guardian

The Continent

Facebook is fanning the flames in Ethiopia

...and we have the documents to prove it



Inside:

- **A fuel tanker explosion** in Sierra Leone killed over a hundred people – a calamity that has been inevitable for years (p8)
- **Nanjala Nyabola** looks at the cost of Facebook cutting its safety teams (p16)
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- **Plus ça change in Glasgow** as Africa once again loses out in climate talks (p21)
- **Only 58% of Africans**, on average, have heard of climate change (p26)
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WELCOME TO SEASON 4!

It's a biggie. We finished Season 3 with a special edition, looking at what the Pandora Papers show us about how the global elite built a system where they create the rules, and how this costs Africa. This time we're kicking off with reporting from COP26 and as the only African newspaper given access to the Facebook leaks. We've got all sorts of things coming before Christmas so keep reading. And thank you for sharing *The Continent*. We now have 16,000 subscribers in 105 countries.



Cover: Facebook would like you to believe that it is a good corporate citizen. But lives are being destroyed because it consistently chooses profit over doing less harm. A trove of over 10,000 leaked documents show how its employees keep warning of the dangers its algorithm poses in boosting and sharing dangerous information. The same employees also share solutions that would make a dramatic difference. But then executives step in and ensure nothing happens to affect the virality of posts. In Ethiopia, this is playing out in a deadly way thanks to a deluge of weaponised content. It is a story mimicked in all the countries where Facebook seemingly doesn't care enough to do less damage. (p10)

Photo: Patrice Talon/Twitter



BENIN

A change of art

Benin has recovered 26 looted artworks from France. The cultural treasures were taken from the country in the 19th century colonial era and had been exhibited at the Quai Branly Museum in Paris. Patrice Talon, Benin's president, called the development "a step in the ambitious process of equity and restitution of the memorial heritage once extorted from the territory of the Kingdom of Benin by France."

UGANDA

Refugees bounce back as DRC cools

Conflict in eastern DRC sent about 11,000 people fleeing to Uganda this week, but 10,000 quickly crossed back, after hearing security back home had improved. Uganda's borders are closed to refugees due to the Covid-19 pandemic, but it issued a humanitarian exception to accept the new influx.

NIGERIA

Luxury building collapse kills 46

By official count, 46 people died when a high-rise building under construction in Ikoyi, an up-scale part of Lagos, collapsed on November 2. The 21-storey complex would have housed luxury apartments. Some prospective homeowners had paid as much as \$500,000 per unit. Buildings collapse with alarming frequency in Nigeria's big cities: Lagos, Port Harcourt and Abuja. In 2014, an apartment block at the Synagogue Church of All Nations collapsed, killing more than 100 people.

SUDAN

Error: Message Sending Failed

On Tuesday, a Sudanese court ordered telecoms companies to restore internet connectivity, but the country is still largely offline. An internet blockade was imposed on October 25 after the military overthrew the civilian government led by transitional prime minister Abdalla Hamdok. In 2019, after mass protests across the country, Omar al-Bashir, who had been head of state for 30 years, was removed. General Abdel-Fattah Burhan, who led the new coup, has appointed himself head of state, reigniting mass civilian protests across the country.

NIGER

Cave-in kills 18 amid gold rush

At least 18 people were killed when an artisanal gold mine in southern Niger collapsed this week. The Garin-Liman mines were discovered only a few months ago but had already attracted thousands of artisanal miners whose opportunities elsewhere have shrunk. Most of Niger's traditional gold-panning sites are in the north of the country, near Libya, and in the western Tillabéri region, where jihadist attacks are frequent. To "modernise the industry", the government closed a number of artisanal sites in 2017.

KENYA

Stay away, UK: Agnes Wanjiru is not at peace

Twelve years ago in Nanyuki, Kenya, a British soldier allegedly killed Agnes Wanjiru, a 24-year Kenyan mother, dumped her body in a hotel septic tank and told his colleagues about it. Their superiors reportedly learnt of the killing and yet did nothing. Now, the bilateral agreement that allows the UK army to conduct annual training camps in Nanyuki is expiring and Kenyan parliamentarians are threatening not to renew it.



BURKINA FASO

Sankara accused pleads not guilty

General Gilbert Diendere, alleged to have orchestrated the coup that led to President Thomas Sankara's death in 1987, has entered a "not guilty" plea in the ongoing assassination trial. Sankara family lawyer Prosper Farama said that Diendere's account of events "did not hold water". "We don't believe he pulled the trigger, but he was the direct supervisor of all these operations," Farama said. "The men who acted were under his command."

SOUTH AFRICA

FW de Klerk dead

South Africa's last apartheid-era president, FW de Klerk, died this week at 85, leaving behind a contested legacy. Although he shared the 1993 Nobel Peace Prize with Nelson Mandela, he had been criticised for maintaining – as recently as 2020 – that apartheid was not a crime against humanity.

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SOUTH AFRICA

The ANC – from ‘Viva’ to ‘vamoose’

The party of Nelson Mandela got just 46% of the vote in South Africa’s recent municipal elections – its worst result since coming to power in 1994. It will now have to negotiate with opposition parties to form coalitions in many local governments. Support for the ruling party has been ebbing over the years, amid corruption and “state capture” scandals involving associates of the party’s former leader Jacob Zuma.

INTERNATIONAL

UN troops kept more than peace

Portuguese troops deployed to a UN peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic allegedly used military planes to traffic drugs, gold and diamonds back into Europe. Ten suspects have been arrested.

DRC

Thousands of artefacts lost in museum fire

Fire ravaged the mask collection of National Museum of Gungu in DRC last week, ruining between 8,000 and 9,000 pieces, dating back to the 18th century. The museum’s collection was mostly drawn from the cultural tradition of the Pende people, who live in the country’s southwest and craft masks for various traditional rituals. The collection formed an important part of the annual Gungu festival of masked dancing.

KENYA

Flaunt it if ya got it (so we can tax it)

Kenya’s tax body has met its collection target for the first time in 10 years – because people are showing off on social media. Commissioner General Githii Mburu said this week that the Kenya Revenue Authority had increased its surveillance of popular platforms such as Instagram and Facebook. “Posting nice houses, cars, taking their families to nice places and so on. Here, we are not sleeping, when we see those, we see taxes,” he told Nairobi’s *Business Daily*. “We have our officers looking. They have gadgets.”

Ethiopia



Photo: Eduardo Soteras/AFP

This photograph was taken last week, on November 7, just five days after Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's government declared a state of emergency and encouraged citizens to take up arms in defence of the government; and a little over a year since the civil war began.

The apparent confidence of the military parade belies a more troubling reality for Ethiopia's government: With thousands of people killed and at least two million displaced, the balance of power in Ethiopia's civil war appears to

be shifting in favour of the rebel Tigrayan People's Liberation Front and its allies, who are reportedly closing in on Addis Ababa.

In response, the Ethiopian government has been accused of rounding up people of Tigrayan descent and detaining them in at least three detention facilities in and around the capital.

At least 16 Ethiopians who work with the United Nations, and their dependents, are among the hundreds of people arrested. ■

Sierra Leone

The aftermath of the explosion

More than 100 people were killed when a fuel tanker exploded in Freetown last week. But disaster has long been waiting in the wings

Abdul Brima in Freetown

A pungent smell hung in the air just outside Connaught, the main referral hospital in Sierra Leone. Mortuary workers struggled to manage bodies. Passersby covered their noses. Onlookers watched in disbelief.

On Friday November 5, 2021, more than a hundred people died in a fuel tanker explosion. Burnt beyond recognition, 115 were buried in a mass burial in nearby Waterloo. The death toll is expected to rise. Over 100 burned victims are admitted in hospitals across Freetown, the capital.

“Right now everyone is focusing on the number of deaths and injuries,” says Habib Tagor Kamara. No one is talking about the deep-seated social and economic

problems that contributed to the tragedy.

But perhaps they should be.

Tagor, the executive director of SLYDCL – Social Linkages for Youth Development and Child Link, a youth support organisation, explains that unemployment and other economic and livelihood challenges were never really addressed after Sierra Leone’s civil war ended in 2001. Now joblessness, drugs and desperation are forcing youths to risk their lives for a buck, he says.

And that’s exactly what happened at around 9pm on that fateful Friday evening, at Freetown’s busy PMB junction, when a fuel tanker collided with a lorry carrying granite. When petrol started to spill out of the tanker, there was a mad rush of motor bike riders and other youths to fill up their jerrycans with free fuel.

Then came the explosion. A massive inferno erupted, engulfing those collecting the fuel, bystanders and drivers and passengers of vehicles trapped in traffic.

Sayo Nakallay Turay lost his brother Adekalie, who was heading home from work but got stuck in traffic. His vehicle was blown away by the explosion, and he died later in a hospital. Adekalie was married with four children. Sayo and other relatives will now have to take up his responsibilities.

Jusu Jaka Yormah lives just a few blocks away from the junction. Between



Ashes: More than 100 people died in the blast. Photo: Saidu Bah / AFP

11pm and 4am, he counted and helped to move 92 bodies. “It was horrible. I have never seen anything like it,” he tells *The Continent*. “People were burning alive.”

A food vendor at the junction says she watched one of her workers burn, but there was nothing anyone could do. The national fire service was overwhelmed by the inferno.

The past few years have been extremely difficult for Sierra Leone, the consequences of which have been felt to a disproportionate degree by the younger members of the population.

In 2014, just as its economy was projected to grow at 11.3%, this West African nation of 8-million people was hit by Ebola. The virus killed 3,956 people.

In 2017, flash floods and mudslides swept through its capital, killing over 1,000 people and displacing 3,000.

In 2020, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the World Bank Group estimates that Sierra Leone’s economy contracted by 2% and its GDP per capita fell by 4%, further squeezing out the youth from employment and opportunity.

In their 2018 election manifesto, the ruling Sierra Leone Peoples Party said: “Youth (persons 15-35 years) account for about 33% of the country’s population. 67% are unemployed.”

But Tagor says Julius Madaa Bio’s government has, like those before it, “made no serious attempts at providing economic opportunities”.

“The past and present governments of Sierra Leone have been deceitful to the youths of this nation,” he says. “That is why our youths are susceptible to calamity and disasters like the fuel tanker explosion on Friday.” ■



Photo: Bloomberg
via Getty Images

How Facebook is fanning the flames in Ethiopia

(and in other parts of the world it does not bother to understand)

Nearly half the world is on Facebook or one of its apps. The social media platform has revolutionised the way that humans communicate – but only now are we beginning to understand the consequences of this revolution. Fake news, conspiracy theories, hate speech, incitements to violence: these all thrive on Facebook, thanks to an algorithm that has been trained to prioritise shares and likes over our safety.

The Continent is the first African publication to obtain access to thousands of documents leaked by Frances Haugen, a former Facebook data scientist. These documents prove that Facebook knows that its platform can cause immense harm to the people that use it. They prove that Facebook has not done nearly enough to protect the people who use it – especially if those users happen to live outside of the English-speaking western world.

Ethiopia is a case study in how Facebook can inflame tensions and fuel real-world violence. But unless Facebook – and the other social media giants – change the way they operate, it may also be a sign of things to come everywhere else.

Leaked documents reveal how Facebook failed to contain hate speech in Ethiopia

Simon Allison, Samuel Gebré and Claire Wilmot

On August 30, nine months into Ethiopia's brutal civil war, a Facebook user who goes by the name Northern Patriot Tewodros Kebede Ayo posted a clear incitement to violence on his page.

He accused the Qimant, an ethnic minority in Ethiopia's Amhara region, of supporting the opposition forces. He called them "snitches", and singled out the Qimant residents of Aykel, a small town in Amhara.

Writing in Amharic, he said: "The punishment has been imposed ... the clean-up continues."

Two days later, between September 1 and 2, more than a dozen Qimant in Aykel were dragged from their homes and butchered on the street, allegedly by members of the feared Fano militia – an Amhara nationalist paramilitary group that has been implicated in multiple atrocities. This was reported at the time by Al Jazeera, and two sources have independently confirmed this account to *The Continent*.

On September 1, users on another Facebook account – a page called "The Fano Patriotic People's Radical System Change" – joined in the online lynch mob: "No mercy for the Qimant," one

post said, even as the killings in Aykel were happening. Another user on the page had previously, in May 2020, laid out a 14-page road map on how to organise the Fano militia, with both violent and non-violent options.

There is no evidence that there is a direct causal link between these Facebook posts and the massacre in Aykel. What we do know, however, is that Facebook staff already knew about both of these accounts, and were worried about their potential to incite violence.

Months earlier, in a leaked internal document seen by *The Continent*, a team within Facebook had found that these accounts were key nodes in a major online disinformation network aligned to the Fano militia, codenamed Disarming Lucy.

According to Facebook's own data, this network was co-ordinating "calls for violence and other armed conflict in Ethiopia"; and "promoting armed conflict, co-ordinated doxxing, recruiting and fund-raising for the militia".

The Facebook team that had discovered Disarming Lucy recommended that all the accounts associated with it be taken down. This was in March 2021. But as of today, *The Continent* can reveal that every single one of those accounts is still active – and many are still spreading hate speech and inciting violence.

The Continent reached out to Facebook for comment on this and other issues raised in this article, but received no response prior to publication.

The algorithm is the problem

Between Facebook, Messenger, WhatsApp and Instagram, more than 3.6-billion people regularly use one of Facebook's apps (the company has recently rebranded and is now known as Meta). Ironically, for a company that is built on the sharing of personal information, Facebook's inner workings have always been relatively opaque.

Until now.

In May 2021, a data scientist named Frances Haugen resigned from her job with Facebook's civic integrity unit. That's the unit, based in Facebook's San Francisco headquarters, that was supposed to monitor – and, crucially, mitigate – all the ways in which Facebook causes harm, including the spread of hate speech and disinformation on the platform. It was disbanded in the wake of the American election last year.

Haugen had grown increasingly disillusioned with Facebook, coming to believe that it was putting profit ahead of providing users with meaningful protection.

Before she left the company for good, Haugen took more than 10,000 documents with her. She copied them by taking photos of her computer screen – in some of the documents, her silhouette is even visible in the reflection.

She shared these documents first with the United States Congress, and then with

the *Wall Street Journal*.

Now she's shared them with a small consortium of journalists from around the world, including *The Continent*, which is the only African newspaper represented.

The documents are drawn largely from the civic integrity unit and Facebook's internal workplace forum.

They paint a damning picture of a company that understands exactly how dangerous its platform can be – but which has repeatedly failed to take actions to make it safer, especially outside of the US.

Haugen describes herself as “an algorithm person”. She is an expert in the intricacies of Facebook's back-end, rather than the political complexities of individual countries, which gives her an insider's perspective on how hate speech spreads so wildly on the platform.

The key point, confirmed in a number of internal experiments, is that content that is inflammatory and extreme is more likely to go viral, generating what Facebook calls Meaningful Social Interaction (MSI) – a metric that measures reach and impact on Facebook (and which is central to how Facebook makes money).

Most of Facebook's features are designed to maximise MSI, which means that the algorithm has a tendency to promote extreme content.

Or, in Facebook-speak, according to one leaked internal memo: “Analyses consistently document that harmful content and low quality Producers disproportionately garner distribution from unconnected reach compared to benign content and high quality



For the likes: Ethiopian National Defence Forces soldiers deployed in Dabat, near Gondar in Ethiopia.

Photo: Amanuel Sileshi / AFP

Producers.”

And, from another leaked document: “It’s no secret Facebook’s growth-first approach to product development leads us to ship risky features.”

In other words: it appears that the prevalence of hate speech and disinformation on Facebook is not a bug. It’s a feature.

An unprofitable trade-off

There are, broadly, two ways in which Facebook can tackle this problem. The first is by tweaking the way Facebook works, to make it harder for people to share problematic content. These changes can be subtle, but have an enormous impact nonetheless.

One change favoured by Haugen is to make it more difficult for Facebook users to reshare content from people who are not in their friends list.

Currently, it’s as easy as pressing the share button, which requires little effort or thought. Internal experiments have shown that disabling the share button

in these contexts leads to an instant, dramatic reduction in the spread of fake news and hate speech. Users are still free to reshare the content, but they have to copy and paste it to do so – and even this minimum level of effort makes most people think twice.

Technical solutions like this work across different countries and languages. It’s a quick, comprehensive fix.

The only problem, as far as Facebook is concerned, is that it also has a strongly negative impact on MSI: people share things less, they like things less, they engage less. In a briefing with the civic integrity team, the notes of which are among the leaked documents, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg makes his position clear, directing the team not to go ahead with any changes “if there was a material trade-off with MSI impact”.

This left the civic integrity team with an impossible task, according to another document. “...integrity teams spend months searching for win/wins – pro-safety features that are also pro-growth. But there’s the thing: these solutions-without-downside almost never exist.”

Or, as Haugen put it in a briefing with journalists on Thursday: “Facebook knows how to make these harms better. But they also know that no one can catch them. So they keep falling on the side of profits.”

Underfunded and understaffed

The second option available to Facebook is to tackle hate speech and disinformation on a case-by-case basis, using a combination of human moderators and

machine learning to analyse individual posts. This approach requires enormous financial and human resources, which Facebook appears to be reluctant to commit outside of the United States.

For Ethiopia, for example, two sources told *The Continent* that there are fewer than 100 people working on content moderation across the four Ethiopian languages that are supported by Facebook (Amharic, Oromo, Somali and Tigrinya). With some 6.4-million Ethiopians on Facebook, this works out to less than one moderator per 64,000 people.

To compound the problem, the vast majority of Facebook's spending is directed towards the US. According to financial records, in 2020 just 13% of the company's budget to combat misinformation went to countries outside of the US – even though these countries account for 90% of Facebook's user base.

Nor is machine learning an effective solution. Not at the moment, anyway. Timnit Gebru, a computer scientist who studies algorithmic bias, told *The Continent* that major errors can happen when computers are responsible for translating and assessing content for languages they do not prioritise.

“You have to have people who are following, investigating and understanding the context very clearly, like journalists. However, the social media platforms working on this don't seem to have that.”

“Facebook needs to do better as far as content moderation on the continent goes,” said Eric Mugendi, Africa programme manager at Meedan, a tech

non-profit that aims to improve the quality of online discourse. “Additionally, the platform needs to allocate more resources to local languages that are spoken widely in the continent and used on the platform, but are not properly monitored for potential harm. They need to acknowledge the real world harm that their inaction has led to, and much more needs to be done.”

Violating community standards

In Ethiopia, a country engulfed in a civil war that has been characterised by multiple accounts of massacres and atrocities, that real-world harm is all too visible.

Earlier this month, Facebook deleted a post by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed that called on citizens to “bury the terrorist TPLF”. The post violated its community standards against inciting violence, the company said.

(If anyone understands the power of Facebook, it is Abiy: he was swept into power on the back of the grassroots, youth-led Qeerroo movement, which was itself enabled and then supercharged through Facebook).

But even more explicit posts by other prominent figures remained online. Berhan Taye, a digital rights researcher and activist, personally reported one post by media personality Mesay Mekonnen, which called for all Tigrayans to be placed in concentration camps. Multiple media reports confirm that Tigrayans in Addis Ababa are currently being rounded up and held in detention facilities around the capital.

**Unfriend or foe:
Captured Ethiopian
soldiers arrive in
Mekele, Tigray.**

Photo: Yasuyoshi
Chiba/AFP



Taye was told by Facebook that the post was reviewed, but “doesn’t go against one of our specific community standards”. Only after she escalated her complaint, using her own connections within Facebook, was the post removed.

The problems Ethiopia is experiencing are mirrored elsewhere in the developing world, Taye told *The Continent*. “[Facebook claims] less than 10% of Ethiopians use Facebook, implying investing in a place like that doesn’t make sense. But when you look at markets like India, Philippines or Brazil where Facebook has over 500-million users, Facebook has equally failed. Either they don’t care, or don’t know the impact the platforms have and are figuring out things after they have transpired.”

‘We are still blind’

“People across Africa should be concerned about Facebook’s poor handling of the Ethiopia crisis because it is indicative of the quality of the response we are likely to see in other African countries,” said Rosemary Ajayi of the Digital Africa Research Lab.

Facebook – or rather Meta, now – insists it is taking its responsibilities in Ethiopia seriously. In a statement on Tuesday, the company said that “for more than two years, we’ve been implementing a comprehensive strategy to keep people safe on our platform given the severe, long-standing risks of conflict”.

But the leaked documents tell a different story. As of December 2020, Ethiopia was categorised as having the weakest level of protection among the countries the civic integrity team had identified as at risk. In an attached rubric, this level is described as: “We are still blind to the extent of the problem”.

And basic safety features that are available to US and western audiences are not available to many Ethiopian users, the same document shows; despite the clear risks, Ethiopian users are without protection against misinformation, civic harassment, civic spam and fake accounts.

This leaves them vulnerable to the kind of inflammatory rhetoric that accompanied the massacre in Aykel, and has been a consistent, hate-filled soundtrack to Ethiopia’s civil war. ■

Facebook and the fog of war

Information warfare is not new, but social media platforms allow it to happen on a bigger and more dangerous scale than ever before

Nanjala Nyabola

On Friday, November 5 2021, AFP reported that the UN's local staff in Ethiopia were being rounded up and detained by their own government because of their ethnicity – an escalation of the ongoing conflict in Ethiopia. Several days earlier, Ethiopia was listed as one of the countries mentioned repeatedly in documents leaked by former Facebook data scientist Frances Haugen. As *The Continent* reports in this edition, these documents show how Facebook's poor investments in content moderation and safety have left an entire nation vulnerable to all kinds of manipulation.

Clearly, the Horn of Africa is a prime example of the new information ecosystem of war, re-emphasising the need for Africans to understand it – so that we can prepare for it.

One reason why so few people say anything publicly about the crisis in Ethiopia, even in terms of speaking up for civilians, is that on social media especially, it has become virtually impossible to say anything about the conflict without some kind of backlash. But within Ethiopia, the stakes are even

higher. One former cabinet minister reported that her family members had been detained, possibly for things she said online. We are witnessing one of the most sophisticated efforts at controlling the narrative of a crisis online short of a complete internet shutdown: the fog of war in the digital age, with social media as part of the terrain.

As *The Continent* reports in this edition, these documents show how Facebook's poor investments in content moderation and safety have left an entire nation vulnerable to all kinds of manipulation

The "fog of war" is a military concept that refers to the inability of soldiers on the front lines to properly assess the full picture of the battle. Often surrounded by literal fog, their hearing impaired by shooting and bombing overhead, their vision was restricted to what was closest to them. Over time the concept has been used more broadly to refer to the ambiguity created when our perspective of a conflict is impaired because we don't

fully understand what's happening.

Historically, this ambiguity is a consequence of conflict, but in the modern era it is sometimes caused intentionally to create a grey zone in which cruelty and violence is tolerated or even invited by civilians who may otherwise reject it. This is not new. In the lead-up to genocides in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, radio and television broadcasts were crucial to efforts to ratchet up animosity against ethnic groups. The point of using information in this way isn't necessarily to convince you that your side is good, but to have you thinking that the other side is worse and therefore violence against them is acceptable to prevent them from doing the same to you.

While informational warfare is not new, Ethiopia is reminding us that social media has changed the type and scale of actions being taken.

Now, Ethiopia is reminding us that social media has changed the type and scale of actions being taken. Co-ordinated inauthentic actions, misinformation networks, targeted attacks against public and private figures – all the hallmarks of social networking gone wrong have been witnessed.

And digital rights activists warned the social networks that this was coming.

In 2017, South Sudanese activists ran an anti-hate speech campaign called

#DefyHateNow after seeing individuals, particularly in the diaspora, using social media to broadcast hate speech into South Sudan that amounted to incitement to genocide. In 2020, Facebook itself confirmed that the governments of France and Russia were engaged in disinformation campaigns in the Central African Republic against each other on the platform. In Ethiopia, analysts like Berhan Taye asked Facebook to intensify its oversight as early as 2018 – yet the platform did not begin content moderation in Amharic until 2019.

Haugen confirmed that this was not accidental. Within Facebook, the deliberate underfunding of safety teams on the site and the way the site was optimised to privilege virality over truth underscores that the site bears responsibility for the role misinformation plays in exacerbating the conflict.

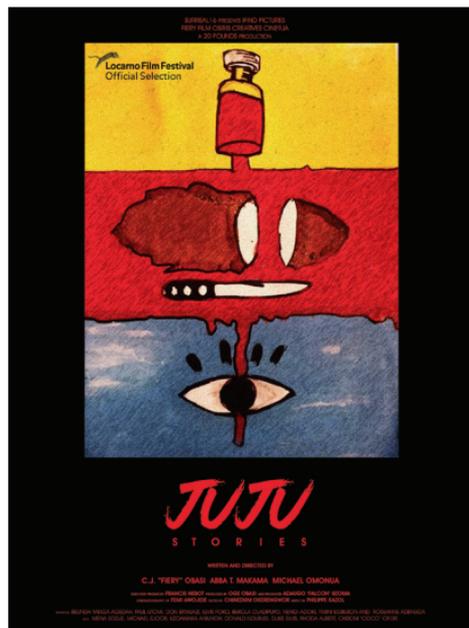
Social media didn't cause the war in Ethiopia, but business choices around virality have helped make misinformation highly portable.

The information ecosystem around the war is skewed in part as a consequence of business decisions to privilege financial returns over the safety of users.

A large potential market also means a large potential for calamity, and demands a proportionate investment in protecting users – community standards simply don't cut it.

Ethiopia may be today's extreme case, but it will not be the last. ■

Nanjala Nyabola is a writer and political analyst based in Nairobi, Kenya



Black Magic

Wilfred Okiche

In Lagos, a young lady desperate for affection follows the advice of a friend and seeks supernatural assistance to attract a man. A male street urchin turns into a tuber of yam shortly after picking up some money he finds at the side of the road. A naïve student grapples with the gradual realisation that her roommate might be a witch. This trio of vignettes make up *Juju Stories*, the follow-up anthology to 2017's *Visions* by the Surreal 16 Collective, which comprises Michael Omonua, Abba T Makama and CJ Obasi.

Real-world iterations of these stories are familiar to any Nigerian who has ever

endured the admonitions of a cautious parent. The world is full of evil people, our elders warn. Do not eat food in people's homes unless they have earned your trust. Do not pick up money from the ground or you will turn into some inanimate object. And watch and pray always, lest your best friend turns out to be a witch.

For the outsider, such warnings may be dismissed as superstitious silliness, but for many a Nigerian they are genuine concerns. The supernatural remains a potent part of the fabric of Nigerian life, regardless of colonial interruptions. Juju – anything from traditional medicine to black magic – is very much a part of the national identity and culture.

Love Potion, the opening story, is easily the strongest and most accomplished – Omonua demonstrates an increasing mastery of the short form. The chaos starts with *Yam*, with Makama merging his love for art with a knack for loose, frustratingly imprecise storytelling. CJ Obasi's *Suffer the Witch* comes closest to the melodrama of Nollywood, a puzzling choice considering the Surreal 16 Collective was envisioned as an alternative perspective to Nollywood's frumpy aesthetic.

Occasionally satisfying, *Juju Stories* which premiered at the Locarno film festival in Switzerland, plays like an interlude, a minor entry from promising filmmakers who still have their best work ahead of them. ■

Juju Stories is playing in select theaters across the continent.

THE QUIZ

0-3

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

4-7

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

8-10

"In my kitchen of knowledge, ignorance vanishes with a puff."



Photo: Marco Longari/AFP

- 1_ Which West African country received 26 looted artworks back from France this week?
- 2_ What is the demonym for people from Benin?
- 3_ In what year was apartheid implemented in South Africa: 1948, 1968 or 1998?
- 4_ In which year was the republic of Mauritius proclaimed?
- 5_ What does the acronym COP26 stand for?
- 6_ Only two people from Africa have been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize while they were president. Who are they?
- 7_ Who is the reigning UFC Welterweight Champion? [Hint: They call him the Nigerian Nightmare]
- 8_ Where will the next COP climate negotiation be held?
- 9_ In which country is Libreville found?
- 10_ What is the popular deep-fried dough snack known as magwinya in South Africa called in Nigeria?

HOW DID I DO?

WhatsApp 'ANSWERS' to +27 73 805 6068 and we'll send the answers to you!

Would you like to send us some quiz questions or even curate your own quiz? Let us know at TheContinent@mg.co.za

Climate revolution?



As countries struggle under poor leadership, with climate change making things worse for all, there are people calling for a radical change in how society works. Community-led development could see more equality, fairer growth and a more sustainable future. Illustration: Wynona Mutisi



Writing's on the wall: Artists paint a mural opposite the COP26 venue in Glasgow.

Photo: AFP

Paris to Glasgow: Plus ça change for Africa

The main headline from COP26 is that countries are going to dramatically reduce their carbon emissions. The world will likely be very different in 2050 as a result. But the other side of the climate coin – who pays for the massive damage of the emissions that benefited mostly western, mostly white countries – will continue to be largely ignored.

Sipho Kings in Glasgow

Glasgow is Scotland's industrial heart. It grew on the back of shipbuilding, supplying the British empire with the tools to loot the world. Some people got massively wealthy. The city centre remains heavy with the big, stone buildings of a society that expected to rule forever.

The environmental and human cost was high. The River Clyde, fat with rain from the ever-wet countryside, was toxic

to fish and smoke tore into the lungs of workers in the valleys. The wealthy ensured that their homes sat safely on the top of Glasgow's rolling hills.

Then the industry left as competition from Asia grew. The local economy collapsed.

Now it is turning around. New industries are gearing up and old ones are coming back to life. This time though the river is healthier, as is the local environment. Scotland is also toying with



Rising tide: Young protesters take part in the Fridays For Future rally during the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow, Scotland. Photo: Daniel Leal-Olivas/ AFP

the idea of demanding its independence from England.

So Glasgow is an apt setting for the annual Conference of the Parties (COP) climate negotiations. It is a place built on pollution and Empire, to the benefit of a few, seeing the potential in a cleaner and fairer future.

But, across two weeks of climate negotiations, entrenched positions have worked hard to defend the status quo. For African nations, responsible for just 4% of carbon emissions and already facing climate exacerbated droughts and floods, the wins have been few.

The mantra of the host nation, the United Kingdom, has been “Net zero by 2050”. That calls for nations to be adding no extra carbon emissions to the atmosphere in just 29 years’ time. The UN’s climate science says 45% of emissions need to be gone by 2030 for global heating to be kept below 1.5 °C. That number is non-negotiable if the island states in the Pacific and Caribbean are to continue to exist, or for life in Africa

and Latin America to not be just about impossible.

Climate negotiations are about some winning their non-negotiable points, and others losing. African countries point to the lack of seriousness in ensuring emissions are cut by 45% by 2030 as a clear sign of their continued losing at COP.

This isn’t new

At first it was all one-way. In 1999, five years after COP started, rich countries agreed to reduce emissions. The United States scuppered this by renegeing on its part of the deal. In 2009 rich countries tried to impose a climate agreement on the 196 countries that are in the UN (which houses COP). They failed.

At that point the UN’s climate science expected global heating to be over 4 °C by the end of this century.

In 2011, in Durban in South Africa, a new climate framework was hammered out. An equal split was agreed between work to reduce carbon emissions (called mitigation) and helping communities

survive climate change (adaptation).

Because rich countries are responsible for almost all emissions – America alone has pumped out 20% of all the carbon in the last 170 years according to *Carbon Brief* – they needed to promise to listen to the rest of the world. They promised \$100-billion a year to help countries with adaptation and mitigation. A “loss and damage” mechanism was proposed to work out how to apportion blame for climate damage, who would pay for it and how.

With the promise that their concerns would be taken seriously, developing countries allowed the 2015 Paris agreement to enter into force.

This requires countries to do what they can to keep global heating to “well below” 2°C. Crucially, it sent a signal to investors and everyone else that the world was going to move away from fossil fuels.

An analysis this week by number crunching group Climate Action Tracker shows that if every country does what it has promised to do, heating will be 2.4 °C this century – despite India announcing it would get to net zero by 2070 and China adding more detail to its own plans.

Building the nuts and bolts

What Paris did *not* do was flesh out how things would work, beyond the headline goal. The five COPs since then have been the sites of pitched battles over words, sentences and paragraphs, with nothing much at stake except the fate of life on Earth.

In Glasgow, delegates met in grey, prefabricated rooms in a giant



Blah humbug: Climate activist Greta Thunberg addresses a rally during COP26. Photo: Daniel Leal-Olivas / AFP

conference centre next to the River Clyde. The catering has been poor, with sandwiches and Irn-Bru cold drinks providing little sustenance. With too little accommodation, at too high a price, some delegates have also commuted from other cities. Sitting on hard-backed, thin cushioned chairs, negotiators were stretched to the limit.

All of this favoured delegates from countries that could afford more luxuries, and the fossil fuel industry, which had over 500 delegates – more than any one country. That’s because you need to be in the right room at the right time, even if it’s 4am, to decide what goes into a sentence.

Each COP starts with the host country putting forward a draft of what it thinks everyone wants and will be willing to agree to. Negotiators then comb through every sentence. Where there is disagreement, brackets are inserted with all the options, so sentences end up looking like this (or this) (and that) (or maybe this).



Hi, I'm a fish: Ocean Rebellion activists protest against deep-sea fishing at the Conference of Parties (COP26) in Glasgow, Scotland. Photo: Andy Buchanan/AFP

There is room to manoeuvre in the choice of words – a text that “urges” and “invites” countries to do something is noncommittal while “should” requires action. The idea here is that each leader can return home and claim a victory to voters, parliament and their budgetary office.

It is also the only way to get 196 countries not to agree, as such, but to not disagree. COP differs from UN resolutions because the final text isn't voted on or passed by majority. It only passes if nobody objects. This gives any one country the power to sink the entire process.

How to ruin a climate negotiation

Some countries play the spoiler role to perfection. Saudi Arabia and Australia have consistently sought to have any mention of “fossil fuels” removed from COP, despite the science saying oil and gas are the biggest drivers of global heating. One draft text, sent out just after 2am on Thursday, used both the term and called for countries to move away from fossil fuels. By Friday morning it had been watered down.

Both countries know that a COP agreement results in real-world changes. Both of those countries want to keep selling fossil fuels for a long time to come.

**Crimson tide:
Members of the
Red Rebel Brigade
protest against
global financiers
during COP26 in
Glasgow, Scotland.**

Photo: Andy
Buchanan / AFP



The great conceit is that these countries don't want to be publicly seen to be weakening an agreement that wants to keep the world habitable. So they act quietly and behind closed doors.

This is where journalists and civil society come in. By getting into rooms where they aren't welcome, speaking to sources and wrangling documents, these groups give information to the ecosystem that rises up around any COP.

That forces accountability.

When that Thursday change included "fossil fuels", and the text was released, protesters were quickly organised with people talking to cameras, microphones and pen-wielding reporters. Outside, mass demonstrations saw tens of thousands of placard-waving people march through Glasgow. Climate activist Greta Thunberg's terse summary of climate negotiations and their lack of ambition – "blah blah blah" – was plastered on posters across the city.

All of this ended up on camera, radio, newsprint, devices and screens around

the world. But, even with the pressure that this always brings, the core mismatch of climate negotiations continues to play out. At the time of writing, the promises of \$100-billion in funding are still delayed (to 2022 or beyond) and nobody is willing to accept responsibility for all the damage done by pollution from rich countries.

The reality is that COP will result in a big decrease in carbon emissions. The world will be very different by 2050. But that change will have been made by the rich world while the rest of the world remains locked out, choosing between going to a COP in the hope of getting crumbs or staying away completely. And the lack of ambition will mean Africa's non-negotiable position of keeping heating to below 1.5 °C will have been ignored, with deadly climate change wiping out communities and countries.

The alternative – a failed COP – would always be worse.

But, as poorer countries keep pointing out, a middle-of-the-road agreement is still a catastrophic outcome. ■

If you know, you know: Climate change is already making life worse

In pursuing the strong case for climate-change justice made at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) this week, African leaders have the wind of public opinion at their backs.

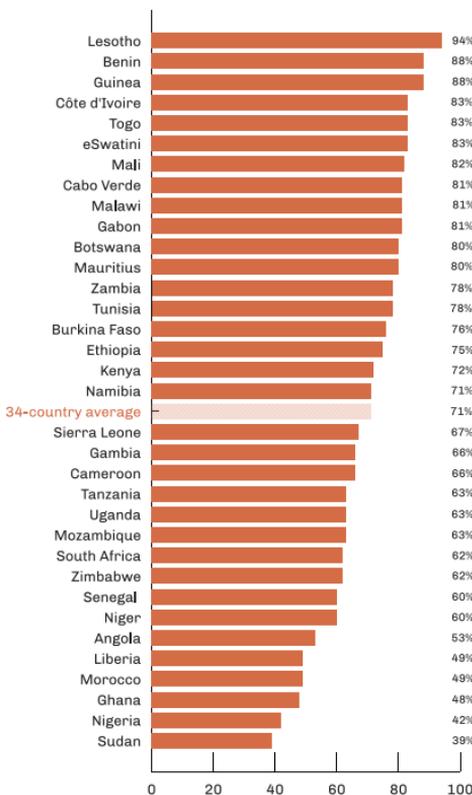
Among Africans who have heard of climate change, seven in 10 (71%) say it is making life in their country worse. That's the majority view in 29 out of 34 countries that Afrobarometer surveyed between late 2019 and mid-2021, including about nine out of 10 Basotho (94%), Beninese (88%), and Guineans (88%).

But there's still work to be done at home, too, because only 58% of Africans, on average, have heard of climate change. Even in South Africa (49%) and Ghana (51%), only about half of citizens are aware of climate change, and the numbers are far lower in Nigeria (30%), Tunisia (33%), and Mozambique (36%).

And while young people can expect to suffer most from the future effects of rising temperatures, young Africans are no more likely than their elders to be aware of climate change (58%) and somewhat less likely to see its harmful effects (68% of those who are aware).

Climate change is making life somewhat/much worse

Percentage among respondents who had heard of climate change



Source: Afrobarometer, a non-partisan African research network that conducts nationally representative surveys on democracy, governance, and quality of life. Face-to-face interviews with 1,200-2,400 people in each country yield results with a margin of error of +/- 2 to 3 percentage points.



PHOTO FEATURE

We've got this

Photo: Netherlands.
Fokkebok/Getty Images

WIND POWER. In 2001 the world had 24,000 gigawatts of wind power installed. That number is now 742,000 gigawatts. In the past decade, the cost of producing that power has also dropped by 40%.



Photo: La Colle des Mees, southeastern France. Gerard Julien/AFP via Getty Images

SOLAR POWER. The price of solar power has dropped by a staggering 90% in the past decade. As part of a grid with appropriate storage capacity, the technology is not just practical in sun-kissed Africa – it's invaluable.



Photo: Singapore.
Roslan Rahman/AFP

SMART CITIES. More than half the world's population now live in cities. Cities soak up the world's wealth, which means they have not just the resources to transition to a green future, but also the most to gain.

The green energy transition can't happen without Africa's minerals

Sophie Mbugua in Nairobi

To meet the Paris agreement, keeping global warming at or below 1.5°C, nations must switch from fossil fuel energy systems to renewables.

The switch will see demand soar for copper, zinc, iron, nickel, lead, and molybdenum – all minerals required for solar panels. The World Bank estimates that by 2050 supply requirements will have risen by as much as 300%.

Demand for other minerals like cobalt, lithium, and rare earth minerals will also grow to an extraordinary extent. These are crucial for batteries, smartphones, laptops, electric vehicles, solar panels, and wind turbines. Steel is also essential for the new age of digitisation.

Africa is home to 42 out of the 66 minerals essential for the green energy transition, a United Nations Institute for Natural Resources in Africa (UN-INRA) report on “stranded assets” says.

The Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia hold 75% of the global cobalt reserves. South Africa has 70% of the world's platinum – essential in developing fuel cell products needed to support mini-grid electricity access in rural areas. A third of the world's bauxite

reserves, a fifth of its uranium resources, and two fifths of its manganese reserves are on the continent.

These bountiful resources could lead to a boom on the continent. But they may well lead to war and exploitation instead. Most of these minerals are concentrated in fragile hotspots troubled by conflict and violence, according to the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD).

Africa is home to 42 out of the 66 minerals essential for the green energy transition, according to a UN report.

This conflict is often a direct result of mineral extraction. Oil in the Niger delta led to conflict there, during the 1990s. Blood diamonds claimed more than 75,000 lives and created half a million refugees in Sierra Leone. In the DRC – a major cobalt, copper, tin, tantalum, and gold producer – illegal armed groups often control mines and exploit miners. Cabo Delgado province of Mozambique, a new natural gas reserves exporter, has suffered repeated militant attacks and armed insurgency since 2017.

“The demand could exacerbate conflict and violence along the supply chains of these ‘green’ minerals, threatening the transition,” warns the IISD.

Conflict risks aside, right now “African mineral resources, though valuable and vast, are extracted mainly for processing and use outside the continent,” says Jean-Paul Adam, the director for Technology, Climate Change and Natural Resources at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa.

“In extractive economies, extracted mineral resources rarely feed back into the economies,” says Qondi Moyo, of UN-INRA. Minerals are finite resources, and much of their potential wealth is lost to corruption. Countries are left with neither the infrastructure nor the institutional capacity to negotiate more equal relationships with extracting parties, Moyo explains.

To turn the tide from conflicted natural extraction to economic benefit, Africa must have “a robust regulatory framework, allowing the maximum value addition to the natural resources, and investing in infrastructure,” Adam says.

To turn the tide from conflict to economic benefit, Africa must have ‘a robust regulatory framework’

Intra-Africa trade arrangements, like the African Continental Free Trade Area, present some opportunity to build African value chains for African resources, says Adam.



Blue marvel: Africa has minerals that will power renewable technology.

In addition to the advantages of trading minerals on a more equal footing, intracontinental trade is “putting local communities at the centre of a just energy transition in Africa” as Rebekah Shirley of the World Resources Institute Africa advises. Minerals conflict often arises, “where locals feel excluded,” Moyo says.

Wishes and advice, will however not reinvent Africa’s mineral industry. “Without a plan, and leadership it will be easy for Africa to continue being subjected to unfair terms of trade under green transition,” warns Moyo. “Africa needs an African vision in terms of sustainability, green transition, and green industrialisation.”

It’s worth noting that whether African leadership acts or fails, the continent’s population will double by 2050, and 10-million young people under the age of 24 will pour into the job market in the coming years, amid post-Covid economic fallouts, and climate change impacts. ■

THE BIG PICTURE

Acid trip: A man pumps acid waste into the sea near the village of Mboro Kandio, 70km north of Dakar. Millions of litres of acid waste produced by the chemical industries of Senegal are thought to have been dumped into the ocean over the past 30 years. After villagers began falling sick, the old platform was shut down – and moved just a few kilometres south. Photo: John Wessels/AFP



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