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The Continent



Taming the algorithms

The future is being coded now.
Will it include us?

Illustration: Dall-E 2/OpenAI

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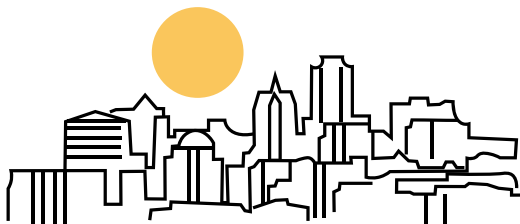
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“A female African superhero saves the world from Big Tech, in the style of Afrofuturism”.

A human did not draw the illustration on the cover of this newspaper. Instead, it was drawn by a computer program powered by artificial intelligence, using the text above as the prompt. Already, we are seeing how artificial intelligence can be racist and exclusionary, and have giant blindspots. This week *The Continent* speaks to Timnit Gebru, the AI researcher who was forced out by Google for raising ethical concerns, about why this moment in history is so dangerous for Africa – and what she and others are doing about it (p12).



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LIBYA

Oil leak in the desert – in this economy?!

A damaged pipeline, running from Libya's Sarir Tobruk oilfield to a terminal in the port of Tobruk, has been releasing about 22,000 barrels of oil a day into the desert since Tuesday. Arabian Gulf Oil Company, a state enterprise which operates the pipeline, has blamed the damage on lack of maintenance and cited funding delays from the government. Libya has not had a unified government since 2011 when Muammar Gaddafi was ousted, which has led to devastating dysfunction across many sectors.

RUSSIA

'Sorry you're hungry – but don't blame us'

Senegal's President Macky Sall met with Vladimir Putin on Friday to convey to the Russian leader the consequences for Africa of his war in Ukraine. "Our countries ... are the victims of this economic crisis," he told Putin at their meeting, referring to the disruption of grain supplies from Russia and Ukraine. Putin did not respond directly, but Kremlin officials said he would likely sympathise with "our African friends" and explain that it wasn't actually Russia's fault that the supply chain was disrupted by its invasion of Ukraine.



EGYPT

This one goes out to the kids back home, says Cannes winner

Tarik Saleh, a Swedish artist of Egyptian origin, won the screenplay prize at the recent Cannes Film Festival for his film *Boy from Heaven*. Describing his intent, Saleh said the film invited "...Europeans to step into the sandals of a Muslim that [they] are afraid of, and walk around, pray, look, hope, be afraid, and fight for survival" with the character. He dedicated the prestigious award to young Egyptian filmmakers, saying he is "hoping they raise their voices and tell their stories".



Probed: Rwandese-French actress Sonia Rolland. Photo: Twitter/SoniaRolland

GABON

Former Miss France in hot water for gift from Omar Bongo

Sonia Rolland, a Rwandese-French actress, and former Miss France, is being investigated by French authorities for accepting an apartment in Paris from former Gabon president, Omar Bongo. Prosecutors say that the \$750,000 apartment was bought with Gabonese public funds embezzled by the Bongo family, especially through “undue commissions” paid by French energy firm, Elf, to exploit the country’s natural resources. Rolland’s lawyer says she was naive when she accepted the apartment nearly 20 years ago when she was 22, and didn’t know where the money came from.

ESWATINI

Traditional courts have legal authority, rules high court

Decisions, orders and judgements by Swazi traditional courts have the full force of Eswatini law and don’t need to be endorsed by other courts, Judge Mumcy Dlamini of the country’s high court ruled recently. In the case, the police refused to implement the orders of a Zombodze Royal Kraal, claiming it had to be turned into a high court order first. The traditional court ruled in favour of a woman’s right to her matrimonial property, in a dispute with her relatives in 2019.

CHAD

Clashes between gold miners kill 100

Fighting between informal miners has killed more than 100 people and left at least 40 injured in the gold-rich, mountainous district of Kouri Bougoudi in northern Chad, authorities said this week. The area is on the border with Libya, a thousand kilometres northeast of Chad’s capital, N’Djamena. The fighting broke out between Libyan and Mauritanian gold miners but soldiers sent by the Chadian government to intervene have also been accused of firing on people. All mining in the area has now been suspended.

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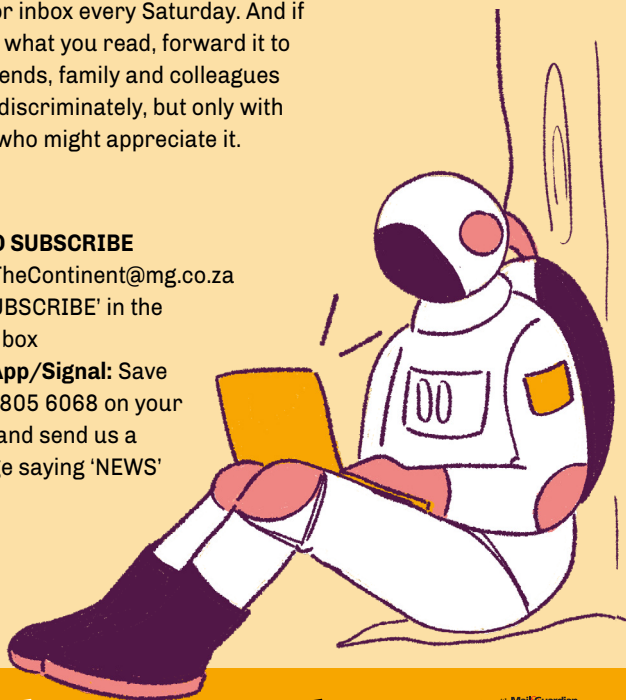
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MOZAMBIQUE

From Russia with love and/or soldiers

Valentina Matviyenko, chair of Russia's Federal Council, led a delegation to Mozambique to sign "a full-fledged agreement on inter-parliamentary cooperation" with its parliament this week. One of the strongest African partners of the Soviet Union during the Cold War, Mozambique did not vote to suspend Russia from the UN Human Rights Council over its war in Ukraine. Moscow has reportedly given Maputo military support to fight insurgents in the gas-rich Cabo Delgado region.

COMOROS

Green light for green turtle sanctuaries

The archipelagic Indian ocean nation of the Comoros has only one protected area for wildlife: Mohéli marine park. That is about to change, after it passed decrees protecting another five areas. In recent years, Comoros has also enacted laws to govern such areas, and created an agency to manage conservation, an important move for the country whose coral reef and seagrass meadows sustain oceanic life like green turtles, the critically endangered hawksbill turtles, and dugongs.

Photo: Twitter/MercyShips



SENEGAL

World's largest hospital ship docks

Global Mercy, the world's largest civilian hospital ship, has docked in Dakar's port; its first visit to Africa. The 12-deck

ship will stay in Dakar until the end of June and 260 health workers will receive training aboard the 7,000m² ship, which includes six operating theatres, 102 acute care beds, seven intensive care beds and 90 convalescent beds. The presidents of Senegal, Guinea-Bissau and Comoros attended a ceremony to welcome the ship.

Malawi

The kwacha has once again been devalued

Faced with a shortage of forex and an economic slump for which it needs an IMF loan, Malawi has deliberately weakened its own currency

Josephine Chinele in Blantyre

Malawi has devalued its currency for the second time in a decade. The 25% devaluation of the kwacha, announced last week, means it is now cheaper for outsiders to buy goods from Malawi. It also means it is more expensive for citizens of the landlocked country to import what they need.

John Kapito, the executive director of the Consumers Association of Malawi, describes the situation as a nightmare, with “panic and confusion” in markets. “Consumers suspect traders are cheating while traders are adjusting prices in order to recover the value of their profits.”

Within days of the devaluation, Illovo Sugar Malawi, which produces about 60%

of the sugar in the country, announced a 25% increase in their prices. It cited a sharp increase in the cost of production, for which it needs imported goods like fuel and fertilisers.

Months ago, traders had already raised the price of sugar because of scarcity.

The country’s Reserve Bank governor, Wilson Banda, said the “devaluation is a necessary evil in order to fix our economy”. Frank Chikuta, Executive Director of the Economics Association of Malawi, said that in the short term: “Consumers will feel the pain to buy essential items.”

The finance minister, Sosten Gwengwe, said that a stronger kwacha had been exacerbating the country’s forex shortage. *The Continent* recently reported on one impact of this, with Kenya and Ethiopian Airlines suspending ticketing services in Malawi.

The devaluation announcement was made while a team from the International Monetary Fund was in the country to discuss a potential loan, prompting speculation that the government might have devalued the currency in a desperate move to get it.

Currently, one United States dollar is equal to 1,100 Malawian kwacha, up from 816 the day before the devaluation. In 2012 the Malawian kwacha was devalued by 33%. ■

Egypt



Photo: Khaled Desouki/AFP

Wondrous find offers clues to Imhotep's rise

Hundreds of coffins and statues have been unearthed in the ancient Egyptian city of Memphis, filling in gaps in the country's history

Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities this week shared the results of a four-year dig near Memphis, which once served as the country's capital. These included 250 wooden painted coffins and 150 bronze figurines – the largest ever single find of such statuary.

It also included a carved statue of Imhotep, one of the most important figures in Egyptian history. A non-royal, he is credited with designing and leading

the construction of the Step Pyramid of Djoser, in Memphis's necropolis, Saqqara. Built some 4,600 years ago, it is the world's oldest monumental structure to be made entirely of stone. Before this, the rich and powerful of Egypt's Ancient Kingdom were buried in mud-brick tombs.

Imhotep rose in fame and in myth after his death, eventually joining the Egyptian pantheon as the god of medicine and healing. The first recorded use of his name came 1,200 years after his death – meaning there are gaps in the historical record that have yet to be filled.

The head of the antiquities council, Mostafa Waziri, was quoted by AP saying a main goal of the dig was to find Imhotep's tomb.

In one sarcophagus, a sealed and untouched papyrus written in hieroglyphs was found. The researchers said they thought it might contain verses from the *Book of the Dead*, a text left with the dead to help their path to the afterlife.

Saqqara is a Unesco World Heritage Site, 40 kilometres south of the modern capital, Cairo. Its cemeteries have tombs and pyramids spanning from the Old Kingdom, some 4,500 years ago, to the New Kingdom and then the period of Roman occupation 2,000 years ago.

Much of the find will be sent to the Grand Egyptian Museum, which will be the largest archeological museum in the world when it opens. ■

Kenya

The failed promise of Kenya's digital elections

Despite failing in consecutive elections, at vast cost, biometric voting systems will be used in the upcoming Kenyan election

At least 35 countries in Africa are using biometric technology to deliver elections, according to research cited by Dutch non-profit investigative unit Lighthouse Reports.

They partnered with *Le Monde* and Kenyan investigative unit *Africa Uncensored* to dig into that technology and its disastrous application in the 2013 and 2017 Kenyan elections.

Technology ought to make elections better with a fast, centralised system to register voters, check their ID on voting day and then share those results.

This is the hope that inspired the Kenyan electoral authority to contract a French firm to supply some 45,000 tablet voting systems. The company — Safran (now Idemia) — was the second choice

but the investigation found evidence that lobbying by the French embassy had helped ensure its win.

The 2013 election came after electoral violence in the previous contested polls. The technology was meant to give an empirical result that nobody could then question. But election day was chaotic. The results were unsuccessfully challenged. One of the failures was technological.

Without releasing any more information on what had happened, the electoral commission went back to the French company for the 2017 election. A total of \$40-million was spent. The system failed so disastrously that the supreme court declared the election “invalid, null and void”. It had to be rerun.

Safran responded to the investigative reporting, saying: “All the internal and external audits – which are otherwise accessible – carried out on our services have confirmed that the company has fulfilled its obligations in accordance with its commitments.”

For the 2022 election, Kenya's electoral authority has turned to a Dutch company to run the digital side of the election. But the voter registration process has already been delayed because the French company allegedly refused to share the voter details it had collected — with *The People Daily* reporting this was due to outstanding payments. ■

The dangerous hype around biometric election-tech

Kenya holds Africa's most expensive elections. The technology underpinning them has failed (twice!) and more than doubled in price per voter. And yet that same technology will return for the elections in August.

Nanjira Sambuli

Kenya is frequently touted as a trailblazer in technology adoption. The country's digitalisation trajectory has earned it nicknames like "Home of M-Pesa" and "Silicon Savannah". And while the former is certainly a success, and the latter a tagline that appears to be here to stay, the East African nation could just as well be described as a canary in the coal mine: its misadventures in the digital space are a cautionary tale about of how technology, bolstered by dizzying hype, can fail catastrophically to deliver on its promise.

Kenya's past decade of experimenting with technologically facilitated elections is particularly instructive in this regard.

Voters will be going to the polls on 9 August. This will be the third election in which election technology has been used. Biometric voter registration, electronic voter identification and an electronic results transmission system are the three "hi-tech" systems first introduced in the Kenyan election process in 2013. They

were billed as the key to eliminating voter fraud and rigging, and ensuring a free and fair election process. In 2017, the system was "upgraded" into the "state-of-the-art", all-in-one Kenya Integrated Electoral Management System.

These kinds of tech pronouncements and "upgrades" are intended to signal progress, development, and rekindle hope that citizens can experience relatively drama-free elections.

But the tech has to actually function. The basics must also be in place — such as reliable electricity and internet to power the systems, and technical know-how to navigate the use of the gadgets. In both 2013 and 2017, the technology malfunctioned, leading in many instances to manual voting, tallying and results transmission.

In 2017, more tech was procured. The cost of the election jumped from \$10 per registered voter in the first election to \$25 in the next, helping to earn Kenya the dubious honour of holding the most expensive elections in Africa.

But the system failed so spectacularly



Poll positions: Staff from the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission being trained in the digital election management system in 2021. Photo: Twitter/IEBC Kenya

in 2017 that the supreme court declared the election “invalid, null and void”.

There is little hope that 2022 will change this course. This is despite the likelihood of the elections ending up being even more expensive, thanks to a drive to correct the past failures of technology by procuring even more tech.

And there is a procurement nightmare threatening the legitimacy of the tech solutions, of the electoral process and of Kenya’s democracy itself.

Various business and political interests have been haggling in the background – at the expense of Kenya’s taxpaying voters – profoundly undermining the premise that tech is the key to delivering elections in the 21st century. There is little transparency or accountability to this haggling, or around the technology used to decide who has won an election and will get to represent voters.

Late last month, an investigation by Lighthouse Reports, Africa Uncensored and Le Monde concluded there was far too much scope for the opaque technology to be abused: “Whoever chooses the

technology wins the elections.”

Kenyans are yet again in an electoral cycle where the embers of tech hype are being reignited. In what appears to be a signal that the third time may not be the charm after all, the country’s electoral commission has attempted to have the Election Laws amended to avoid the embarrassment from the 2017 court verdict in particular.

They now want to ensure that manual transmission of electoral results can pass muster as a “complementary mechanism” to the electronic transmission codified in law. Technology is not democracy. Kenya’s past decade of experimenting with the former to deliver the latter is an outstanding case-in-point.

As more African countries join the “hi-tech” elections bandwagon, they will do well to learn from Kenya’s missteps. ■

Nanjira Sambuli is a researcher, policy analyst and strategist interested in and working on understanding the unfolding, gendered impacts of ICT adoption on governance, diplomacy, media, entrepreneurship and culture.



Clarion: Artificial
Intelligence ethics
expert Timnit Gebru

Timnit Gebru and the fight to make Artificial Intelligence work for Africa

As you read this, the future is being coded in Silicon Valley. The algorithms that will one day govern our lives are being built – but who is building them, and who are they being built for?

Simon Allison

The way Timnit Gebru sees it, the foundations of the future are being built *now*.

In Silicon Valley, home to the world's biggest tech companies, the artificial

intelligence revolution is already well under way. Software is being written and algorithms are being trained that will determine the shape of our lives for decades or even centuries to come.

If the tech billionaires get their way, the world will run on artificial intelligence.

Cars will drive themselves, and computers will diagnose and cure diseases. Art, music and movies will be automatically generated. Judges will be replaced by software that supposedly applies the law without bias, and industrial production lines will be fully automated – and exponentially more efficient. Decisions on who gets home loans, or how much your insurance premiums will be, will be made by an algorithm that assesses your creditworthiness; while a similar algorithm will sift through job applications before any CVs get to a human recruiter (in fact, this is already happening in many industries).

Even news stories, like this one, will be written by a program that can do it faster and more accurately than human journalists.

But what if those algorithms are racist, exclusionary, or have dangerous implications that were not anticipated by the mostly rich, white men who created them? What if, instead of making the world better, they just reinforce the inequalities and injustices of the present?

That's what Gebru is worried about. "We're really seeing it happening. It's scary. It's reinforcing so many things that are harming Africa," says Gebru, speaking to *The Continent* from Boston.

Gebru would know. She was, until late 2020, the co-director of Google's Ethical AI program. Like all the big tech companies, Google is putting enormous resources into developing its artificial intelligence capabilities, and figuring out how to apply them in the real world. This encompasses everything from self-driving

cars to automatic translation and facial recognition programs. The ultimate prize is a concept known as Artificial General Intelligence – a computer that is capable of understanding the world as well as any human, and making decisions accordingly ("It sounds like a god," says Gebru).

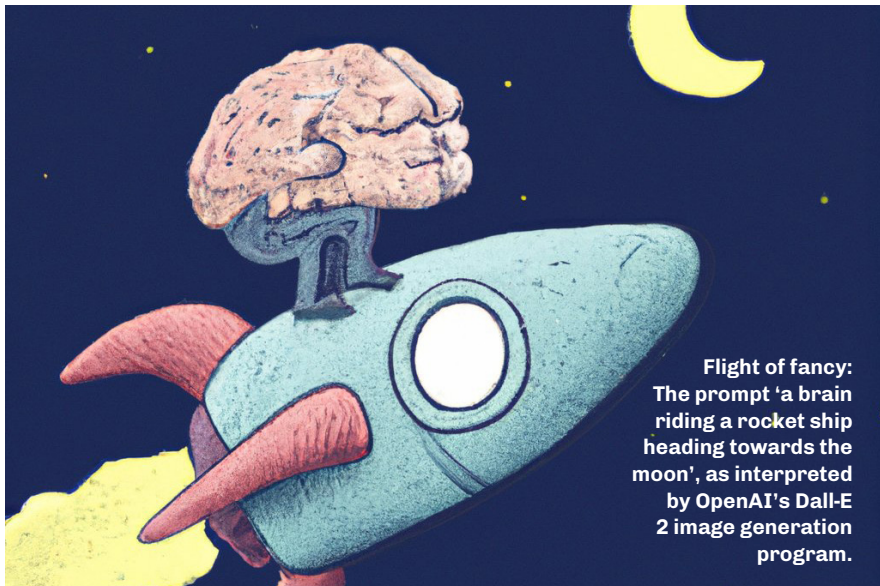
She was not at Google for long.

Gebru joined in 2018, and it was her job to examine how all this new technology could go wrong. But input from the ethics department was rarely welcomed. "It was just screaming about issues and getting retaliated against," she says. The final straw was when she co-authored a paper on the ethical dangers of large language models – used for things like machine translation and autocomplete – which her bosses told her to retract.

But what if those algorithms are racist, exclusionary, or have dangerous implications? What if they just reinforce the inequalities and injustices of the present?

In December 2020, she left the company. She says she was fired; Google claims she resigned. Either way, her abrupt departure and the circumstances behind it thrust her into the limelight, making her the most prominent voice in the small but growing movement that is trying to force a reckoning with Big Tech – before it is too late to prevent the injustices of the present being replicated in the future.

"Gebru is one of the world's leading



Flight of fancy:
The prompt 'a brain riding a rocket ship heading towards the moon', as interpreted by OpenAI's Dall-E 2 image generation program.

researchers helping us understand the limits of artificial intelligence in products like facial-recognition software, which fails to recognise women of color, especially Black women,” wrote *Time* magazine when it nominated Gebru as one of the 100 most influential people in the world in 2022. “She offers us hope for justice-oriented technology design, which we need now more than ever.”

The new gold rush

Artificial intelligence is not yet as intelligent as it sounds. We are not at the stage where a computer can think for itself, or match a human brain in cognitive ability. But what computers *can* do is process incomprehensibly vast amounts of data – and then use that data to respond to a query.

Take Dall-E 2, the extraordinary image-generation software that created *The Continent*'s cover illustration this week, developed by San Francisco-based OpenAI. It can take a prompt such as “a brain riding a rocket ship heading towards the moon” and turn it into an image, with uncannily accurate – sometimes eerie – results. But the software is not thinking for itself. It has been “trained” on data: in this case, 650-million existing images, each of which have a text caption telling the computer what is going on in the picture. This means it can recognise objects and artistic styles, and regurgitate them on command.

Without this data, there is no artificial intelligence. Like coal shovelled into a steamship's furnace, data is the raw material which fuels the AI machine – all



All tied up: Pictures from the 'Risks and Limitations' section of OpenAI's Dall-E 2 preview on github.com, showing Dall-E 2's interpretation of the prompt 'CEO'.

too often, Gebru argues, that fuel is dirty.

Perhaps the data is scraped from the internet, which means it is automatically flawed in all the ways the internet itself is flawed: anglo- and western-centric; prone to extremes of opinion and political polarisation; and all too often it reinforces stereotypes and prejudices.

Dall-E 2, for instance, thinks that a “CEO” must be a white man, while nurses and flight attendants are all women. More ominous still was an algorithm developed for the United States’ prison system, which predicted that black prisoners were more likely than white people to commit another crime – which led to black people spending longer in jail.

Or perhaps, in one of the great paradoxes of the field, the data is mined through old-fashioned manual labour: thousands of humans hunched over computer screens, painstakingly sorting and labelling images and videos. Most of this work has been outsourced to the developing world – and the people doing

the work certainly aren’t receiving Silicon Valley salaries. “Where do you think this huge workforce is? There are people in refugee camps in Kenya, in Venezuela, in Colombia, that don’t have any sort of agency,” says Gebru.

These workers are generating the raw material, but the final product – and the enormous profits that are likely to come with it – will be made for and in the West. “What does this sound like to you?” Gebru asks.

Black in AI

Timnit Gebru grew up in Addis Ababa (Timnit means “wish” in Tigrinya). She was 15 when Ethiopia went to war with Eritrea, forcing her into exile: first in Ireland, and then in the US, where she first experienced casual racism. A temp agency boss told her mother to get a job as a security guard, because “who knows whatever degree you got from Africa”. A teacher refused to place her in an advanced class because “people like you”

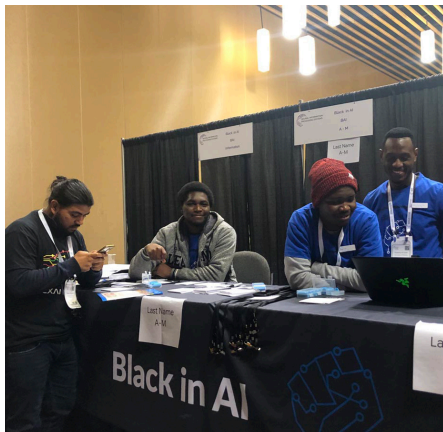
always fail. But Gebru didn't fail.

Her academic record got her into Stanford, one of the world's most prestigious universities, where she hung out with her friends in the African Students Association and studied electrical engineering. It was here that both her technical ability and her political consciousness grew. She worked at Apple for a stint, and then returned to the university where she developed a growing fascination with artificial intelligence.

"So then I started going to these conferences in AI or machine learning, and I noticed that there were almost no black people. These conferences would have 5,000 or 6,000 people from all over the world, but one or two black people."

Gebru co-founded Black in AI, a space for black professionals in the industry to come together and figure out ways to increase representation. By that stage, her own research had already proved how this racial inequality was being replicated in the digital world. A landmark paper she co-authored with the Ghanaian-American-Canadian computer scientist Joy Buolamwini found that facial recognition software is less accurate at identifying women and people of colour (a big problem if law enforcement is using this software to identify suspects).

Gebru got her job at Google a couple of years later. It was a chance to fix what was broken from inside one of the biggest tech companies in the world. But, according to Gebru, the company did not want to hear about the environmental costs of processing vast data sets, or the baked-in biases that come with them, or the



Represent: Timnit Gebru co-founded Black in AI as a solidarity space for black professionals in the tech industry

exploitation of workers in the global south. It was too busy focusing on all the good it was going to do in the distant future to worry about the harm it might cause in the present.

This, she says, is part of a pernicious philosophy known as long-termism, which holds that lives in the future – at any time in the future – are worth just as much as lives in the present. "It's taken a really big hold in Silicon Valley," Gebru says. This philosophy is used by tech companies and engineers to justify decisions in product design and software development that do not prioritise immediate crises like poverty, racism and climate change or take other parts of the world into consideration. "The way things are happening right now is predicated on the exploitation of people on the African continent," she says. "That model has to change."

“Not only is long-termism taking up so much of the AI narrative, it is something that is preoccupied with first-world problems,” Abeba Birhane told *The Continent*. She is a senior fellow in Trustworthy AI at the Mozilla Foundation, and a friend of Gebru’s. “It’s taking up a lot of air, attention, funding, from the kind of work Timnit is doing, the groundwork that specialist scholars of colour are doing on auditing data sets, auditing algorithms, exposing biases and toxic data sets.”

“Not only is long-termism taking up so much of the AI narrative, it is something that is preoccupied with first world problems,” says Abeba Birhane

In the wake of Gebru’s departure from Google some 2,000 employees signed a petition protesting her dismissal. While not acknowledging any culpability, Sundar Pichai – the chief executive of Alphabet, Google’s parent company – said: “We need to assess the circumstances that led to Dr Gebru’s departure, examining where we could have improved and led a more respectful process. We will begin a review of what happened to identify all the points where we can learn.”

Close to home

In November 2020, a civil war broke out in Ethiopia, and once again Gebru’s personal and professional worlds collided. As an Ethiopian, she has been

vocal in raising the alarm about atrocities being committed, including running a fundraiser for victims of the conflict. As a computer scientist, she has watched in despair as artificial intelligence has enabled and exacerbated these atrocities.

On Facebook, hate speech and incitements to violence related to the Ethiopian conflict have spread with deadly consequences, with the company’s algorithms and content moderators entirely unable or unwilling to stop it. (For example: an investigation by *The Continent* last year, based on a trove of leaked Facebook documents, showed how the social media giant’s integrity team flagged a network of problematic accounts calling for a massacre in a specific village. But no action was taken against the accounts. Shortly afterwards, a massacre took place.)

The tide of the war was turned when the Ethiopian government procured combat drones powered by artificial intelligence. The drones targeted the rebel Tigray forces, with devastating efficacy; and have been implicated in targeting civilians too, including in the small town of Dedebit, where 59 people were killed when a drone attacked a camp for internally displaced people.

“That’s why all of us need to be concerned about AI. It is used to consolidate power for the powerful. A lot of people talk about AI for the social good. But to me, when you think of the current way it is developed, it is always used for warfare,” says Gebru. “It’s being used in a lot of different ways by law enforcement, by governments to spy on their citizens,



Awkward questions: Timnit Gebru was hired by Google, and then allegedly fired after she raised ethical concerns about the company's work.

Photo: Getty Images

by governments to be at war with their citizens, and by corporations to maximise profit.”

Once again, Gebru is doing something about it. Earlier this year, she launched the Distributed Artificial Intelligence Research Institute (Dair). The clue that Dair operates a little differently is in the word “distributed”. Instead of setting up in Silicon Valley, Dair’s staff and fellows will be distributed all around the world – rooted in the communities that they are researching. “How do we ring the alarm about the bad things that we see, and how can we develop this research in a way that benefits our community?”

Raesetje Sefala, Dair’s Johannesburg-based research fellow, puts it like this: “At the moment, it is people in the global north making decisions that will affect the global south.” As she explains it, Dair’s mission is to convince Silicon Valley to take its ethical responsibilities more seriously – but also to persuade leaders in the global south to make better decisions, and to implement proper regulatory

frameworks. (For instance: Gmail passively scans all emails in Africa for the purposes of targeted advertising, but the European Union has outlawed this to protect their citizens.) “Our governments need to ask better questions. If it is about AI for Johannesburg, they should be talking to the researchers here.”

So far, Dair’s team is small: just seven people spread across four countries. So too is the budget, especially given that they are up against the world’s richest companies and men.

“What we’re up against is so huge, the resources, the money that is being spent, the unity with which they just charge ahead. It’s daunting sometimes if you think about it too much, so I try not to,” says Gebru.

And yet, as Gebru’s *Time* magazine nod underscored, sometimes it is less about the money and more about the strength of the argument – and on that score, Gebru and Dair are well ahead of Big Tech and their not quite all-powerful algorithms. ■

Malawi

Suspects held for years with no trial in broken legal system

There are only about 600 licensed lawyers in a country of 19-million which has about a million cases in its judiciary's pen-and-paper registry

Jack McBrams in Lilongwe

Boxten Kudziwe's story sounds so unreal as to be unbelievable. One evening in April 2006, he was stopped by two police officers and taken to the police station in Bangwe, a town in southern Malawi, for questioning about a business associate whom they accused of involvement in a series of armed robberies. He was told he would be detained until he disclosed his associate's whereabouts. And, for three months, they held him without so much as charging him before a court.

When he first appeared in a magistrate's court, he had spent 1,776 hours in police detention, contrary to the maximum of 48 hours prescribed by the country's constitution. It was during this court appearance that Kudziwe learned for the first time that he was being charged with multiple murders. Too poor to afford a lawyer to represent him, Kudziwe was summarily sent to prison.

In 2008, through volunteer lawyers,

Kudziwe complained to the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, which agreed his incarceration violated his rights to due process and a fair trial, and said he should be immediately released. Strangely, government prosecutors pushed ahead with a trial.

His trial began in 2010 and ended in 2013 when the prosecution's case was found to be inherently unreliable and the charges were thrown out.

"Right there in court, I shed tears because I could not believe that after seven years this day had finally come," Kudziwe says.

His story is not unusual. There are thousands like him in Malawi's prisons. Some have been in pre-trial detention for as long as 14 years. In its 2020 report, the prison inspectorate noted the country's prisons, which hold 14,700 people, were at 260% of their capacity. About 40% of these were on pre-trial remand.

According to Kennan Manda, a judge who chairs the inspectorate, "the way the system is being operated by the courts,



Bursting at the seams: Prisoners scuffle in the queue for food at Chichiri Prison in Malawi. A 2020 report by the prisons inspectorate that detention facilities in the country were at 260% of their intended capacity. Photo: Luca Sola/MSF

police and the legal practitioners is almost criminal in its own right.” The inspectorate has recommended the country’s human rights commission probe abuses within the criminal justice system.

This is standard practice, according to Chimwemwe Ndalohomwa, programme leader at the Paralegal Advisory Service Institute, a non-profit that sends trained paralegals to teach, advise and assist prisoners through the country’s criminal justice processes. “People charged with less serious and non-violent offences wait months in prison before being brought back to court when they cannot afford bail,” he said.

The majority of people arrested cannot afford a private lawyer and there are very few legal aid lawyers. There are currently 602 lawyers for Malawi’s population of 19-million, a staggering lawyer to citizen ratio of 1:31,200. Ndalohomwa estimates that more than 90% of people arrested go

through the court process without legal representation.

Masa Chamkalala is director of the Legal Aid Bureau, a government-funded entity that provides free legal services. His department has only 20 lawyers. “This system is in a crisis. We need to do something as soon as yesterday,” he said.

According to Chamkalala, there are close to one-million cases registered with the judiciary whose record keeping he describes as “pathetic.”

“In 2022, you can’t be using pen and paper, no wonder things get lost in the process and people get forgotten,” he said.

Chamkalala also faults the system that does not reprimand public officers for their mistakes. “There are no consequences,” he said. “We have treated our fellow Malawians nonchalantly because we know that there will be no action taken. If the person sues, it is the state that pays.” ■

Ghana

Opportunists move in to exploit past injustices

Accra's Achimota Forest only exists because colonial occupiers took land from indigenous people. But righting that wrong might only benefit modern elites.



Green dream: The Achimota Forest Reserve is a treasured part of Ghana's capital.

Marian Ansah in Accra

Civil society groups in Ghana are up in arms about the government's decision to remove the protected status of parts of a forest in the capital city, Accra.

The Achimota Forest Reserve houses a

zoo, spiritual retreat centres, a school and a botanical garden. It draws some 20,000 visitors and brings in about \$60,000 in revenue each year. For people in Accra, it is also a crucial space to escape their cement surroundings.

But the land was taken from



Payback time?: Achimota Forest was taken by the colonial government of the early 20th century from certain indigenous families.

indigenous people by the colonial “Gold Coast” government, between 1921 and 1927. One family, the Owoo, say they were not properly compensated.

Since 2007, the family has been demanding that its land be returned, arguing that portions are not being used for the purpose for which it was taken from them in the first place but they were still zoned as a park, so could not be used for anything else.

After long-running negotiations between the family and the state, some of the land has been handed back. The government de-gazetted 361 acres of the forest.

In response to the public uproar that followed, the Owoo family released a statement, saying “compensation has not been paid” for the loss of their land in the first place.



Tree's company: Visitors tour the Accra zoo, located inside the Achimota Forest.

While the family says it will “not compromise the ecological integrity of the adjoining forest reserve”, a former lands minister who was part of the earlier negotiations, recently claimed that their plan is to develop the land into a second central business district in Accra.

The current lands minister, Samuel Abu Jinapor, said portions of the de-gazetted land had already been developed. So the decision merely acknowledges what is already a fact on the ground.

But there are more people than the Owoo family who stand to benefit from the de-gazetting.

Campaigners against the decision

have pointed to local elites who have developments that encroach on the Achimota Forest – these illegal developments would now be legal.

This was borne out in the recent will of the former forestry commission’s chief executive, Kwadwo Owusu Afriyie, where six acres of the forest were left to his relatives.

There is also the fact that the Owoo family had negotiated for 118 acres to be de-gazetted, and not the 361 acres that have been de-gazetted.

With more to the forest saga than meets the eye, campaigners are now calling for the decision to be reversed. ■



Wriggle room: There are snakes at the zoo in Achimota Forest. Outside the zoo, too. All photos: Ernest Ankomah/*The Continent*

In 2022, why do we still need to say that human rights are for all?

A football player's apparent stance against LGBTQ+ rights unleashed a torrent of hate, threatening the lives of people who have as much right to life as anyone else, writes **Jama Jack**

Each year on 17 May, the world commemorates the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Intersexphobia, and Transphobia. This celebrates the LGBTQ+ community, and raises much-needed awareness of the violence and harm directed towards them.

In France, football players were encouraged to wear rainbow-coloured numbers on their shirts as a gesture of solidarity.

Senegalese footballer Idrissa Gana Gueye, who plays for French champions Paris Saint-Germain, did not play that day. His coach said he had been excused for “personal reasons”. While he has not spoken out, it has been reported that he did not want to wear the shirt because of his religious beliefs.

His absence was condemned by some. But the hashtags #JeSuisIdrissaGanaGueye and #JeSuisGanaGueye quickly gained traction. As did hate speech towards LGBTQ+ people.

The hashtags in support of Gueye, accusing queer people and their allies of

“heterophobia”, soon spilled over to other online platforms. The issue was picked up by traditional media in Senegal, where conversations regarding homosexuality have always been polarised. The discourse, peppered with Senegalese nationalism and religious bigotry, has been dominated by worrying calls for violence against queer people in a country where state sanctioned violence against gender and sexual minorities already exists.

Senegal's president, Macky Sall, tweeted his support of Gueye, saying “his religious convictions must be supported”.

Sall is the current chair of the African Union.

He was joined in his support by local government officials and academics. These messages help to create a powder keg of mob justice, where people are aware that their actions are now endorsed and protected by those in power.

In Senegal, the voices of LGBTQ+ people were absent. Because of the very real and present danger to their safety, the open expression of their thoughts and



What a shirt show: Paris Saint-Germain footballer Idrissa Gueye of Senegal.

Photo: Tnani Badreddine/Getty Images

concerns makes them targets for attacks, on and offline, with little to no protection from their communities or the state.

And, amid this violence, an important part of the conversation has fallen away: that LGBTQ+ rights are human rights, and that the humanity of queer people is not up for debate.

As has been the case all over the world, with the violent rhetoric gaining momentum there were real threats being issued to attack queer people and those suspected of being gay.

Gueye's reported refusal to wear the shirt and the ascribed reason for it wasn't just a simple act by an ordinary person. It was done by a person of great national and international prominence, especially following Senegal's victory at the African Cup of Nations earlier this year. It was also done in the context of growing co-

ordinated violence and rights violations against LGBTQ+ persons in Senegal and around the world.

The rhetoric and actions of public figures matter. And their words do not simply happen in an echo chamber. They have real world consequences.

The same week Gueye was trending, a young man – reported to be an American visiting the country for the Dakar Biennale – was attacked, and stripped by a mob on suspicion of being gay. Videos of this attack circulated on social media, drawing celebration and commendation for the attackers with commentary including the threat of “corrective rape” – a horrific practice to “cure” or “correct” lesbians' sexual orientation – gaining prominence.

This violence against queer people cannot be reduced to a case of a difference in beliefs. We cannot pick and choose who is deserving of humanity.

Should Idrissa Gana Gueye have worn the jersey? Is he right in refusing to wear the jersey based on his beliefs? These are not the right questions to be asking. What is needed is an examination of the many systems and tools, including social media platforms, that continue to facilitate and encourage the abuse and infringement of the rights of queer people. The conversation we ought to be having is why in 2022, we have to be reminded that human rights are for all. ■

Jama Jack is a communications specialist and feminist storyteller from The Gambia. She is the Content Strategist and English Content Curator at Eyala, a platform by, for and about African Feminists.

North African soccer teams keep winning everything

With seven titles in 10 years, it's fair to say North African teams are the kings of football. What's their recipe – and can the rest of Africa compete?

Amine El Amri

On Monday a brace from Zouheir El Moutaraji fired Wydad Athletic Club to African glory. In defeating Egyptian powerhouse Al Ahly, the Reds added a seventh title to Moroccan football – a third for the Casablanca side.

It is the 34th win for North African clubs in the Confederation of African Football Champions League, the continent's most prestigious club team tournament. The last outside winner came in 2016 with South Africa's Mamelodi Sundowns. It now seems a given that each time the champions league comes to its epilogue, the teams will be from the north. This is the result of several key changes in how football works in North Africa, particularly in countries like Morocco and Egypt: Sporting management is now a very

successful university curriculum. Subjects related to football are also bestsellers in local media. And where ratings are on the rise, advertising and money is often not very far behind. Those funds allow the teams to buy and/or to keep the most talented players, maximising their chance of winning major titles.

This is not happening as well in other regions. Congolese duo TP Mazembe of Lubumbashi and AS Vita Club of Kinshasa are falling further behind in the race for trophies. In the east, football in countries like Tanzania and Uganda is growing as money shifts into local leagues.

But it is in South Africa that the chance of competition against northern dominance is strongest. Their Premier Soccer League might not have what it takes to compete with its Northern counterparts yet, but it has the financial means to follow a similar path, and it won't be too long before we see a South African club in the final again. ■



Northern exposure: Morocco's Wydad AC celebrate after their CAF champions league semifinal win. Photo: AFP

How fair is your media?

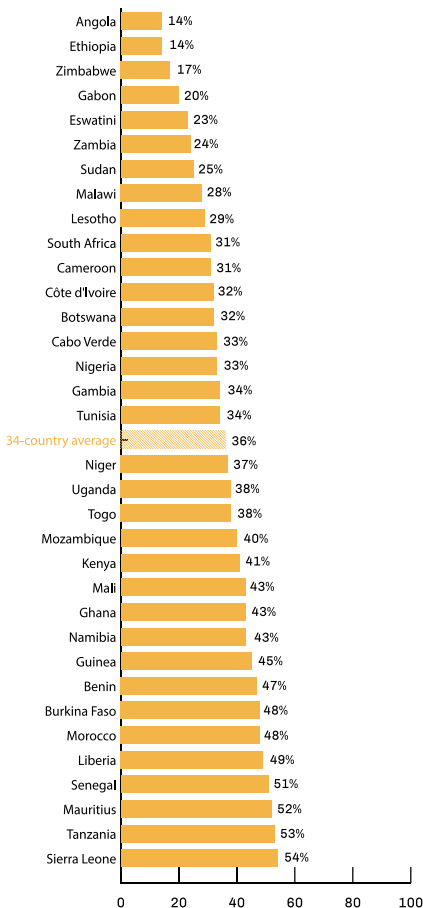
A few weeks ago, we saw that a majority (62%) of Africans want a free media. And across 34 African countries that Afrobarometer surveyed in 2019/2021, six in 10 citizens (60%) said their country's media was in fact "somewhat" or "completely" free to publish without state interference. It was the majority view in 26 countries, though very few Liberians (19%) and Gabonese (22%) agreed.

But if freedom comes with a responsibility to be fair, the media appears to have fallen short: Only 36% of respondents said their country's media provided fair coverage of all candidates in the most recent national election. Sierra Leone (54%), Tanzania (53%), Mauritius (52%), and Senegal (51%) were the only surveyed countries where majorities said coverage was fair. Fewer than one in five citizens agreed in Angola (14%), Ethiopia (14%), and Zimbabwe (17%).

So is the media less fair than free? Maybe in some countries reporting would be fairer if journalists felt freer.

Or would more people demand a free media if it were fairer?

Percentage who say media provided fair coverage in the last election | 34 African countries | 2019/2021



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 +/- two to three percentage points.



Photo: Twitter/AfricaAlbida

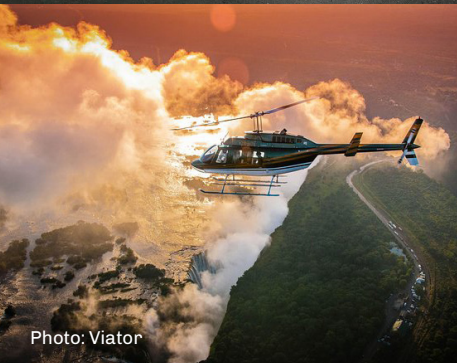


Photo: Viator



Photo: Twitter/AfricaAlbida

Travel

Welcome to Victoria Falls

Known in the local Tonga language as Mosi oa Tunya – the smoke that thunders – Victoria Falls is the most prominent tourist resort in Zimbabwe, offering a majestic view of the falls and various activities to make one's trip memorable.

Ngqwele Dube

Getting around

Victoria Falls is a compact town with very light traffic. Most of the hotels are within walking distance of the central

business district, as is the town's major attraction – the great waterfall itself. Taxis are also available in town at a flat fee of \$5. The journey in from the airport is mainly done by tour operators, but there are taxis that cost \$30.



Photo: The Matetsi

Victoria Falls is known for its wide array of accommodation, ranging from five-star hotels to camping facilities

while Mbumez in the same suburb mainly plays Zimdancehall music, the local spin on reggae and dancehall.

Places to stay

Victoria Falls is known for its wide array of accommodation, ranging from five-star hotels and safari lodges to self-catering guest houses to the Rest Camp, with its camping facilities. Whatever your budget, you'll find a place to stay in Victoria Falls.

The Matetsi (pictured above left), an exclusive riverside lodge located along Kazungula Road, charges between \$800 and \$1,500 per person per night, although the rate usually includes accommodations, meals and activities.

There is also the Victoria Falls River Lodge, the Old Drift Lodge and the Victoria Falls Hotel which are all luxurious and charge from \$500 per person. Self-catering guest houses offer affordable accommodation to people travelling in groups – rates usually range between about \$20 and \$30 per person. At the low-budget Rest Camp one can even find camping facilities for \$10, dorms at \$20 and luxury tents for around \$50. Safari lodges such as Mopani Lodge, Teak Lodge and Pamusha Lodge offer bed and breakfast at \$50 for a single room and \$80 for a double.

Eating out

Hoteliers generally provide a wide range of meals to ensure no palate is neglected. The Boma Diner offers signature traditional dishes while a dance group leads you in playing African drums. The meal costs \$45. Try Lookout Cafe's signature peri-peri quarter chicken for \$25, or The Three Monkeys restaurant's ribs and chips for \$20.

Nightlife

For a distinct taste in beer, the Zambezi Brewery offers craft beer that is brewed at the bar (they also sell other brands). The brewery has draught lagers that start at \$2, and offers live music on selected days, with the entrance fee of \$5. In Mkhosana suburb, you will find Club 42, which plays popular music,



Photo: Guillem Sartorio/AFP

Activities

The town abounds with activities. Viewing the falls themselves is of course top of the list for most visitors, and no matter how many times you watch the waters gush down from a height of 100m, there is always that urge to go back and see it again. A helicopter ride offered by local company Flight of Angels will even take you over the falls, while there are sunset boat cruises along the Zambezi River itself. There is even a crocodile farm, where you can get up close to the giant predators.

Adrenalin junkies can treat themselves to a heart-stopping bungee jump, zipline or bridge swing. Other popular activities are whitewater

rafting and dipping into Devil's Pool, on the edge of the falls. Game drives, including at night, and game walks are also readily available.

Best time of the year and why

The falls are at their most intense between July and October, but in December the Vic Falls Carnival brings a buzz to the town with visitors coming from near and far to enjoy the four-day music fiesta.

Song that represents the town's feel

African Queen by 2Face captures the laid-back, chilled mood that envelopes the town, and the lyrics could well be describing the beauty of Vic Falls. ■



Do you want to show us around your town or city?

Send an email to thecontinent@mg.co.za and we'll be in touch!

THE QUIZ

0-3

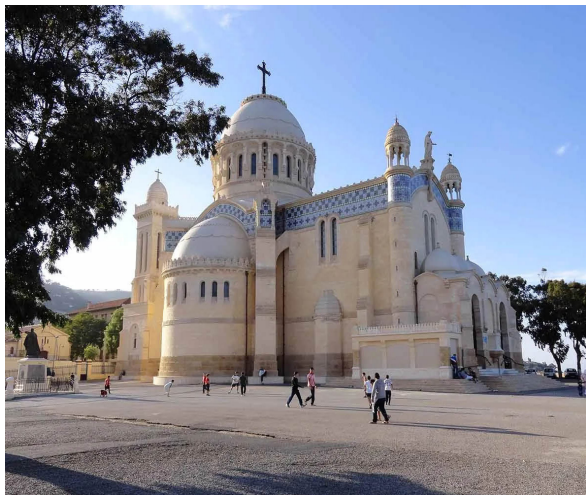
"I think I need to start reading more newspapers."

4-7

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

8-10

"I backed a hunch about Notre Dame. Something about it rang a bell."



- 1_** What is the biggest country in Africa, in terms of land mass?
- 2_** In which country can you visit The Church of Notre Dame of Africa (Basilique La-Dame d'Afrique)?
- 3_** Who used the alias David Motsamayi while hiding from South Africa's apartheid government?
- 4_** Which insect spreads the viral disease dengue fever? (They also spread chikungunya, yellow fever and Zika viruses.)
- 5_** Which country is sports club Al Ahly from?
- 6_** Rwanda is a coastal country. True or false?
- 7_** True or false: Darfur is the capital city of South Sudan.
- 8_** People from Zanzibar are called Zanzibaris. True or false?
- 9_** Which year did Bob Marley perform in Zimbabwe?
- 10_** Amharic is the official language of which country?

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

Nigeria's other jihad: The coming of age of Ansaru

Idris Mohammed

Northwestern Nigerian states struggling against Boko Haram, economic decline and spiralling conflict driven by armed bandits now face a further threat – the Ansaru terrorist group. Ansaru, which is a breakaway faction of Boko Haram that enjoys al-Qaeda backing, is on the rise. Ansaru's focus on winning hearts and minds, and protecting its supporters against banditry, is creating a potent new front in the battle for religious and territorial control.

Ansaru became officially independent in 2012 following a rift between moderates and hardliners within Boko Haram. After keeping a low profile in recent years, it is now making a comeback. According to locals in Katsina State, the latest iteration of Ansaru arrived around June 2020. Although it is unclear exactly which incidents it has taken part in, the group is suspected of involvement in a recent attack on the Kaduna-Abuja train, in which seven passengers were killed and many more were abducted.

Although there are concerns that jihadist groups and armed bandits will join forces, it is the willingness of Ansaru to take on some bandits and restore a degree of order that has enabled it to gain popularity and prosper. This

fits with Ansaru's "hearts and minds" campaign, which is designed to win over communities by providing food, clothing and money.

One resident lamented that young people are joining Ansaru in their hundreds because they appreciate its efforts to establish order and its commitment to build a true Islamic state that would bring development and dignity.

In turn, the growing popularity of Ansaru has enabled its leaders to appoint commanders in a growing number of areas. Meanwhile, stronger ties with communities mean Ansaru has the potential to establish deep roots.

Halting the rise of Ansaru will require more than just strengthening the security forces. The group is growing because it is filling the vacuum left by a failing state that has ceased to deliver services and security for its people. Only the restoration of an effective and legitimate government will sustain civilian and democratic rule. ■

Idris Mohammed is a journalist and researcher, and a member of the



United States Institute of Peace Network of Nigerian Facilitators. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa

The Big Picture

Photo: Luis Tato/AFP

Digging it: Elizabeth Masanja takes a break from gathering stones containing grains of gold in Geita, Tanzania. Historically, women have been excluded from artisanal mining here, facing harassment and assault if they try to get involved. But women-only mining groups are changing the landscape. There are approximately 1-million artisanal and small-scale miners in the country, of which 25% are women.



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