

# The Continent

with Mail & Guardian

## The human cost of the beautiful game

*Exploited in Qatar for  
the World Cup*



Photo: Tom Stoddart/Getty Images

# Inside:

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**Cover:** Billions have been spent so that very wealthy footballers can compete in this year's World Cup (and help improve Qatar's reputation). But the people building those stadiums are often abused and poorly paid. Among them are many African workers, who can't count on their own countries for support when things go wrong. Even if they die (p14)



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## NIGERIA

### Deadly floods have displaced tens of thousands of people

President Muhammadu Buhari's office this week said that flooding across the country has displaced 73,379 people, this year, killed 115 and injured 277 more. Severe flooding was reported in 23 of the country's 36 states, and it affected more than 508,000 people. As the global climate changes, Nigeria – whose territory touches the Atlantic Ocean and stretches towards the Sahel – is likely to suffer disproportionately from excessive flooding brought on by rising sea levels and accelerated desertification in the north.

## CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

### Crypto e-residency scheme ruled unconstitutional

No, you can't buy citizenship, "e-residency" or land in the Central Africa Republic using Sango Coin, their national cryptocurrency. A top court in the country ruled this week that the government's plan to give citizenship to foreigners who buy \$60,000 worth of crypto is unconstitutional. The scheme also offered a 250m<sup>2</sup> plot of land for \$10,000 and e-residency for \$6,000. In April, the country became the first African country to adopt Bitcoin as its official currency and then launched Sango Coin as its local cryptocurrency.

## ZAMBIA

## IMF comes through with massive bailout

This week Zambia finally won approval from the International Monetary Fund for the massive, game-changing loan it has been seeking. The 38-month, \$1.3-billion loan, is expected to be used to consolidate its other national debts, and for some social welfare spending to cushion citizens as it implements stringent measures to reduce inflation and improve its economy over the long term. The IMF decision will unlock an immediate disbursement of about \$185-million.

## MALAWI

## Make way... or serve time

A former member of the country's electoral commission has been sentenced to 18 months in prison for obstructing a presidential motorcade. In 2019, Linda Kunje's vehicle did not stop for Lazarus Chakwera's motorcade. Chakwera had just been elected president in an election that she had helped oversee. Her driver will serve 15 months. In 2018 an ambulance driver was tried on similar charges but ultimately walked free after a fierce public outcry.

Photo: ticad8.tn



## JAPAN

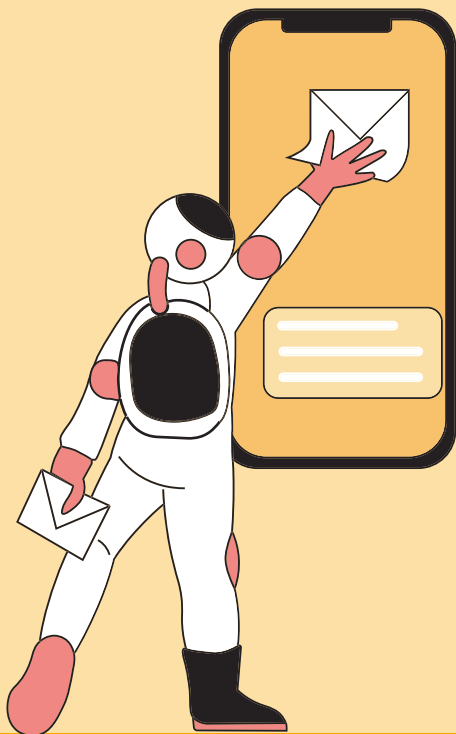
## 'Africa deserves to be on the UN security council permanently'

Japan will support the bid for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council for African countries

to "redress the historical injustice" of excluding the continent, the country's prime minister said at a recent conference on African development held in Tokyo. Japan will push for the permanent seat and other reforms of the council when it takes up a non-permanent seat on the council in 2023 and 2024, Fumio Kishida promised. He also pledged \$30-billion in Japanese aid to African nations.

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**Stay: President João Lourenço casts his vote.** Photo: Twitter/MPLAoficial

## ANGOLA

### The revolutionaries live another day

The party which has held power in Angola since the country's independence, MPLA, narrowly won another term with 51.2% of the vote. Unita, the main opposition party which also fought an anti-communist civil war between 1975 and 2002, got 44% of the vote, a sharp rise from 27% in the 2017 election. It is contesting the result. At its founding, the MPLA branded itself a communist party but its rule of Angola has been criticised as being primarily kleptocratic.

## KENYA

### The Ruto vs Raila saga is not over yet

Legal arguments challenging the recent presidential elections in Kenya's Supreme Court ended this week and the court will deliver its ruling on Monday. In the meantime, the court has ordered a recount of ballots cast at 15 polling stations. William Ruto was declared winner with about 100,000 more votes than Raila Odinga. Should the judges annul the entire election, a new one would have to take place within 60 days. In 2017 the court annulled the election – the first election annulment in Africa.

## MALI

### Militants lift their blockade of Boni

Residents of Boni, a village in south-central Mali, will be able to come and go for the first time in three months, after militants agreed to lift a blockade they put them under, on accusations that they collaborated with Malian national security forces. *Le Malien* newspaper reported this week that after talks with leaders and youth in the village and its neighbours, the militants have agreed to demine the roads connecting it to the rest of Douentza, the administrative subdivision it is part of.



# South Africa



**Unwelcome: No drilling without consultation.** Photo: Shell

## Choosing the ocean over oil

**Shell has lost a court case that challenged and has now blocked its plans to disturb the seabed off South Africa's Wild Coast in search of oil**

**O**n Thursday, a South African court set aside the government's decision to allow petrochemical giant Shell to trawl for oil and gas off the country's ecologically sensitive Wild Coast.

The decision, made during Africa Climate Week, is the culmination of months-long legal battle between activists and communities, and Shell, which in April last year docked a ship in Cape

Town ready to start conducting seismic surveys offshore. Thousands of protesters later gathered at a Cape Town harbour to "unwelcome" the ship.

In 2014, South Africa's energy ministry had granted an oil exploration licence to Impact Africa which later transferred it to Shell. The licence was renewed in 2017 and again in 2021.

In the court case, Wild Coast communities argued that they were not consulted during the process that granted and then renewed this licence. The court ruled in their favour, finding that information on the proposed project was shared in exclusive spaces like newspapers and online forums, and only in English and Afrikaans, meaning that the isiXhosa-speaking rural communities of the Wild Coast did not have access to it.

The ruling was celebrated by environmentalists who say new oil projects fly in the face of global efforts to switch to renewable energy sources and that Shell's seismic surveys – involving firing sonic airguns into the ocean floor – harm marine life.

Human rights defenders feared oil drilling would disrupt the cultural, spiritual and economic lives of the Wild Coast communities in much the same way that Shell's activities in Nigeria harmed the lives of both people and marine life in the Niger Delta by polluting it. ■

# Health

## Monkeypox puts Africa at the back of a brand new queue

**Logistics, not hesitancy, is still the biggest challenge in Covid-19 vaccine rollouts as vaccine inequality reappears in global monkeypox response**

**Laura López González**

**C**ovid-19 treatments and rapid testing are still not available in many African countries as vaccination campaigns struggle, suggests a recent report released by the People's Vaccine Alliance and think tank Matahari Global Solutions.

African countries battled to access vaccines as rich nations hoarded supplies for much of that pandemic. Today, just under a quarter of Africans have been fully vaccinated against Covid-19, according to Our World in Data. In countries that secured early vaccine stocks, vaccination rates are almost three times that.

New research by Matahari Global Solutions reviewed Covid-19 responses in seven African countries. The group found some still struggling to conduct rural vaccinations.

In the DRC, healthcare workers leading efforts were underpaid or not paid at all. Almost all countries lacked sufficient Covid-19 rapid tests and newer treatments. Healthcare workers in

Madagascar and Nigeria did not know about the antiviral medication Paxlovid. In high-risk patients, Paxlovid reduced the risk of hospitalisation and death by about 89%, according to a February study in the *New England Medical Journal*.

Vaccine inequality is repeating as the world battles a monkeypox virus outbreak. Monkeypox is rarely lethal but causes painful rashes and sores — although emerging evidence suggests the range of symptoms may be growing.

The virus is spread through contact with sores, infected material such as bedding or by breathing in droplets of saliva exhaled from an infected person. These droplets are large and require close face-to-face contact, unlike Sars-CoV-2. The outbreak is thought to be driven by skin-to-skin contact during sex.

As of 24 August, African countries had reported about 3,500 cases this year and 105 deaths. In late July, the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention reported Africa had no vaccines to prevent monkeypox, and testing was limited. ■





Photo: Ernest Ankamah

# Accra loses its planetarium

**African kids deserve to get into advanced sciences like astronomy or robotics but official curricula often fail to teach even the basics and extra-curricular Stem champions need deep pockets to close the gaps**

**Delali Adogla-Bessa in Accra and Lydia Namubiru in Kampala**

**D**r Jacob Ashong whips out his phone and points to an old picture of him with the late renowned Ghanaian mathematician Professor Francis Allotey. “I know how to find the next Allotey,” declares the retired scientist, who runs Ghana’s only planetarium.

The planetarium, which Ashong and his wife started with their pensions, is meant to pull in curious children with the wonder of exploring space and grow their interest in science, mathematics, engineering and technology (Stem). And then – who knows – maybe Ashong would find his next Allotey among them.

It was a great idea, many agreed.

Betty Buah, the Stem co-ordinator in the Greater Accra region, often stopped by on her way to work to nudge the



children, especially the girls, towards careers in astronomy. “Space science is for every country, not just Nasa [in the US],” says Buah. “Giving children the opportunity to observe things in space using the planetarium is a very good way to get them interested.”

Odenho Agyeman-Duah, a 17-year-old who aspires to a career in chemical engineering, has visited the planetarium consistently since childhood and started volunteering there. “This is an important

**Beyond fun and games: Ugandan children in the FundiBots program go from observing simple robots to engaging in science experiments.** Photos: FundiBots

institution and it should have a place for growth here,” he says.

But that’s the problem – it quite literally does not have a place. The planetarium, which has occupied rented space since it opened in 2008, was given an eviction notice at the beginning of July after the

building owners sold the property. It will only remain open to the public for the next two weeks.

If Ashong has a solid plan for a pivot following the shock of eviction, he is keeping it close to his chest. The planetarium has been struggling for funds since 2016 when its partnership with the University of Leicester ended.

Bumps on the road to Stem in Africa are just as familiar to another group of dreamers on the other side of the continent, 5,200km from Accra. FundiBots, in Kampala, Uganda started in 2011 as a passion project by Solomon King who wanted to get Ugandan children excited about robotics.

King initially went to schools, at the invitation of science teachers, showing off robots he had built. The non-profit later started offering holiday and extra-curricular classes for children whose parents or schools could pay for it. To include children from the least privileged

backgrounds they sought donor funding and started free sessions in public schools.

But then it dawned on them that the learners were not engaging with robotics beyond “fun and wow” as Stacy Asimwe, the company’s programmes co-ordinator put it. “To teach children robotics, they have to know basic science” she explains, but learners across the school system, from primary school to university, hardly knew any science because the Stem subjects in the official curriculum were being ineffectively taught by rote and cramming.

FundiBots has since pivoted to the basics – making and distributing aids for teaching basic science. They are sometimes simple robots like a light wooden car being moved by magnets. But often they are simpler fabrications like plastic models of the human skeleton.

“This is our big bet now. To disrupt science education in Africa,” says Asimwe. ■



**Dream big: The FundiBots project aims to get kids in Uganda, especially those from less privileged backgrounds, excited about science and technology.** Photo: FundiBots





# Cold shoulder for mining if Chile warms to reforms?

**Chileans will vote yes or no to a new Constitution on Sunday. It would guarantee rights to nature, and requires more community involvement in big decisions. That could mean big changes to the country's most profitable industry – mining**

**Muriel Alarcón Luco in Santiago**

**T**he draft version of Chile's new Constitution is the best-selling non-fiction book in the country. Its 388 articles are offered for just under \$5 in kiosks and bookstore windows. Shoppers can purchase copies for half that price from street vendors. A few days ago, the government opened a kiosk facing the presidential palace to offer free copies.

As government spokesperson Camila Vallejo autographed copies, she called this a "historic moment".

Chile's current Constitution dates back to the 1980s and the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. It has been criticised for putting the rights of companies ahead of those of people. After mass protests in 2019, where people demanded a new Constitution, a panel of 154 drafters were

given a year to come up with a new guiding document.

It drops at the start of the presidency of Gabriel Boric, a left-wing leader and the youngest in Chile's history.

The draft proposes structural changes in the model of governing and in the different powers of the state. By redefining the country as plurinational (with all ethnicities as equal), it opens up channels of indigenous consultation, gives territorial autonomy to the regions and recognises nature's rights. Minerals cannot be mined in glaciers and protected areas. They can be used "based on their finite, non-renewable, public interest, intergenerational nature and environmental protection."

These are unprecedented achievements of the "eco-constituyentes," a group among its drafters made up of environmental activists, who pushed for big changes.

Despite the draft being watered down – it doesn't nationalise resources – the new regulatory frame would put pressure on the exploitation of fundamental resources for the national economy and global development. Chile produces a quarter of the world's copper and has one of the largest lithium reserves in the world. These resources are critical for the production of electric vehicles, solar panels and wind turbines – all a key part of a shift away from the fossil fuels that heat the atmosphere and drive climate breakdown.

But do the changes in the draft Constitution mean less mining for the country? "Not necessarily," according to one of the architects of this Constitution, Juan José Martín, the co-ordinator of the Convention's Environment and Economic

Model Commission, and a very active environmental activist. While mining isn't against the Constitution, its spirit is that mineral exploitation "should help the country to become a better one".

Part of this is a desire to diversify the Chilean economy, which currently relies on mineral exports. Martín says this will allow the country "to move forward without its economy collapsing" if, for example, an alternative is found to copper.

### **The new regulatory frame would put pressure on the exploitation of fundamental resources**

The guidance that the Constitution provides still needs to be enacted. That means laws will have to be passed (if the referendum returns a yes majority) that decide how mining can happen. María Luisa Baltra, Professor of Mining Law at Universidad Católica de Chile, says this means a great deal of doubt in the mining sector: "It could completely change the system, and that implies legal uncertainty." The regional autonomy built into the draft Constitution also means different regions could legislate in different ways.

Baltra adds: "We have to take care of the environment but, sometimes, to take care of it we also need mining resources, for example, lithium, for the purposes of electromobility, to face climate change."

Rodrigo Álvarez, who was also involved in the drafting of the new Constitution and is now campaigning to reject it, says the draft is confusing and that "the only thing that could grow is the legal discussion". ■

# Qatar



Foul: Business is booming in Qatar, but so is exploitation. Photo: Sean Gallup/Getty Images

## Slaving for the beautiful game

**To deliver November's football world cup, Qatar needed a huge number of workers to build billion-dollar stadiums in the desert. And to welcome tourists. Many of those workers came from African countries. Some tell *The Continent* that they were abused, poorly paid and abandoned by their own countries when things went wrong.**

**Jack McBrams**

**Q**atar is not a football powerhouse. The first Arab country to host a world cup can do so because it has vast wealth, the ambition to build 60,000-seater stadiums in the desert, and a pool of workers from

poorer countries that could be imported to do the work.

The human cost of that was made clear in a report by the Equidem and Global Labour Justice-International Labour Rights Forum. "We work like robots. Discrimination and Exploitation of





**Not just us: Nepali workers rest on thin mattresses in a labour camp in Doha. Workers from developing countries risk exploitation and abuse in the region, studies say. Photo: Corbis/Getty Images**

Migrant Workers in Fifa World Cup Qatar 2022 Hotels” was published last month. It alleges discrimination and exploitation of migrant workers in Fifa World Cup Qatar 2022 hotels, between February 2020 and July 2022.

Women and men from Africa and Asia working at the hotels describe to researchers a raft of violations including sexual harassment, nationality and gender-based discrimination, wage theft, health and safety risks, sudden loss of employment, and illegal recruitment.

Speaking to *The Continent*, Malawian national Wanthaza Mughogho says he witnessed, first hand, the abuse and labour malpractices documented in the report.

He says in February 2020 he resigned from the hotel where he worked to join another company, and asked it to transfer his visa to his new employer, or give him a National Occupational Classification.

Instead, they cancelled his visa. “I had 30 days to leave the country.”

But then Covid-19 came and Qatar’s airports were closed. He couldn’t leave.

This didn’t stop his previous employer reporting him to the government’s “search and follow-up” immigration unit. He didn’t know this and, once the airports re-opened, he bought a return ticket to Malawi so he could get a new visa for his new job.

He was arrested at the airport and spent two nights in a detention centre. To leave, he had to accept deportation and a five-year ban.

Mughogho says that in the detention centre, he met a lot of other Africans and Asians who had been detained and were waiting for their deportations.

“Their stories were similar,” he says and explains the one way workers are abused in Qatar: First, people are promised lucrative jobs in the country by recruitment agencies. On arrival, their passports are taken away from them and then their salaries are drastically reduced. They cannot change jobs. And if they run away to find better paying work, they are reported to immigration, arrested and put in a detention centre.

He adds that: “Some have been there for weeks and some for months.”

Malawi's minister of labour, Vera Kamtukule, told *The Continent* that reading through the report broke her heart and that while her government could not stop labour migration, it should work to ensure that it happens within the law. “The ideal situation for us is that we should have a bilateral agreement that is signed between ourselves and the countries where the people go to work.”

In the case of Qatar, she said there was no bilateral agreement in place between the two as Qatar was previously not a destination for Malawian labourers. “We are pursuing it. And with the World Cup preparations under way, we want to pursue this agreement.”

Mpilo Nkomo, the country director for the International Organisation for Migration in Malawi, explained that in the absence of bilateral labour agreements it is difficult for Qatar authorities to enforce compliance on migrant workers protection in line with what their home country considers acceptable. “It might even take a long time to appreciate the abuses,” he said.

On their part, the Qatari government says it has done more than any other country in the region to improve workers' rights. Aamer Elsayed Hassan, an official from the Qatari ministry of information, said that in accordance with international standards, new laws had been introduced to prevent abuse and exploitation in the labour market and, as a result, “the number of offences has declined year-on-year”.



**Boy-Qatar: Freiburg supporters call for boycott of the FIFA World Cup in Qatar.**

Photo: Matthias Hangst/Getty Images

He added that Qatari labour inspectors now have the capacity to do “thousands of inspections” and improvements in its wage protection system now protect 96% of eligible workers. “The reality is that no other country has come so far so quickly,” he said, reiterating Qatar’s assertion that systemic reform does not happen overnight and shifting the behaviour of every company takes time.

FIFA told *The Continent* that it “does not accept any abuse of workers by companies involved in the preparation and delivery” of the World Cup. It was implementing “unprecedented due diligence” to protect workers. And has “actively pushed for the implementation of broader labour reforms that apply to all companies and projects across the country and benefit all workers in Qatar.”

The experience in Qatar is not unique to African nationals, and it plays out across the region: if things go wrong, foreign workers tend to find little support available from their home countries. ■

# Without consular services, Ugandans are left to die

**Many Africans are in the Middle East, doing precarious, exploitative and harmful low-wage work. But they get little support when things go wrong.**

**Lydia Namubiru**

**I**n mid 2021, Abdallah Walugembe received a Facebook message from a Ugandan woman who said his sister, Sadia Najjuuko, had been abandoned while ill at an airport in the Middle East with an air ticket to Uganda.

Walugembe went to Entebbe airport in time for the arrival of Najjuuko's plane but she never showed up. The messenger later told him that she was too unwell to board so she left her with the airport police.

He spent the next week running between the ministries of labour and foreign affairs, trying to get help to trace her. Then, in the wee hours of one morning, he received a video via WhatsApp. "We are at deportation. One of us has died. We had to break into their room to get the fellow Ugandan who is dead," a woman said. The video then pans to show Najjuuko's body on the floor.

Walugembe teamed up with Abdallah Kayonde, a unionist who campaigns for migrant workers rights, to try to get the Uganda government to find and repatriate her body. They threatened to sue, incessantly called the two ministries,

and gave media interviews. It seemed like no one knew how to help. Last November, an official at the labour ministry told Walugembe in a recorded call that he was handling three cases. But not this one. "Don't accuse me of anything," he said. "If you want to go to court, you can go ahead. I don't own this government."

Najjuuko's family never got her body back and don't know where she is buried.

## **Najjuuko's family never got her body back and don't know where she is buried.**

There are 140,000 Ugandans living and working in Saudi Arabia. Their embassy has one consular officer to help them. And that appointment took five years from when the countries entered bilateral agreements, allowing hundreds of agencies from the gulf states to recruit low wage Ugandan workers.

Things are not that much different in neighbouring Kenya. It has some 97,000 citizens working in Saudi Arabia, 89 of whom died in the kingdom between 2019 and 2021. They have one embassy to turn to, which also serves Iraq and Kuwait. ■

# Ethiopia

## The endless, deadly wait for healthcare

**The tentative ceasefire in Ethiopia's Tigray region ended in bloodshed last week. For those without access to medicine, it means even more suffering with an overwhelmed health system.**

**Liban Mahamad**

**B**ereket Tumay Redae is just over two years old and lives in Mekelle, in the northern Tigray region.

He was admitted to Ayder Hospital more than five months ago with visceral leishmaniasis, a potentially fatal disease transmitted by sandflies, which can be survived if treated. But, according to his doctors, Redae is now helplessly sick.

The right medicine to treat his condition is not available in the region, thanks to a blockade by the Ethiopian government, in place since last June, after Tigrayan forces recaptured the capital Mekelle and government forces withdrew.

Redae's parents died in the war. His grandmother says they were killed by government forces. And he is not alone.

Fasika Amdeslesie, a surgeon at the biggest hospital in the capital, says the last delivery of medicines for conditions like Redae's was last May. Without those

medicines, "hundreds of children" with conditions like childhood cancer will die, he says. "Children came to our hospital and they were sent away with nothing, to die at home."

The tentative ceasefire in what the central government calls a "law enforcement operation" didn't mean more medicine. But it did mean a supply of food – at first, anyway.

That ended last month when fighting escalated on the border between the Amhara and Tigray regions. Then, on 26 August, an airstrike hit Makelle. Health officials say at least seven people, including two children, died. Kibrom Gebreselassie, the director of Ayder hospital in Mekelle, says a 17-year-old boy was brought to their hospital. "His heart was blown out. Instant death for the kid."

A spokesman for the Ethiopian government denied killing civilians.

Alongside the lack of medicine, doctors are also not receiving their



**Horror: A child in Dubti, Ethiopia recovers from a hand amputation after being hurt in a grenade blast near the Tigray border.**  
Photo: AFP

salaries. Gebreselassie runs the largest hospital in the region and says it's routine for him to only eat once a day.

Despite the resumption of fighting, little information is available about the situation on the ground. *The Continent* has previously reported on how much work the Ethiopian government is putting into controlling the flow of information, through social media campaigns, bots and by kicking out voices that disagree with its narrative of the war. Even the word “war” is unacceptable to the state.

The lack of communication means many Ethiopians do not know the fate of their families in and around the regions where fighting has happened since November 2020.

Temesgen Kahsay, an academic in Oslo, tells *The Continent* that in order for him to call his 75-year-old mother, she had to travel from her hometown in Tigray to another town near the border with the Amhara region. “Once she arrived there, she called my brother, who

lives in another part of Ethiopia, then he contacted me to call her.” And even this tenuous method has failed – he has not spoken to his mother since last June.

Since then, the war has turned into a stalemate. Thanks in part to its purchase of drones, the central government was able to stop a Tigrayan advance on Addis Ababa late last year.

It then turned to severely restricting humanitarian aid, including food, medicine, and fuel, from entering Tigray, in violation of international law, according to Amnesty International.

The state also denies this.

The blockade has plunged the region into a severe humanitarian crisis that is being exacerbated by a regional drought. Some 90% of the region's 5.5-million people need aid, according to the United Nations.

Tens of thousands have been killed, with millions displaced and numerous atrocities have been documented as committed by both sides. ■

## Who needs to act on climate change? Answer: Who doesn't?

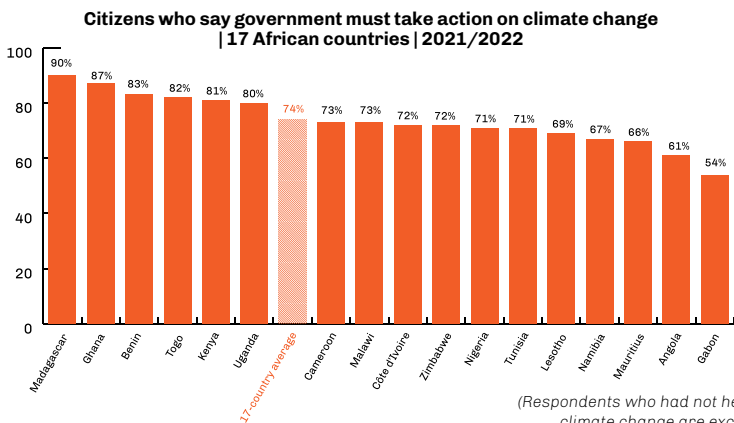
**T**he United Nations 2022 Climate Change Conference (COP27) in Egypt in November will bring together more than 35,000 political leaders, scientists, financial experts, and activists in pursuit of “concerted action” against the existential threat of climate change.

Afrobarometer surveys in 17 African countries show that among respondents who have heard of climate change, large majorities want more action on climate change than they’ve seen so far from their governments (93%), from business and industry (92%), from developed countries (88%), and even from ordinary citizens

like themselves (86%). A third (33%) of all citizens think their governments are doing a good job of addressing climate change, while 52% rate their performance as poor.

Africans take the problem so seriously that 74% of those familiar with climate change “agree” or “strongly agree” that “it is important for our government to take steps now to limit climate change in the future, even if it is expensive or causes some job losses or other harm to our economy.”

This amounts to a remarkable citizens’ call to action for their representatives and leaders at COP27: a demand for greater engagement, by all stakeholders, now.



**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.



# Climate

## **Africa will demand justice (and money) at the next UN climate conference**

**National leaders and climate activists met in Libreville this week to caucus with each other on a unified Africa**

### **Francis Kokutse in Libreville**

**T**his week's Africa Climate Week in Libreville, Gabon, has set the tone for the continent's participation in the next UN climate conference (COP27) which Egypt will host in November. The continent will be demanding climate justice, especially in the form of cash from big polluters to pay for the damage its communities will suffer, despite contributing very little to climate change.

Ali Bongo Ondimba, Gabon's president, reminded the over 1,000 people gathered for Africa Climate Week that rising sea levels due to climate change are threatening megacities like Dakar in Senegal, Lagos in Nigeria, Cape Town in South Africa and Libreville. He also noted that "today, 22-million people in the Horn of Africa face starvation because of climate induced drought and famine" and "countries in the south of the continent are regularly hit by deadly cyclones".

The week is where African countries

come together in an attempt to hash out unified positions on all manner of issues. These range from how the continent uses its gas reserves, to protecting forests and pushing back against the agendas of big polluters. In Libreville this meant days of intensive sessions, and countless meetings between officials outside of the formal agenda – in informal spaces where real change happens.

The face-to-face meetings also helped to rebuild relationships after the distance required by Covid-19.

Egypt's foreign minister, Sameh Shoukry, said that Africa will have to spend 2-3% of its GDP to deal with the impacts of climate change. That's an expense that he called "a disproportionate responsibility that cannot be described as anything other than climate injustice".

Africa as a whole contributes less than 4% of all global emissions.

Shoukry promised that when his country hosts COP27, "we will spare no effort to assist parties in engaging in a

frank, constructive and dynamic dialogue that addresses loss and damage, including the central issue of new and additional finance.”

Ondimba noted that past attempts to combat climate change have often been overtaken by “sovereign interests”. This has been true on the continent too. African delegates at COP have often failed to represent a united front and common demands, with countries like the petrostate of Nigeria and South Africa, whose economy is powered with coal, pursuing different priorities and allies from the rest of the continent.

As a result, key demands – such as the one that rich countries pay for their pollution – do not land with the power that they could.

### **What climate justice money can do**

Ondimba made the case for copying and funding Gabon’s example on combating climate change. The country is an oil producer, putting out about 198,000 barrels of oil a day. Nonetheless, he noted, it is “now considered the most carbon-positive country in the world.”

This is in large part thanks to the natural Congo basin forest ecosystem which covers about 22-million hectares in the country. The second-largest forest ecosystem in the world after the Amazon, it spans five other countries. Ondimba pointed out that his country took ambitious measures to drastically reduce the impact of loggers on its forest cover.

Gabon, which is the fifth richest country on the continent in GDP terms, set up a forest observatory which uses



**Toxic ruin: Pollution in Bargny, Senegal, has destroyed marine life and fishing communities. Photo: AFP**

satellite imagery to identify illegal logging and intercept the loggers. Last year, it reportedly lost only 0.1% of its forest cover. Other countries in the Congo basin, like the DRC, struggle with funding to do that sort of surveillance and conservation.

Ondimba said that since the Copenhagen climate conference in 2009, Gabon has absorbed more than a billion net tons of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and could absorb more than 100-million net tons of carbon dioxide each year. But to do that it needs rich countries to help pay to keep the forests safe.

Climate negotiations have settled on this as one solution to the climate crisis, where polluters offset their pollution by keeping pollution from happening in other parts of the world. In Gabon, that means keeping trees in the ground.

Other regions like Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Middle East and North Africa, also held climate week for countries to caucus with each other ahead of COP27. ■

# Egypt

## Is an 'African perspective' on climate change useful?

**The UN's climate meeting returns to Africa. Some activists believe unity is useful, others say nuance is needed. Few think the polluting West even cares**

**Charles Ebikeme**

**T**he United Nations' climate change conferences (COP) are into their 27th edition. This year, they'll be held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. As usual, the fight will be between wealthy countries who have polluted and driven runaway climate change, and the rest of the world, which is suffering the damage of that.

African delegates were left frustrated by the negotiations in Glasgow, Scotland last year. For a decade, they have pushed for countries like the United States to pay the \$100-billion a year that has been promised to help countries adapt to climate change. That one country is responsible for a fifth of carbon emissions. Africa as a whole is responsible for 4%.

Some African activists fear that this year will bring more of the same frustrations. "I'm very interested to see how that's going to pan out," said Heizal Nagginda, a Ugandan youth climate activist. "COP is so Western, if I'm being honest. Nothing really happens at COPs."

Moses Mulindwa, another Ugandan activist, said that while the negotiations do produce solutions, they "are very slow and made by people not experiencing what is happening on the ground".

Forcing change requires powerful negotiating blocks, such as that of the European Union, which reinforces the demands of its members. One of Africa's problems is that regional powers – like Egypt, Ethiopia, Nigeria and South Africa – have not always been on the same page.

So the "African perspective" on climate change tends to differ depending on whether the delegate is representing South Africa, whose economy is powered with coal, the petrostate of Nigeria, or a country in the Sahel which is seeing the most dramatic climate change impacts.

But according to Michelle Mhaka, a Zimbabwean and South African activist, a "whole of Africa" position can't be done by finding "one African voice that sort of speaks to everybody" but rather by having many voices, creating a more nuanced response to the climate crisis. ■



Low blow: A record number did not bother voting. Photo: Twitter/IEBCKenya

## Kenyan elections: From terror to disinterest

**This election, perhaps more than most, has demonstrated that attempts to sweep the legacy of corruption and violence under the rug of a fair election, have always led to grief.**

**Patrick Gathara**

**K**enya's boring presidential election has become very interesting. It was initially acclaimed as one of the most transparent in the history of the country, and perhaps the region.

The outcome was meant to be available to anyone with an internet account, and the patience to wade through and tally over 46,000 results forms posted online by officials at polling stations.

However, electoral maths has never been the country's forte.

There were early signs of trouble

when, just a few days after the vote, the slow and methodical independent media tallies disappeared from TV screens. Talk turned to their systems being hacked and fake results forms being uploaded to the website of the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC).

By the time the chair of the Commission, Wafula Chebukati, announced Deputy President William Ruto as the president-elect, amid chaotic scenes at the National Tallying Centre in the capital, and with a majority of his fellow commissioners rejecting the outcome, the election was looking less

like the pristine and open exercise he had promised, and more like the sort of controversy-packed poll Kenyans have become used to.

Two weeks later, the air is thick with allegations of secret meetings, interference by government officials, hacking of IEBC systems, offers of bribes to change the result and long-running controversies within the IEBC itself.

Regardless of the Supreme Court's impending ruling this coming week, these controversies have dented faith in Kenya's ability to overcome its past.

A clean and fair fight for power was always going to be a big ask for a country that has assiduously avoided dealing with the contradictions and injustices bequeathed it by history. Contestations for power have always brought out the worst in its politicians, while paradoxically engendering hope and optimism for change in those they wish to govern.

What really matters is not whether the IEBC chair's announcement reflects the truth of how 14.5-million Kenyans voted.

Far more significant is the 71% of the population who were either too young to vote or too disgusted by the political process to bother.

Even before the election, the evidence was overwhelming that most Kenyans do not believe that the political system reflects their values, wishes and aspirations. Of an expected 10-million newly eligible voters, only a quarter elected to register to do so. And, at 65%, this election produced the lowest turnout for a first-round election in 30 years, with the exception of the 2002 elections.

In a short decade, Kenyans have transitioned from a terror of presidential elections to a disinterest in them. Important reforms have reduced much of the risk of violence but have done little to cultivate the people's faith in the political system.

### **Regardless of the Supreme Court's impending ruling this coming week, these controversies have dented faith in Kenya's ability to overcome its past**

I have previously argued that what Kenya needed were systems that mitigated against the tendency of our politicians to cheat their way into power. And I was beguiled by the promise of transparency that technology held. However, fool-proof systems for identifying genuine voters and transmitting genuine results, while important, will not easily overcome generations of mistrust.

A good basis for such an exploration can be found in the forgotten 2013 report of the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission which details the history of anguish that the political class has visited on the population.

It is, unfortunately, a report that president-elect Ruto has previously said he would not implement because it would, in his estimation, reopen old wounds.

But given that it is the ghosts of our past that continue to haunt our present, it is important that we excavate that past and finally put it to rest. ■

# Zimbabwe

## LGBTIQ community on its own when it comes to HIV

**Driven underground by homophobia, LGBTIQ Zimbabweans educate each other about HIV and its prevention in secret meetings**

**Jeffrey Moyo in Harare**

**I**n secret gay bars, inside gym clubs and at clandestine parties, gay and lesbian people in Zimbabwe say they are exchanging notes on ways to combat HIV and Aids among themselves.

“If it were not for the secret meetings we hold at our own initiative as gays and lesbians, I would have died particularly due to stress because I contracted HIV when I was raped in 2011,” a 27-year-old gay woman told *The Continent*. She said her girlfriend was also HIV positive and together they visited government healthcare centres for free treatment but have been careful to never disclose their relationship to the health workers there.

Same-sex relationships are illegal in Zimbabwe. Medical advice is shared through whisper networks and secret meetings. But the information that underpins that advice – like someone’s HIV status – can only be obtained with proper access to medical services like testing.

A 41-year-old gay man who lives with his partner in Harare said he started self-prescribing pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) even though, as far as he knows, his partner is HIV-negative, like him. Their last HIV tests were six years ago.

“I know I’m negative but I’m not sure if my partner is still negative as well. Often we take PrEP,” he said.

PrEP is medicine for people at high risk of contracting HIV. It’s typically prescribed for people who are sexually active, without consistent condom use, with a partner who has HIV – especially if the partner’s viral load is undetectable or unknown.

PrEP is also prescribed for women with HIV who are, or intend to get, pregnant – to prevent transmission of the virus to their newborns. In Harare, afraid to reveal their sexuality to doctors and consult with them on what precautions are suitable for them, some lesbians are self-prescribing PrEP just to be safe. A 28-year-old lesbian who does not have HIV but feels she is at risk, said she is taking PrEP daily.





**Poles apart: Same-sex relationships are illegal in Zimbabwe, so LGBTIQ people do not have access to appropriate medical advice and treatment .** Photo: galzlgbtzim

Chester Samba of the rights group Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe said his non-profit is working hard to ensure that the LGBTIQ Zimbabweans they know of have access to at least one HIV test every six months.

Despite some cases of precautions that might not match risk profiles, the peer advice exchanged underground is often useful and empowering. A 43-year-old gay man, who is among the 1.4-million Zimbabweans living with HIV, said that it was “from our secret gay support groups” that he resolved to consistently take antiretroviral drugs to protect his lover. “I have learnt that ARVs suppress HIV and

therefore lessens chances of transmitting it to the next person and that is why I religiously take my own ARV treatment. I don’t want to infect my lover by mistake.”

Similarly, a 34-year-old gay man said that learning from what they share at their secret gay meetings, his lover and he have embraced consistent condom use.

Despite the widespread homophobia, the Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe rights group is setting up community centers for Zimbabwe’s sexual minorities. These may turn peer-to-peer advice, which can get distorted as it is passed on, into formal and vetted health information that is openly available to all LGBTIQ people. ■

# 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

"Don't be mad, a gas car is not how you arrive in Antananarivo."



**1\_** Antananarivo is the capital of which country?

**2\_** Côte d'Ivoire's name comes from the trade of what material?

**3\_** A young Mahatma Gandhi travelled to which country to practise law in 1893?

**4\_** What is the highest court in the land in Kenya?

**5\_** What is Sierra Leone's largest city?

**6\_** The International Monetary Fund officially approved a \$1.3-billion loan to which southern African country this week? [Hint: The country

elected a new president in 2021]

**7\_** The city of Kano is the capital of which Nigerian state?

**8\_** Name two African countries that border the Red Sea.

**9\_** Lazarus Chakwera is which country's president?

**10\_** Which international tournament is Qatar hosting later this year?

## 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](mailto:TheContinent@mg.co.za)

# Tell me no lies, telenovelas



## Continental Drift

Samira Sawlani

We at *Drift* have been indulging in a guilty pleasure over the past few months: the telenovela!

They're just about everywhere now, usually an English dub that nevertheless teaches us how to ¡*Gasp!* nonverbally in Spanish. We're not entirely sure whether this counts as cultural appropriation or cultural indoctrination, but we *do* know that when Maria Rubio finally comes out of her coma and everyone discovers that Juan Carlos is actually the evil twin pretending to be his brother Alejandro and that Valentina is actually pregnant with the stablehand's baby, boy oh boy the *mierda* is going to hit the fan.

Even with so much happening, one of the best things about these soaps is that you can miss a week or two and come back to find you've barely missed a thing. It's a bit like popping out of the country, and when you come back a few presidential terms later and find the exact same guy is still running things, and nothing has changed.

And that, after all, might be something we can relate to?

Seems the same guy will be running

things for a second term in Angola after the electoral commission declared President João Lourenço, winner of the August 24th elections.

It was a tight poll, with the governing MPLA party getting just a smidgeon more than half of the vote.

Of course the main opposition party Unita is contesting the outcome, but even if their challenge ultimately fails, there's no denying that the MPLA's slim margin represents a downward spiral for the party that's been at the wheel for the past 50 years.

### ¡Meanwhile!

Alongside the electoral thrills and spills, Angola has also been cursed/blessed by the ongoing drama around the funeral of former president José Eduardo dos Santos, which finally took place this week, more than a month after he passed away in a hospital bed in Spain.

A legal battle had been raging over where he should be buried, with his daughter Tchizé dos Santos insisting that he wanted to be buried in Barcelona. But a court in Spain ordered that Dos Santos' body be released to his widow and gave the go ahead for his remains to be repatriated to Angola.

Cue the dramatic music, cameras zooming in and flicking between every character's shocked ¡*Gasp!*

And so Dos Santos's state funeral went

ahead in Luanda with solemnity and dignity but *without* his daughter Isabel – erstwhile “richest woman in Africa” and currently in exile, possibly in Europe or the United Arab Emirates, we’re not entirely sure, and under investigation for corruption on a frankly impressive scale.

## Familiar familia

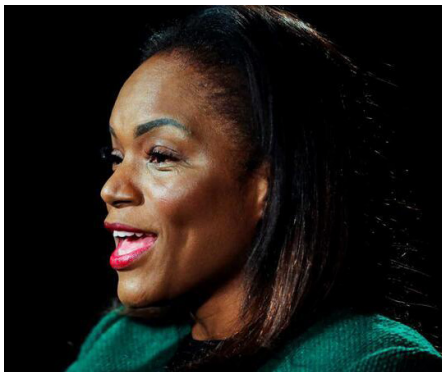
Our favourite soaps do tend to feature dynasties at war with each other, patriarchs and matriarchs in battle, back-biting, romances, bromances and messy fallings out – or politics as usual, as it’s known in Kenya, where the supreme court has begun considering Raila Odinga’s challenge to the recent election results.

Lawyer James Orengo, who represents the Odinga camp, argued that the result should be nullified, claiming William Ruto did not attain more than 50% votes cast and that their grievances are not just conspiracy theories.

Ruto’s lead counsel Fred Ngatia meanwhile has branded the petition “a work of fiction”.

Every telenovela worth its salt will have a character who mysteriously disappears for a while – in Kenya this role is now being played by outgoing president Uhuru Kenyatta, who has been uncharacteristically quiet since the election. We can just imagine him pacing around State House, monologuing furiously like a scorned soap star.

Or perhaps he’s taken a leaf out of Boris Johnson’s book and is having the time of his life going to parties, cashing in his executive coupons to hitch rides in fighter planes and going on a final tour of



**Unfair lady? José dos Santos’s daughter Tchizé wanted to keep his remains in Spain, but they put him on the plane.**

provinces to remind everyone who still owes him a favour that he’ll be along to collect as soon as the cameras look away.

## Bad habits

Before you judge us for our telenovela obsession, we would like to point out that there are others with even less salubrious indulgences, such as the Sudanese authorities, whose preoccupation with firing tear gas at protesters demanding a return to civilian rule is still going strong.

According to the Central Committee of Sudanese Doctors, a demonstrator was killed in the process, bringing the total number of people killed since protests began in 2021 to 117.

Though some of us are privileged to be able to distract ourselves from the horrors of the world just by waving our remotes at the TV, for far too many people the world is about as far from being a telenovela as it gets. And when their family members disappear, they do not come back. ■

# Sierra Leone's muddy politics add to climate change chaos

Musa Sesay and Ibrahim Barrie

**O**n 28 August a heavy rainstorm killed at least eight people and displaced thousands from hilltop communities and low-lying areas in Freetown, Sierra Leone. News photos show cars being washed away down streets and houses being washed away by flood waters.

In recent years, the capital has become a disaster-prone area due to environmental degradation. People cut down trees to make way for unsustainable housing settlements on hills and valleys. This incident has therefore triggered a fresh debate about environmental governance, regulation and climate resplendence.

At present, the country is trapped in an unhelpful blame game.

Freetown's mayor has been accused of failing to develop and implement risk-informed development interventions. But some see this criticism as a tactic by the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party to take control of the council in next year's local elections. The council itself has hit back, accusing past and present governments of providing building permits to residents in disaster-prone areas.

One positive aspect of these disagreements is that the political failings underpinning climate change have been laid bare, although this is not the first time these issues have been revealed – Sierra Leoneans will be thinking back to August 2017, when flooding and mudslides killed more than a thousand people, and wondering why nothing has changed.

Sierra Leone is not alone. Flooding, drought and landslides are a major problem in a growing number of countries. Massive flooding recently occurred in Ghana and Nigeria, while drought continues to affect cattle-rearing and agricultural activities in the north, east and Horn of Africa.

Effective responses to all of these challenges will require sustained government intervention, and taking difficult decisions that may have negative short-term electoral consequences but are essential for long-term resilience and survival.

The problem in Sierra Leone is that in the context of the recent protests, the government is worried about its popularity, and is unlikely to be willing to make the tough choices needed to prevent such disasters from happening again. ■

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Musa Sesay is the head of development studies at the University of Makeni.

Ibrahim Barrie is the course co-ordinator

for the MA in sustainable development at the University of Makeni. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa.



# The Big Picture

Photo: Peter Louis Gume/AFP

One of us: New members of South Sudan's National Police Services of the Unified Forces celebrate at their graduation ceremony in Juba on August 30. Thousands of fighters, including former rebels from rival camps in South Sudan's civil war, were formally integrated into the country's army in the long-overdue graduation ceremony.



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