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The Continent

The nightmare sold as a Disney fantasy





Cover: It was meant to be a conservation success story. Three years ago, nearly 300 elephants were moved into a park on the Malawi-Zambia border. Their new home, Kasungu National Park, used to be home to more than 1,200 elephants, but they were hunted down to just 50. A big international wildlife NGO helped the Malawian government. But nobody seems to have thought about the people living in the area – 10 have been killed by elephants and a lawsuit claims 12,000 have paid the price for that conservation success story (p17).

Inside:

■ **Kenya:** Nothing spreads like a banned film (p9)
■ **Nigeria:** Extreme weather is the new Boko Haram (p10)
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Welcome back

A nod to protocols: It's May. We last spoke in April. Some stuff has happened in between. We hope you did all the things, none of the things or whatever quota makes you feel better about this bonfire of a year. We took some time to plan where we want to be by 2030 (world domination), look at our accounts (not too red) and plan this season (our 18th). We almost forgot that it was this covid-baby's fifth birthday (postcards welcome). More on that in our 200th edition at the end of the month. TLDR; we are back! With a new news editor (p3), plans for quality swag, and a digestible amount of great African journalism. It's

‘Why, why not, what if?’ A new news editor asking the big questions



Christine Mungai in Nairobi

I became a journalist to try to understand the world. To figure out why things happen the way they do, to grasp – however tenuously – the systems that shape our lives. I was also trying to be less annoying to the people around me, especially my long-suffering brother and sister whom I bombarded with random facts for years.

In the 15 years that I’ve been a journalist, the kinds of stories I’ve enjoyed doing most are the ones that grapple with big questions, the existential challenges of being here, of being African. Like Jacob wrestling with God, I find it difficult to stop questioning, to stop asking *why, why not, what if?*

Now, I’m thrilled to announce (in my LinkedIn voice) that I will be doing this work here, at *The Continent*, as the publication’s news editor.

The journalism that excites me combines the things I care about—thoughtful storytelling, a sharp curiosity about the world, and amplifying African journalism that is compelling, urgent and nuanced. I’m looking forward to helping shape the editorial direction of a newsroom whose fast pace has not eaten up room for depth, complexity, and surprise.

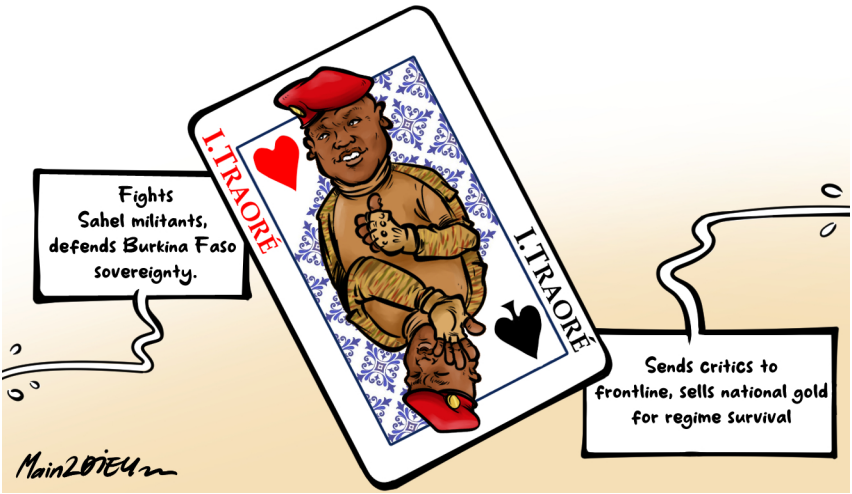
I’ve been a fan and subscriber of *The Continent* since day one.

What I love most about it—more than anything—is its spunk. Its irreverence. Its ability to hold serious and weighty stories with a kind of defiant lightness. In a business that can often feel heavy, lonely, and bruising, *The Continent* has always carried a kind of radical joy.

And maybe that’s what I’m here to carry forward too – that joy.

The belief that even in the mess and madness of it all, telling, or reading, stories still matters, and does not have to take even more of our sanity with it.

That we can ask better serious questions without losing our humour, or our humanity, in the telling. ■



Pick and play: Burkina Faso's president Ibrahim Traoré is either a new Thomas Sankara or a new Charles Taylor – depending on the day, and on who one asks.

SUDAN

SAF boss al-Burhan primes Ali for power

The chief of the Sudanese Armed Forces, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, who recaptured Khartoum in March, has appointed an acting prime minister: diplomat Dafallah al-Haj Ali. This comes two weeks after the Rapid Support Forces militia, which was pushed out of much of the capital but remains entrenched in Darfur in Sudan's west, declared a parallel government on 15 April. The war began in April 2023 with disputes about integrating the two forces – which jointly removed civilian leaders after a 2019 popular uprising ousted long-time autocrat Omar al-Bashir.

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Opposition's Thiam appeals election ban

Côte d'Ivoire's main opposition party has appealed a court ruling that disqualified former Credit Suisse chief executive Tidjane Thiam from running in October's presidential election, *Bloomberg* reports. An Abidjan court removed Thiam, 62, from the voters' roll due to his dual French-Ivorian nationality, just days after he was named the Democratic Party's candidate. The court claimed its decision couldn't be appealed, but party lawyers said they are challenging the ruling on procedural grounds, seeking to reinstate Thiam's eligibility ahead of the crucial vote.

NAMIBIA

Agriculture minister arrested for rape

Namibia's agriculture minister, Mac-Albert Hengari, has been fired following his arrest on Saturday for the alleged rape of a 16-year-old girl five years ago. Police in the capital Windhoek say Hengari was trying to bribe the now 21-year-old victim. On Monday, Hengari appeared in court on charges of obstructing the course of justice and was denied bail. He also faces kidnapping charges. The country's President Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah has dismissed him from both the cabinet and Parliament.



Photo: Namibian Presidency

TUNISIA

Saied rails against critics of mass trial

Tunisian President Kais Saied took to social media on Tuesday to condemn the international criticism levelled against a mass trial targeting his political rivals. On Facebook, Saied said foreign criticism of the trial was tantamount to "blatant interference in Tunisia's internal affairs". This month, 40 people, including opposition politicians, lawyers and activists, were sentenced to between 13 and 66 years on terror charges or conspiring against the state. Large protests calling for Saied's resignation rocked Tunis later in the week.

UGANDA

Ebola outbreak over after vaccine roll-out

Ugandan health authorities have declared the country's latest Ebola outbreak officially over, saying that no new infections have been recorded in the past 42 days. The outbreak, Uganda's ninth in 25 years, began in January when a nurse died from the Sudan Ebola virus in Kampala. Within days, Uganda rolled out a trial vaccine for that strain, immunising a ring of the nurse's closest contacts. If proven to work, it would be the first vaccine for the Sudan strain. A separate vaccine protects receipients from the Zaire Ebola strain.



Ruin: A young boy stands amid the destruction following overnight strikes. Photo: Mohammed Huwais/AFP

YEMEN

US airstrike kills African migrants

On Monday, a United States airstrike killed at least 68 African migrants in Yemen's Saada province. Local reports say the bombed detention centre held migrants, mostly from Ethiopia, who were detained while crossing Yemen to seek jobs in Saudi Arabia. The attack was confirmed by Yemen's military, *Middle East Eye* reports. Houthi fighters have been fighting Saudi and UAE-backed groups in Yemen since 2014.

TRAVEL

Somalia and Taiwan ban each other over independence rifts

Somalia and Taiwan have imposed entry bans on each other's passport holders, in a row over Taiwan's recognition of Somaliland, *AP* reports. Taiwan has been forging ties with Somaliland, which declared independence from Somalia in 1991 but lacks global recognition. Similarly, Taiwan considers itself independent but is claimed by China. In 2020, Taiwan and Somaliland opened offices in each other's capitals, "angering" both Beijing and Mogadishu.

MALTA

Golden passports may glitter but are now 'illegal' in EU

Malta's golden passport scheme, which lets people buy citizenship by purchasing property or donating to charity, is against the law, according to the European Court of Justice. The EU Commission took Malta to court in 2022 over the scheme under which people who buy Maltese passports can live and work in any EU country. The *BBC* reports the court as saying it renders "the acquisition of nationality a mere commercial transaction".

MUSEUM OF STOLEN HISTORY

Benin Bronzes won't be returned to Nigeria

The Museum of Fine Arts in Boston has closed its Benin Kingdom Gallery, returning most of its collection of Benin Bronzes not to Nigeria, but to their "owner" Robert Owen Lehman. These works, central to debates on restitution of artefacts acquired through colonial-era looting, include items stolen in the 1897 British raid on Benin City, in present-day Nigeria. When the museum proposed repatriation to Lehman, he instead insisted that the artefacts be removed from the museum and returned directly to him, *The Boston Globe* reports.



Photo: Robert Owen Lehman Collection/ Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

TECHNOLOGY

If you don't like AI, kill it with kindness

For a company built on stealing other people's words and art for training AI, you'd think politeness would be in short supply. But Open AI's chief executive Sam Altman says users of ChatGPT-4 are actually being much too nice to his IP-regurge-a-tron. Goldman Sachs concurs, saying a typical query uses up to 10 times more electricity than a standard Google search – the more words in a prompt, the more expensive it becomes – and your unnecessary politeness is clearly eating into Altman's revenues. Thanks for the heads up, Sam.

DR CONGO

Congolese troops moved ... to Kinshasa

Hundreds of Congolese soldiers, police officers and their families who sought refuge at a UN peacekeeping base in Goma after the city fell to M23 rebels in January are being moved under escort to Kinshasa, the Red Cross said Wednesday. Around 1,400 people had been sheltering at the site, *Reuters* reports. The ICRC, acting as a neutral intermediary, is escorting them over several days. The move signals M23's deepening hold in eastern Congo, as state forces are effectively evacuated from the territory.

DRC

Opposition figures cast doubt on US peace effort

Prosper Heri Ngorora in Goma

Kinshasa and Kigali were expected to present the US government with drafts of an agreement to end fighting each other on Friday, as agreed by their foreign ministers last week. But some prominent Congolese politicians argue that the Washington-driven process might be another non-solution to the conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

Key opposition figures – Joseph Kabila, Martin Fayulu, Moïse Katumbi, and Delly Sesanga – released a joint declaration on Wednesday calling for internal dialogue "to enable the Congolese people to identify the internal and external root causes of the crisis and to find lasting solutions". They back a peace effort driven by Congolese Catholic and Protestant prelates. All three opposition figures who signed the document are living in exile.

Lifo Fazili, a member of Katumbi's political party Ensemble pour la République, told *The Continent* a peace deal agreed with Rwanda will not restore calm in the DRC. "Everything is discussed abroad while the conflict is indigenous," he claimed.

On the streets of Goma, one of two Congolese cities that the M23 rebel fighters seized early this year, opinions are divided on the position taken by Kabila and others.

"This war is not between the DRC and Rwanda. Tshisekedi lied," said Julien Kasereka, who sides with the opposition.

On the other hand, residents like Irene Sophie say opposition figures are speaking out of self interest. "If [they] were patriots, they would have advised us before the situation got any worse," she said. "While we're losing our towns, today they want dialogue … which is a distraction."

President Félix Tshisekedi's government maintains that former president Kabila has long backed the M23 rebels.

According to *Reuters*, the US is pushing Rwanda and the DRC to sign a peace accord in two months. It would include a deal for US companies to get access to mining and other opportunities in both DRC and Rwanda, on the logic that the presence of western investments would be a security guarantee for the region.

This week President Donald Trump succeeded in getting Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to sign a similar deal, albeit with far fewer concessions than he originally insisted on. ■

Kenya

Gen Z protest film draws fire and eyes

The state forbade a public screening of the *BBC* film but on YouTube it had five million views by Friday.

Christine Mungai



Human rights groups are demanding fresh investigations into the killing of protesters by Kenya's security forces last June, following this week's release of a *BBC* Africa Eye documentary.

Blood Parliament shines the spotlight on members of the security forces — including the police and military — who shot three protesters dead on June 25th 2024, at the height of nationwide demonstrations against a rise in taxes.

The Law Society of Kenya said the documentary had left the country in shock over the "malice, impunity and brutality" with which young Kenyans had been "executed" by state agents. Amnesty International and the Kenya National Human Rights Commission called for fresh investigations.

Kenya government spokesman Isaac Mwaura criticised the documentary as biased, and a legislator, George Kaluma, called for the *BBC* to be banned in Kenya. Another MP, Bashir Abdullahi, said in Parliament that "people are killed all the time, we sympathise and move on" – prompting online backlash, public outrage and demands for justice.

The *BBC* said it was forced to cancel a public screening of the documentary on Monday following pressure from the authorities, but the video had already garnered five million views by Friday.

The documentary comes just as the government prepares this year's Finance Bill – promising no new taxes, an apparent attempt to pre-empt a repeat of last year's protests.

However, the core drivers of youth discontent – poverty, inequality, unemployment and conspicuous consumption by the political elite – have not changed. The streets remain quiet for now, but the air is thick with grief, anger, and the unfinished business of justice. ■

Nigeria

Extreme heat triggers military stockpile explosion

A munitions blast rocked a military barracks this week. It wasn't a militant attack – a hotter world is to blame.

Late on Wednesday night an explosion ripped through the Giwa military barracks in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State in northeastern Nigeria.

Residents initially feared it was an attack by Boko Haram militants, who have terrorised the area since the early 2000 and launched a direct attack on the barracks in 2014.

Locals told the *Daily Trust* newspaper that after the explosion on Wednesday they heard gunfire – prompting many to hide or flee the area. But the next day police said another man-made terror was to blame: extreme heat.

"The explosion was due to the current high temperatures in Maiduguri, which led to the explosion of some munitions," said a statement from Captain Reuben Kovangiya, who heads public relations for the Nigerian Army.

Over the past two weeks, temperatures in Maiduguri have ranged between "lows" of 27°C and highs of 44°C. On the day of the explosion, temperatures did not at any point fall below 32°C.

The heatwave comes just months after the city of two million people was inundated by floods that burst a local dam, killed at least 37 people, injured dozens more and drove tens of thousands into camps for internally displaced people.

Disaster relief to Borno state cost the Nigerian federal government at least three billion naira ($1.9-million), the state governor said. Those floods had themselves followed a severe drought.

Northeast Nigeria is part of the Sahel. Because of global heating, the Sahara desert is stretching further and faster into the region, leading to the collapse of local agriculture and livelihoods which in part has been fuelling the rise of militant groups like Boko Haram.

African countries have long argued that global heating needs to be kept below 1.5°C for the heat to be survivable.

That number has already been passed, and the mercury continues to rise. Meanwhile, the world's biggest polluters have turned their attention to other things. ■

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Ghana

Mahama's gold rush is fast and furious

Gold is trading at more than $3,200 an ounce as Trump-spooked rich people buy bullion as a 'safe haven' investment. This might be the miracle Ghana needs to turn its economy around. President Mahama is betting on a monopoly.

No one in Ghana may buy unrefined gold, however small the quantity – unless its from the government itself, through the "GoldBod" created last month. The government says it is monopolising internal gold trade to shore up the local currency (cedi) and kick out foreigners who buy gold from unlicensed miners and smuggle it out of Ghana.

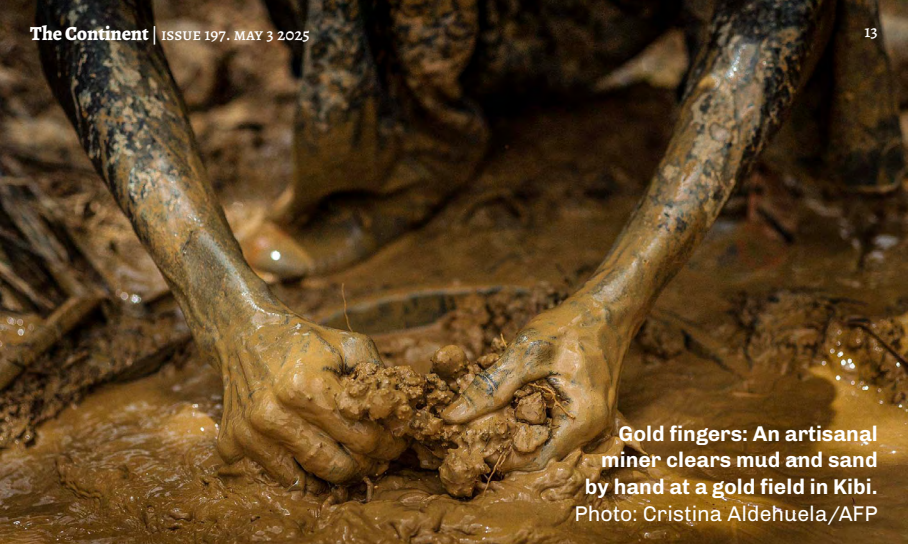
But the screw-tightening also means local traders who deal in small gold quantities, like Larry Ansong*, who makes golden ornaments, rings, necklaces and bracelets, will now have to buy their raw material from the GoldBod. They will also need new licences. That is causing anxiety in Accra corner shops.

When *The Continent* visits his shop in Accra, Ansong is on a call with other low-stakes traders discussing the financial strain of the new regime. He needs 1,000 Ghanaian cedis ($70) to apply for a licence, GH¢ 10,000 ($700) to actually get it, and would need to renew every year for GH¢ 7,000 ($490). He is also required to have a minimum working capital requirement of GH¢50,000 ($3,558) to qualify for the licence.

Assong says his shop deals in about 14g of gold a month, which at the current unusually high prices on the world market would be worth less than $1,500. But the new regulations seem designed for traders who deal in big volumes without explicitly exempting anyone else, except multinational corporations mining their own gold.

Assong is unsure which licences he needs. He buys small quantities of gold, smelts them and fabricates jewellery and ornaments. Information on the GoldBod's website suggests he will need a licence for each of the three business steps and the smelting and fabrication licences won't be open for applications until July.

"Many smaller traders feel



Gold fingers: An artisanal miner clears mud and sand by hand at a gold field in Kibi. Photo: Cristina Aldehuela/AFP

disenfranchised or unclear about how to legally continue operations," said Amanda Clinton, a lawyer who advises traders in the precious minerals sector.

A welcome reform rolling too fast

Even Assong admits Ghana needed to reform its gold sector. "I agree there should be stronger regulation," he says. He has himself bought "galamsey" gold when it helped his profit margin.

Small-scale mining, referred to locally as galamsey when it's unlicensed, is said to feed gold smuggling syndicates that cost the government billions in potential tax revenue.

In 2022, the finance minister at the time, Ken Ofori-Atta, said that 60 tonnes of gold worth an estimated $1.2-billion were spirited out of Ghana via dark channels. Overall, the government estimates that up to 80% of the gold mined by artisanal and small-scale miners is smuggled out of Ghana.

The GoldBod is supposed to stem those illicit flows. Eager to show its off to a roaring start, the agency's officials paraded three Indian citizens on Wednesday, alleging that they are linked to a gold smuggling syndicate. It pointed to India, China, and the United Arab Emirates as the main destinations for smuggled gold.

If the agency succeeds in curbing gold smuggling, the pay off could be huge, especially with the current record setting price of gold on the world market.

Even with much of it reportedly smuggled, gold mining by artisanal and small-scale miners accounted for $5-billion of Ghana's $11.4-billion gold exports last year.

If only the reform was not quite as rushed.

"The general sentiment is that compliance would be more achievable if GoldBod adopted a phased roll-out with clearer communication, better

stakeholder input, and transitional allowances," said Clinton.

The GoldBod is not leaning towards any compromise. "The law is the law," the board's spokesperson, Prince Minkah, told *The Continent*.

The president's big bet

President John Mahama returned to office in December on the back of two years of economic turmoil in Ghana. He must perform an economic miracle and reset a debt-laden country whose currency often seems to be in free-fall. Positioning the government to ride the wave of the current gold boom market is his big bet. The GoldBod will have GH¢4-billion ($280-million) every week to buy all the gold floating around – at about the same prices that galamsey miners offer on the dark market – and sell it on the world market itself for a killing.

"The bigger picture here is that we want to optimise precious minerals for national benefit," said GoldBod spokesperson Minkah. "We have done the math and we don't foresee any losses."

Mahama's bet is not unpopular. It has been largely welcomed by licensed miners and civil society groups among others. Galamsey is often blamed for polluting up to 60% of Ghana's water bodies and civil society groups have long campaigned against it.

The GoldBod will not actively police gold mining, leaving that to the police, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Minerals Commission. But the board said it planned to establish traceability standards that could help the galamsey fight. "That will be GoldBod's way of promoting sustainable mining," insisted Minkah.



Galamsey: An artisanal miner washes sand collected from a riverbed in Ghana, checking for flecks of gold. Photo: Cristina Aldehuela/AFP

Pessimists might cite the government's track record on doing global business. The country's other major commodities parastatal, Ghana Cocoa Board, has a monopoly over the domestic trade in cocoa but has incurred only losses since the tail end of President Mahama's first presidency, which ended in 2017. It is in debt to the tune of GH¢32-billion ($2.24-billion), and many local farmers supplying it are disgruntled.

Minkah claimed President Mahama's better governance will be the differentiator between the GoldBod and CocoBod. "Some of these challenges will not become a headache. I don't foresee them within the GoldBod framework because we have a leadership that values transparency." ■

No country for truth-tellers

Long after whistleblowers hold the powerful to account, the powerful hold them ransom. Protection laws, where they exist, are hardly enforced.

Robert Amalemba

When Nelson Amenya blew the lid on a murky $2-billion deal to lease out Kenya's biggest airport, he didn't anticipate the backlash he would face: online trolls, a $68,000 defamation lawsuit and death threats.

"They're after you, bro. Lawsuits or a bullet, your call. Quit hitting the state and watch your back. One misstep, and you're gone," said a caller delivering one of the most chilling warnings. Amenya told *The Continent* the call came from a high-ranking official in Kenya's Directorate of Criminal Investigations he considers sympathetic to his cause.

Public furore following Amenya's whistleblowing – and news that United States authorities had charged Gautam Adani, the Indian billionaire at the centre of the deal in his American dealings – saw Kenya's President William Ruto scrap the airport deal. But, despite that validation, Amenya was targeted for speaking out.

Businessman Jayesh Saini, whom Amenya named among Adani's top fixers in Kenya, sued him in France – where he is living on a student visa. "I'd never seen a courtroom, let alone a foreign one," he said. The court dismissed the case in January, by which time Amenya had won Transparency International Kenya's Whistleblower Integrity Actions award and been named by the *New African Business* magazine as one of the 100 Most Influential Africans of 2024.

But social media accounts continued to send him messages threatening that his mother wasn't as safe as he was in France. At one point, his parents called him saying they had been interrogated by Kenyan police over a missing car they didn't know anything about. Amenya's Kenyan business received a letter suggesting that it was under police investigation.

Deeper and wider than Kenya

Whistleblowers across Africa walk similarly bittersweet journeys of public appreciation and severe personal cost. Only a handful of countries – Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda – have laws that protect whistleblowers. Kenya does not, despite a years-long struggle to pass one.

Elizabeth Duya of Transparency International Kenya says Amenya's fate could have been different if the Whistleblowers Protection Bill had been enacted. It proposes protections (such as a framework for anonymous reporting) not

just for whistleblowers but also protects their relatives. Prohibited retaliation includes not just physical threats but also more subtle forms at the workplace and in court. "It's one of the most progressive drafts we've had," said Duya. "It borrows from global best practices, including financial rewards for leakers," said Antony Karuga of Kenya's Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission.

But the bill has been in limbo since 2013. "The political will just isn't there," said Duya. According to Karuga, it is "bogged down in the slow churn of public consultations, parliamentary readings and political debate".

Whatever the cause of delay, the cost is clear. "Fighting graft begins with speaking out, but in Kenya, as in many African nations, there's no dedicated framework to protect tipsters," Duya added. "Relying on vague constitutional rights isn't enough. That's why so many stay silent."

Where whistleblower protection laws exist, they have major blind spots, or their enforcement is weak. Ghana's 2006 Whistleblowers Act – one of Africa's most robust, on paper – hasn't translated to real safety. In a 2018 study, public policy scholar Joseph Antwi-Boasiako found that fear of retaliation outweighs the promise of justice. When graft is exposed, it is often met with official inaction.

But when retaliation comes, the toll is heavy. Journalist Ahmed Hussein-Suale was gunned down in 2019 after a lawmaker exposed his identity as one of the undercover reporters behind a graft exposé. His colleague Manasseh Azure Awuni fled to South Africa the following year amid threats to his own life.



Target: Kenyan whistleblower Nelson Amenya. Photo: Alain Jocard/AFP

South Africa's Protected Disclosures Act offers some legal cover for whistleblowers facing retaliation. But, according to a Corruption Watch report, it exposes them to the risk of more direct threats. The cost of exposure was highlighted when Babita Deokaran, a whistleblower who revealed a $22-million Covid-19 procurement scandal, was gunned down outside her Johannesburg home in August 2021.

With little to no protection, whistleblowers face stark choices. For Amenya, the ultimate price might be losing Kenya as his home. He said there is no chance that he will return home even though the student visa allowing him to live in France will expire in June. "Not under this regime," he says.

Yet Duya is hopeful. "These laws show intent. With time, they could offer real protection and encourage more people to speak up." ■

It was a fairytale fantasy of wildlife and people – until the killing began

Exotic pictures in western media of huge metal cranes lifting elephants into a park at the Malawi-Zambia border masked 'negligence' that set up a brutal conflict between people and pachyderm.

Photo: Frank Weitzer



Jack McBrams in Kasungu

The midmorning sun casts lazy shadows across the cracked earth of Chafwamba village in central Malawi's Kasungu town. Chickens peck at the base of a withering pumpkin vine. Barefoot children clamour excitedly around their father who sits on a veranda slicing a pumpkin.

If life were to imitate Big Conservation's marketing photography, a magnificent but peaceful Jumbo would appear on the edge of the frame, indifferently co-existing with the natives.

In this real life picture, the children are motherless. Jumbo killed their mother.

On 3 February 2023, "everything fell apart," for 35-year-old Kannock Phiri, the pumpkin-slicing father. "She went out to fetch vegetables for lunch," he tells *The Continent*. "They found her body in the maize field later that day."

Strapped to Masiye Banda's back was the couple's one-year-old daughter Beatrice, who survived with injuries.

Eighteen months before the tragedy, journalists from around the world were in Kasungu snapping dramatic pictures as elephants were lifted by industrial cranes into the national park. Malawian wildlife authorities, with funding and expert advice from the International Fund for Animal Welfare (Ifaw), were giving 263 elephants a new and larger home.

Since then, 10 people in the area have been killed by elephants, or in circumstances the community blames



Unheard of: In July 2022, 263 elephants were moved into Kasungu National Park in a colossal one-month operation. Photo: Marcus Westberg

on their sudden influx.

Limbikani Kayedzeka's brother John was one of the earliest victims. He was trampled by an elephant in Tsumba village in September 2022, three months after the big translocation.

"It started like any normal day. My brother went to the garden. Suddenly, people were shouting: 'Elephants!' He tried to run, to hide in a bush, but one was already there," Kayedzeka says.

John was survived by two children aged five and three: Nicholas and David. Kayedzeka has tried to help their mother to support them but says that elephants are also destroying the cassava and cabbage he would share with them. "I try to help," he says. "I am failing."

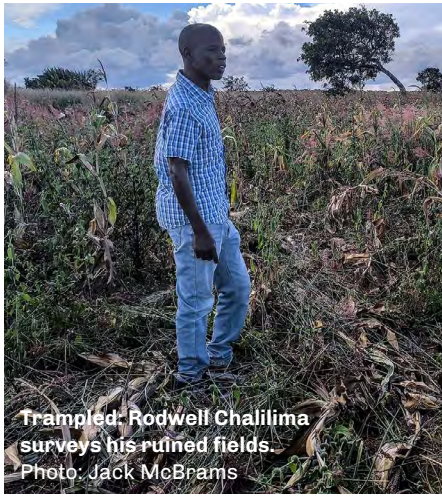
Many more people are facing hunger because of what the huge herbivores do to their gardens.

"Last night, we heard dogs barking," Rodwell Chalilima, a father of six, tells *The Continent* in a border village called Chisinga. Residents who dared to go out found a large herd of elephants in the fields. "We couldn't do anything. We just watched," he says.

Before the elephant influx, Chalilima's maize field yielded over 250 bags a year. Now? "Between 50 and 60, if I'm lucky," he says. "It's hard to pay school fees. It's hard to feed my household."

A lawsuit being prepared by UK firm Leigh Day alleges that more than 12,000 people across 1,684 households have suffered injury, death, displacement, and starvation because of the translocation.

Leigh Day is presenting 10 complainants who want to sue Ifaw for negligence, causing a nuisance, and certain constitutional violations.



Trampled: Rodwell Chalilima surveys his ruined fields. Photo: Jack McBrams

Ifaw didn't respond to *The Continent's* request for comment, but issued a statement last June which said that it was the government of Malawi that "chose to relocate elephants" and its own input was financial support and conservation expertise. But at least one conservation insider suggested the fund's role was more than simply passive.

Mike Labuschagne was the law enforcement director at Ifaw where he says he "helped arrest hundreds of poor villagers for wildlife crimes," before switching sides to work with families affected by conservation efforts.

He argues that Ifaw fundraised by selling "a fantasy" to its donors in the West "that elephants and humans can coexist on the same land, peacefully".

"That's not Africa," he says. "That's Disneyland."

When in doubt, read history

Ifaw's statement in June appeared to defend the translocation, saying the elephants were moved "from one park that was at capacity, to another park that had space – a decision determined by scientific reasoning". Historical reasoning could have predicted that an elephant influx would lead to violent conflict between people and pachyderm.

Kasungu park was once home to at least 1,200 elephants but people hunted them down so much in the 1970s and 80s that at one point there were only 50 left alive. By July 2022, the population had recovered to about 120 elephants, which largely stayed within the park's protected area. Then it tripled in a matter of weeks. This time, with well-funded protection for the animals, it's the people dying.

In July 2022, the park had about 120 elephants. The translocation tripled that number in a matter of weeks.

History teaches that a binary us-or-them choice can be avoided.

The 263 elephants were translocated from the much smaller Liwonde National Park, which used to be notorious for human-animal conflict until a 1.8 metre electrified fence was built around its entire 130km perimeter. But the lessons of Liwonde were not applied to Kasungu before the translocation. In Tsumba, Kayedzeka points out a section of park fencing that ends abruptly at the Malawi-Zambia boundary. "That's the problem. That's where they come through."

Nearly three years after suddenly tripling the Kasungu elephant population, Malawian authorities are building a 135km fence. "It is now 84% complete," Joseph Nkosi, the spokesperson of the wildlife ministry, tells *The Continent*.

Even when completed, the fence is unlikely to cover the entire park. Kasungu is four times the size of Liwonde.

And the Kasungu fence is unlikely to be as robust. "Building the fence is participatory in nature," says Nkosi, explaining that local communities are being trained to construct it themselves – in contrast to the $1.6-million investment that the nonprofit African Parks (linked to British prince Harry Windsor) put into the Liwonde fence in 2015.

Less "participatory in nature" is the park authorities' approach to responding to marauding elephants. Wildlife rangers have chili bombs and firecrackers to chase off elephants when sighted outside the protected area. But even though they are non-lethal, the tools are not given directly to the people who live near the park. Instead, Ifaw said in June, response teams are "strategically located in the park and deploy at short notice when required."

Labuschagne interprets such decisions as being informed by "contempt for Malawians and Zambians" and says he warned Ifaw years ago that "their contempt" would land them in court. "Now it has." He believes the complainants in the UK lawsuit could seek as much as £4-million in damages, and that the fund could also face criminal proceedings in the United States. ■



Participants at 'Heavenly Bodies', an underground drag ballroom event during Lagos Pride, celebrate the 'mother of the year' winner.
Photo: Temiloluwa Johnson

PHOTO ESSAY

Lenses on Africa, global renown

Paul Botes, Photography Editor, *The Continent*

The Africa selection of this year's World Press Photo Awards had a great diversity of stories that offered rare glimpses and rich insights into life on the continent.

In particular, the work of two women photojournalists was recognised, including Temiloluwa Johnson, whose photography you will have seen in the pages of *The Continent* (editions 180 and 195).

Johnson wrote to us, highlighting her commissions from *The Continent* as among the first opportunities to "give her stories a chance on the local stage" – a good reminder of one of the many reasons this newspaper exists: to introduce excellent African

journalists to the world.

Also among the winners of the 2025 World Press Photo Awards is Cinzia Canneri – a photographer whose work we will feature next week, telling of the complexities of conflict in Ethiopia, as well as Luis Tato and Aubin Mukoni, whose field work for AFP we have also published in these pages.

We celebrate their work as journalists working in Africa and standing tall at global media's top photography awards.



A groom poses for a portrait at his wedding in Omdurman, Sudan, where celebratory gunfire has become a wedding tradition. Photo: Mosab Abushama

Competitive Ugandan bodybuilder Tamale Safalu's life changed when he lost his leg in a motorbike accident. But he is still standing strong. Photo: Marijn Fidder





Top: A young fisherman sorts through his nets on the shore of Lake Kivu, in Goma, DRC. Photo: Aubin Mukoni

Bottom: Protesters chant anti-government slogans while climbing a Kenya Police water cannon truck during a nationwide protest. Photo: Luis Tato





Top: Response team members observe an elephant feeding near a military base in Livingstone, Zambia. Photo: Tommy Trenchard

Bottom: An Eritrean girl walks along the railway connecting Eritrea to Ethiopia. Photo: Cinzia Canneri



The international winner of the World Press Photo Of The Year 2025: Mahmoud Ajjour, 9, who was injured during an Israeli attack on Gaza City in March 2024, found refuge and medical help in Doha, Qatar.
Photo: Samar Abu Elouf

Africans back the media's right to bite

Africans want democracy (66%), with competing political parties (64%). They want Parliament to make the laws (69%) and to monitor how the president spends taxpayers' money (66%).

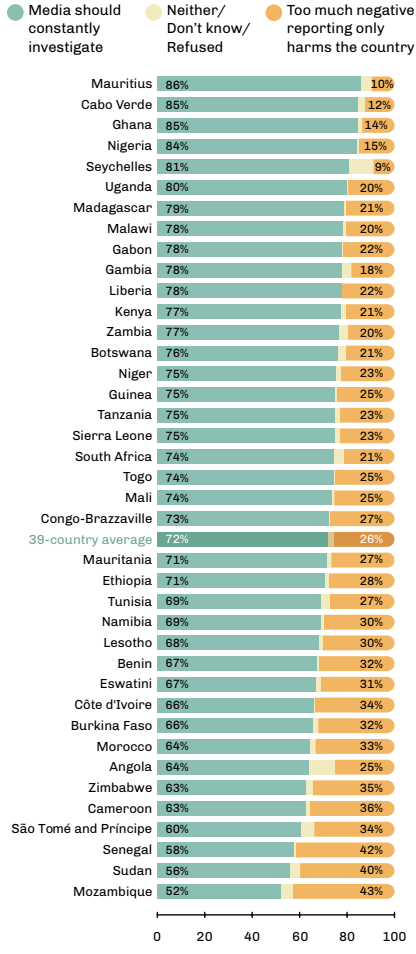
Even more, they want an independent watchdog: On average across 39 countries, 72% of Africans say the media "should constantly investigate and report on government mistakes and corruption".

It's the majority view in every surveyed country. Only a quarter (26%) of respondents say too much negative reporting is damaging for the country, though this rises above a third in Côte d'Ivoire (34%), São Tomé and Príncipe (34%), Zimbabwe (35%), Cameroon (36%), Sudan (40%), Senegal (42%), and Mozambique (43%).

This year, two of the above made ugly headlines: Mozambican journalist Arlindo Chissale died after being beaten by security forces, and Zimbabwean journalist Watson Flexy Munyaka died after being thrown out of a moving vehicle.

These incidents serve as chilling reminders, on this World Press Freedom Day (3 May), that even with strong public backing, too often the watchdogs have to watch their backs. ■

'Media should scrutinise government' vs 'Media should avoid negative reporting'
39 African countries | 2021/2023



Source: *Afrobarometer is 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 to 2,400 people in each country yield results with a margin of error of +/- two to three percentage points.*

AFRO BAROMETER
Let the people have a say



Film Review

Wilfred Okiche

A scattered search for self

Topsy-turvy, jumbled up and somewhat out of step.



Finding out: Funke Akindele's stardom doesn't cut it. Photo: Amazon Prime

Funke Akindele is a formidable triple threat: star actor, producer and director. Her last three movies hold the top three spots on the Nigerian all-time box office charts. As others struggle to bring audiences to the cinemas, her December releases are blockbuster events.

No doubt looking to capitalise on Akindele's popularity, Amazon Prime Video acquired her latest melodrama as a direct to streaming original.

Finding Me, which Akindele co-directs with Isioma Osaje is, however, a tonally inconsistent misfire. It situates a woman's journey of self-discovery at its centre but is unable to do anything coherent or consistent with its premise.

Akindele plays Tinuke Phillips, an insecure heiress trapped in an abusive relationship with her hubby Kola (Joseph Benjamin). With the help of the usual suspects – a loyal best friend (Omoni Oboli) and a potential love interest (Efa Iwara) – she begins to take ownership of her own agency.

Running over 2.5 hours, *Finding Me*'s structure feels drawn out and episodic – better suited, perhaps, for television. The picture looks cheap and unconvincing, and the writing uninspired.

Finding Me tries to pass as progressive but the messaging is muddled. It opens with Tinuke's duplicitous husband breaking the fourth wall to introduce the action and major players. The point of view shifts, his character recedes to the margins and Tinuke's arc to fore. But then she spends most of that screen time catering to the demands of a domineering father, a spoiled brother and a manipulative husband, barely ever sitting with herself.

In the end, the film only ends up reinforcing gender stereotypes both at home and in the workplace: women are emotional beings who need the love of a good man for redemption.

The pull of Akindele's superstardom might be enough for hardcore fans to go with the flow, but this time the filmmaker in her hasn't found anything interesting to present. ■

THE QUIZ

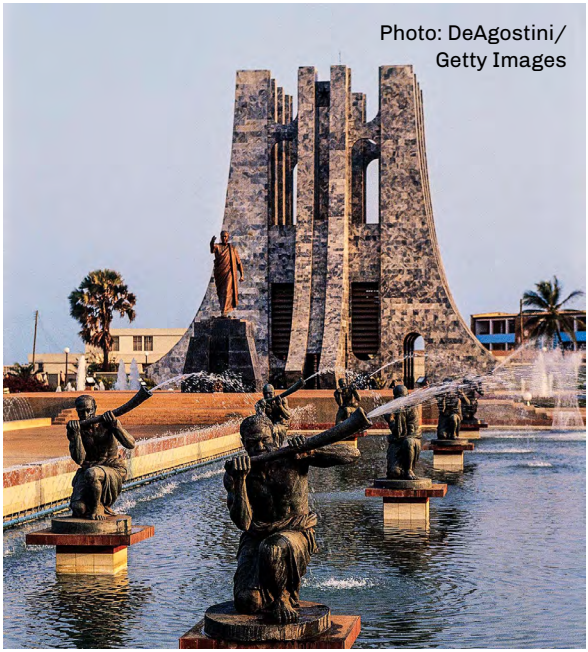


Photo: DeAgostini/ Getty Images

1_Who does the pictured memorial park in Accra commemorate?
2_In which year did Ibrahim Traoré seize power?
3_How many colours are there on Algeria's flag?
4_In what year was the African Union officially launched?
5_Who was the first chairperson of the African Union?
6_Which country's president is Hassan Sheikh Mohamud?
7_Name the Egyptian footballer who just became a Premier League champion.
8_True or false: The Masai giraffe is an extinct species.
9_In which country was artist Julie Mehretu born?
10_Which country is Africa's papal candidate Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson from?

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
"Another pope from Africa would be nice – it'd be our fourth, we build them super holy here."

HOW DID I DO? WhatsApp 'ANSWERS' to +27 73 805 6068 and we'll send the answers to you!



You're on your own: The Trump regime took less than three months to completely dismantle US foreign aid. Photo: Mandel Ngan/AFP

The future of African democracy now depends on local pockets and leaders

Africans will solve their own problems. But the loss of Western funding means local philanthropists, intellectuals and other leaders need to put funds and quality time into civil society – and hurry up about it.

Augustine Magolowondo

President Donald Trump has dismantled United States foreign aid and profoundly disrupted the global ecosystem that supported democracy, human rights, public health, and poverty alleviation. Although it's Trump's cuts that have dominated attention, other Western countries such as the United Kingdom, Belgium, Sweden, and the Netherlands are also scaling back their aid commitments.

The broader Western world appears not only unable to compensate for the vacuum left by Washington but also happy to widen it.

Some commentators welcome this

retreat, claiming it opens the door for Africa to assert its independence and chart a new course. They argue that it might catalyse a self-driven transformation—an African renaissance.

This is an exciting prospect.

But the risks of failure are substantial. The scale and suddenness of the cuts are kneecapping African civil society at a pivotal moment: authoritarianism on the continent is deepening, and international pressure on leaders to uphold democratic standards is weakening.

Backlash against solidarity

The inconsistency and hypocrisy of world powers have led many to overlook how international solidarity enabled African citizens to counter domestic authoritarianism. The transitions from one-party regimes and military dictatorships to pluralistic democracies in the 1990s were often driven by internal pro-democracy demands that had international support. Democracy was considered a shared global value and international support helped nurture domestic aspirations for it.

Take Malawi, where President Banda ran a three-decade dictatorship marked by human rights abuses. As domestic voices calling for reform grew louder, members of the Paris Club tipped the scales when they suspended aid over human rights abuses,weakening the regime's finances. This led to a 1993 referendum, where Malawians overwhelmingly voted for multiparty democracy.

In that case, and many others, freedom was not imposed from the outside and democracy was not a "Western agenda". African citizens worked with the international community, in joint commitment to political rights and civil liberties, to reshape the political culture on the continent.

Removing one half of this partnership could have dramatic consequences.

African activists may find that operating without international solidarity brings more government restrictions than ever. Authoritarian regimes on the other hand, already inspired by global democratic erosion, will be emboldened by the absence of external accountability and become more brazen at dismantling opposition, co-opting institutions, and shrinking civic space.

The victims of this rollback are not abstract ideals but ordinary people whose rights, voices, and aspirations are being eroded. Afrobarometer surveys consistently show that the desire for dignity, freedom, and accountable governance is deeply rooted in African societies.

Acknowledging external solidarity is not to say the international community deserves credit for African political resilience. Africans solved and will solve their problems. But success is a lot more likely and durable when they are not acting in isolation.

Malawi again offers an illustrative example. In the decades following the multiparty referendum, Malawians used US and European aid to strengthen the country's democratic institutions. Civil society initiatives supporting civic education, monitoring elections, and

promoting government transparency sprung up and did the work.

These same groups, alongside a judiciary bolstered by international backing, were central in securing credible elections in 2019 and 2020.

Now, with pivotal elections approaching, the Trump-era aid cuts have left them underfunded and civic education efforts were scaled back or shut down. Political party development work, especially for women and youth participation, has stalled. That's the environment in which Malawi's next elections will happen.

Other donors may try to fill the gap, but piecemeal efforts won't be enough if cuts persist.



Out of time: Without international funding, efforts in Malawi to deepen civic engagement and monitor polling have stalled – just before key elections. Photo: Amos Gumulira/AFP

Self-driven transformation

If an independent civil society is the goal, now is the time for African intellectuals, activists and civic leaders to invest their time and energy in building it. Recognising that everyone benefits when democracy thrives, African business leaders, philanthropists, and governments must finance the civil society that emerges after or survives the foreign aid cuts.

There must also be greater South-South cooperation. Global South countries that have made democratic progress should support others to achieve similar milestones.

There are rich lessons in democratic reform for cross-regional learning from Senegal, Ghana, South Africa, Botswana, Zambia, and Malawi. Fostering peer learning and regional dialogue can strengthen local efforts and reduce dependency on outside validation.

The domestic/international alliances that delivered the democratic gains of the 1990s must now be rooted within Africa. Regional bodies and the African Union must recommit to democracy as a public good.

As authoritarian leaders grow more sophisticated and resourced, democracy needs new champions. Without them, the promise of greater independence may give way to a new form of control and exploitation. ■

Dr Augustine Magolowondo is a governance expert with over 25 years of experience in international development cooperation

THE BIG PICTURE

Requiem: A Catholic mourner walks past a life-size cutout of Pope Francis as people gather to celebrate mass in his honour, ahead of his funeral, at the Holy Family Basilica in Nairobi on 25 April.

Photo: Luis Tato/AFP



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