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# The Continent



**Spinning a  
gangster sport into  
the mainstream**

Photo: Shiraaz Mohamed



### THIS WEEK'S COVER STORY:

In older, more gangster days, some South Africans liked to show off the fruits of their illicit activities. At criminals' funerals in 1980s Soweto, cronies celebrated their exploits by spinning stolen cars – driving at high speeds in clouds of dust while pulling dangerous stunts. This adrenaline-pumping sport is trying to shed its criminal element and go mainstream and transnational. We go to Eswatini and Johannesburg for a weekend of spinning (p18)

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**Face time:** Tanzania's government is reportedly weighing up whether to put President Samia Suluhu Hassan's image on its bank notes. This would put her in rarified company: currently, only former president Julius Nyerere and former Zanzibari president Sheikh Abeid Amani Karume have been so honoured.

## GAMBIA

### Parliament debates legalising FGM

A Bill to lift the ban on cutting women's vulvas has been tabled in Gambia's parliament by independent lawmaker Almammeh Gibba. The practice was banned in the country in 2015. According to the United Nations, over 75% of Gambian women between the ages of 15 and 49 have suffered female genital mutilation. Gibba and religious leaders argue that the removal of female genitalia is a religious and cultural practice. Most women would disagree.

## RED SEA

### First casualties as tensions escalate

Three sailors were killed after a rocket struck the *True Confidence*, a cargo ship, off the coast of Yemen. In recent weeks the Houthis, a paramilitary group fighting a civil war in Yemen, have fired dozens of rockets at ships in the Red Sea in retaliation for Israel's war in the Gaza Strip. A multinational naval force has failed to curb the attacks and commercial ships are choosing to avoid the Suez Canal by going the long way, around the Cape of Good Hope.

## NIGERIA

## Crypto exchange abandons naira

In 2021, Nigeria recorded the highest trading volume for cryptocurrencies in Africa. Now Binance, the world's biggest crypto exchange, says it will cease all services related to the naira, amid government proposals to regulate the crypto industry. The government claims Binance and similar exchanges are part of a forex black market that has facilitated the collapse in value of the currency. It demanded that Binance pay \$10-billion in compensation for facilitating forex manipulation, terrorism financing, tax evasion and money laundering.

## GERMANY

## SA novelist returns exalted literary prize

Zukiswa Wanner, the first African woman to get the prestigious Goethe Medal, returned it this week to protest against Germany's support for Israel's war in Gaza, which has included supplying weapons. "What I see is Germany being on the wrong side of a genocide again," said the writer, who won the medal in 2020. This week, an investigation by *Climate Home* revealed that "the German government has used its financial power over climate activists in the Global South to try to stop them publicly criticising Israel's attacks".



**Croc 'n roll: President Emmerson Mnangagwa and his spousal auxiliary Auxilia.** Photo: Jekesai Njikizana/AFP

## ZIMBABWE

## US slaps president's 'criminal network' with new sanctions

The United States scrapped an extensive sanctions programme on Zimbabwe that was first introduced two decades ago. But it quickly slapped new sanctions on 11 senior leaders and three companies. The individuals include President Emmerson Mnangagwa and his wife Auxilia; Vice-President Constantino Chiwenga; and spy chief Walter Tapfumaneyi. The US Treasury describes Mnangagwa as presiding over a "criminal network of government officials and businesspeople who are most responsible for corruption or human rights abuse against the people of Zimbabwe". In Zimbabwe, this criminal network is said to go by the name "Zanu-PF".



**Sentenced to death: Mohamed Badie, the former leader of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood.** Photo: Khaled Kamel/AFP

## EGYPT

### Death sentence for eight opposition politicians

After a three-year trial, a court in Egypt has sentenced eight opposition politicians to death. The trial is related to the so-called Manassa Memorial massacre in 2013. According to reporting by *Middle East Eye*, 79 people were charged for a number of offences, including leadership in a terrorist group, preventing state institutions and public authorities from performing their duties, and attempting to change the regime by force. They include members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Twenty-one were acquitted.

## SENEGAL

### Election date set for 24 March after Sall's delays overturned

Following weeks of will-they-won't-they, Senegal is set to go to the polls on 24 March. On Wednesday, the West African country's government was formally dissolved by President Macky Sall, whose delay of the elections was declared unconstitutional by a Senegalese court. Sall has also replaced Prime Minister Amadou Ba with Interior Minister Sidiki Kaba, to allow Ba, the ruling coalition's presidential candidate, to focus on his election campaign. Sall's presidency ends on 2 April.



**Let us vote: A demonstrator in Dakar raises his fist in protest against election delays.** Photo: John Wessels/AFP

**MOROCCO****Long, hot winter just a milestone on road to climate collapse**

Winters in Morocco are never especially cold – but nor are they supposed to be blisteringly hot. According to the national meteorological service, average temperatures this January were 3.8°C higher than average, making it the hottest January since record-keeping began in 1940. And in February, some regions experienced temperatures that were ten degrees higher than normal. The entire planet is hurtling towards being more than 1.5°C hotter than it was before industrialisation, yet the big polluting countries most responsible for the climate crisis refuse to take meaningful action.

**SOUTH SUDAN****Harvard economist, human rights activist – and gun runner?**

A much-lauded South Sudanese peace activist, Peter Bial Ajak, has been charged with gun-running in the United States. The charges, filed in Arizona, accuse Ajak and an ally of conspiring to illegally export AK-47s, hand grenades, missile systems and other weapons, worth millions of dollars, in a bid to overthrow his home government. Ajak fled South Sudan four years ago, claiming the president wanted him dead. He later obtained prestigious positions and fellowships at Harvard, the Africa Center for Strategic Studies and the National Endowment for Democracy.

**DRC****Rebel group makes significant gains**

At least 15 people are dead after M23 rebels seized a town in North Kivu province as fighting between the group and the Congolese army continues. On Wednesday, the United Nations said two days of fighting, during which the town of Nyanzale was captured, resulted in the flight of at least 100,000 people. Nyanzale, located more than 100km north of the provincial capital Goma, is of particular importance in the resource-rich region as a key Congolese army stronghold.



**Render unto seizers: M23 rebels are taking territory in North Kivu.** Photo: Guerchom Ndebo/AFP

# Nigeria

## Prisoners join wave of food protests

The steeply rising cost of food is affecting everyone.

Justina Asishana

The latest food protest in Nigeria was at a prison in Jos, about 200km north of the capital Abuja.

For about 45 minutes on Friday 1 March, inmates gathered at the centre of the prison. They shouted at prison officials, refused breakfast and defied orders to return to their cells. The officials used tear gas to disperse the protest and force the prisoners back indoors.

The protest was triggered by a plan to reduce food portions in the prison due to rising costs. Raphael Ibinuhi, the comptroller of Jos Correctional Centre, told journalists that the facility's food supplier also suggested replacing some of the prisoners' rice meals with cheaper starches like cassava flakes, locally known as garri.

Food prices have risen by at least 35% in the past year, according to Nigeria's central bank. The surge is driving many

people to desperation.

On Sunday, days after the prison protest, a group of young people broke into a warehouse in the Gagwa area of Abuja and made off with bags of maize and other grain. Last month, hundreds of women and young people took to the streets in Niger, Kano and Kogi states of Nigeria to protest high food prices.

"The food challenge and the cost of items is a national issue," said Ibinuhi.

But the government appears unwilling to intervene – it has not acted on a court order to fix the prices of essential commodities including milk, flour, salt and sugar. The order was issued by a federal judge in early February, in a suit brought by Nigerian lawyer and human rights activist, Femi Falana, against the country's Price Control Board. ■



**Portion control: Detainees grip the bars of a prison van in Abuja. Prison rations are being cut as Nigeria's food price crisis grows.** Photo: Kola Sulaimon/AFP

# Ghana

## President fiddles as bigotry burns economic hopes

Marian Ansah

**H**arsh new legislation targeting Ghana's LGBTQ+ community, passed by Parliament last week, has given President Nana Akufo-Addo a very difficult decision to make. If he signs the Bill into law, Ghana could lose up to \$3.8-billion in World Bank funding over the next five years – according to estimates from his own finance ministry. The international community has made it clear it will not endorse what it views as a clear attack on basic human rights.

On the other hand, if Akufo-Addo rejects the Bill, he faces a domestic political crisis. Speaker of Parliament Alban Bagbin has warned the president not to defy the will of the legislature.

What will he do? For now, nothing.

In a statement addressed to the diplomatic community, Akufo-Addo said no decision would be forthcoming until the Supreme Court has heard a challenge to the Bill's legality.

That challenge was lodged on Monday by Richard Dela Sky, a private legal practitioner, who argues there were not enough parliamentarians present when the Bill was passed to make it lawful.



**Star-crossed: Ghana's future is in the balance, caught between bigotry and blackmail.** Illustration: Wynona Mutisi

If enacted, the “Human Sexual Rights and Family Values Bill” will impose prison sentences of up to five years for the “wilful promotion, sponsorship or support of LGBTQ+ activities”. The Bill has been criticised by local civil society groups, who say that it would violate Ghana’s constitution. “Our constitution protects minorities against oppression at the hands of a majority,” said the Centre for Democratic Development. ■



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# Haiti is still being punished for overthrowing slave-owners

**Kenya's proposed intervention should not ignore the Caribbean island nation's complex history.**

**Simon Allison**

**H**oward French, the author of *Born in Blackness: Africa, Africans and the Making of the Modern World*, describes the Haitian Revolution of 1792 as “one of the most remarkable stories of liberation that we have as a species: the largest revolt of enslaved people in human history, and the only one known to have produced a free state”.

That state, occupying about a third of the Caribbean island of Saint-Domingue – once the most lucrative of all the French colonies – was named Haiti. It successfully defied the collective might of the British, Spanish and French armies, becoming the first independent, black-led republic in the western hemisphere.

Unable to defeat Haiti militarily, colonial powers devised another punishment. France imposed an “indemnity” of 150-million francs – a staggeringly large sum for the time – saying that it needed to compensate slave-owners for their lost land. France also sought to make an example of Haiti, to discourage rebellions elsewhere.

Haiti's new rulers, wary of being invaded again, agreed to pay. The country has been paying ever since.

In a 2022 investigation, the *New York Times* described “a debt so large, and so lasting, that it would help cement Haiti's path to poverty and underdevelopment”.

Its reporters estimated that the “indemnity” cost Haiti \$122-billion in lost revenue and missed economic opportunities. “Haiti became the first and only country where the descendants of enslaved people paid the families of their former masters for generations,” the investigation concluded.

The massive debt – later bought out by an American firm, during a decades-long occupation by the United States, which continued to extract enormous revenues from the country – has made it impossible for Haiti to prosper. “This hobbled Haiti's chances of developing viable financial and democratic institutions for much of the 19th and 20th centuries,” wrote Malick W. Ghachem, a professor of history at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in *Foreign Policy* magazine.

There is a direct link between this



**The Haitian Revolution: Slave rebellion on the night of 21 August 1791, c. 1815.**  
**Private Collection.** Photo: Fine Art Images/Heritage Images/Getty Images

punitive debt burden and the near-total breakdown of the rule of law in Haiti today, argues Ghachem. “Pervasive state-sanctioned gang activity is just the most visible reflection of the primary, though under-recognised, driver of Haiti’s catastrophe: the country’s broken monetary system, which is a legacy of its colonial past.”

It was in an effort to address this catastrophe that Prime Minister Ariel Henry travelled to Nairobi last week. He is the country’s de facto leader after the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in 2021, but he does not even control its capital city: some 80% of Port-au-Prince is thought to be run by heavily-armed gangs. And while Henry was in Nairobi, the gangs struck again: this time, attacking two major prisons and releasing nearly 4,000 prisoners. Fierce street battles between various gangs and the police

continued throughout this week, and on Wednesday the international airport was attacked.

In Nairobi, Henry signed a deal with Kenyan President William Ruto to send 1,000 Kenyan policemen to quell the violence in Haiti. This is being underwritten by the US to the tune of \$200-million (“thus sparing the United States from spilling any of its own blood in whatever battles may be upcoming,” said journalist Amy Wilentz in *The Nation*). Benin has also offered to deploy 2,000 soldiers.

Assuming they are eventually deployed (this is far from certain: one Kenyan court has already declared the deal illegal), it is unclear what difference, if any, a few thousand policemen with no local knowledge or context will make. There are around 200 gangs operating in the country: “So that makes 15 men, if all the countries sign up, to control each gang,” observed Wilentz.

It would be difficult, dangerous work – and serves only to distract from the urgent need to free Haiti from its economic shackles. “A concerted international campaign to support Haiti’s financial sovereignty is the real intervention that Haiti needs – and possibly the only one,” said Ghachem.

The Haitian crisis has its roots in the enslavement of black Africans. It is a bitter irony that the very same western nations responsible now propose a solution that involves paying to put black Africans in danger – while refusing to take any responsibility for the historical injustices which led the country to this point. ■



**Bad sports: Kenyan officials Stephen Soi and Francis Kanyili faced corruption charges relating to the 2016 Olympics. Photo: Elsa/Getty Images**

## Africa's sportspeople deserve a level playing field

**Instead, even before they get inside a stadium, they must deal all too often with corruption, negligence and abuse from sports managers and administrators.**

**Kalungi Kabuye**

**K**enyan athletes staged a protest at Nyayo stadium on Wednesday, delaying the selection trials for the All Africa track and field games. The Kenyan athletes, and many fans, were angry that national sports managers planned to take just one person per discipline in the competitions happening in Accra later this month. Kenya has historically taken three people per discipline.

“How can the government take only

one athlete? What happens to the rest who have invested for this day?” asked 800m world champion Mary Moraa, who led the protest, according to Kenyan journalist Michelle Katami.

Jaded Kenyan athletics fans reacted with outrage – but not surprise.

“We all know this script. They’ll keep the rest of the slots for their girlfriends and children,” said one Kenyan on social media. Another concluded: “Kenyan sports persons are world beaters; Kenyan sports managers are a world disgrace.”

One does not have to look far to find other examples of incompetence, negligence or corruption. In one of the most egregious, in 2016, Kenya's cabinet secretary for sports was charged with embezzling most of the \$6-million that was budgeted for the country's Olympic team. Together with the team's chef de mission, they were found guilty and ordered to pay fines amounting to almost \$1-million, a sentence that caused an uproar in Kenya. Both officials paid the fines – and presumably kept the change.

The athletes' protest this week had some impact. By Thursday morning, Kenya Athletics had somehow found room in the budget to accommodate 50 athletes for Accra, instead of the 32 initially announced.

Despite the off-track challenges, Kenya's athletes remain among the best in the world. Faith Kipyegon holds the world record for the 1,500m and the 5,000m. Brigid Kosgei is the fastest women marathon runner in history. Eliud Kipchoge the fastest man in the same discipline. The list goes on. Imagine what they could do in an environment that supported their progress, instead of holding them back?

### **A case study in sports corruption**

The Uganda women's netball team is all too familiar with that unfortunate script. They could be world beaters, yet are undermined by disgraceful officials. Now ranked sixth in the world and second in Africa, the She Cranes are Uganda's most successful national team. That success has come not because of the government, but



**Skim scam: Ugandan official Patrick Ogwel was accused of pocketing a netballers' pay.**

in spite of it. Its tribulations are almost as legendary as its sporting prowess.

The team moved from eight to six in the world after strong performances recently in Wales and England. But the team's fluidity on the pitch masked the months-long chaos it had lived through back home.

Appearing on TV in February 2023, the Uganda Netball Federation president Sarah Babirye Kityo blew the whistle on her boss, the general secretary of the National Council of Sports Patrick Ogwel. She said that he asked her to account for 425-million Uganda shillings (\$109,000), when he had given her only 186-million shillings (\$48,000).

An investigation by the government ombudsman confirmed these allegations, finding that Ogwel had received more than 100-million shillings (\$26,000) in kickbacks from the netball federation



**Netball stars: The She Cranes are Uganda's best sports side, yet have had endless indignities heaped upon them by sports administrators.** Photo: Elsa/Getty Images

– the money was skimmed off players' allowances. Ogwel denied the allegations against him, and Uganda's parliament undertook a second investigation. This time around, it was the whistleblower Kityo who ended up in prison, for failing to account for the funds that she said had been stolen. Ogwel did not respond to requests for comment.

The episode is only the latest for the long suffering team.

In 2013, the netball team travelled by road to Malawi to participate in the African Nations Cup, arriving when the games had already begun. After the gruelling 2,400km bus ride, they had to play the same day they got there. With barely any sustenance (other teams offered

them water) the girls played their hearts out and managed to get third place.

**An investigation found that Ogwel had received more than 100-million shillings in kickbacks, skimmed off player's allowances.**

Later that year they won the Nations Netball Cup in Singapore despite similar drama. The team missed their flight after funds arrived late, forfeited their first game and after an 11-hour journey, got to Singapore just six hours before they had to play Ireland. They won, and continued winning till they beat hosts Singapore in the final.

## The rot runs wide and deep

Ugandan and Kenyan sports officials are hardly the only ones mired in allegations of corruption, neglect and abuse.

In Cameroon, the legendary Samuel Eto'o – who now heads the country's soccer federation, Fecafoot – is being investigated by the Confederation of African Football (CAF) for alleged match-fixing. CAF says it presumes him innocent until proven guilty, and Eto'o denies all the allegations.

Audio recordings sent to CAF indicate that Eto'o promised to promote one club, owned by an ally of his, from the country's third division. It was duly promoted. The dossier of allegations also lays out a Fecafoot management dispute between Eto'o and his deputy Njala Quan Junior, in which the president allegedly retaliated by fixing a match to humiliate the team owned by the vice-president.

In the 2023 Women's Football World Cup, Nigerian players threatened to boycott the games because of unpaid bonuses and allowances dating back several years. Although they eventually played (they were eliminated in the quarters by champions England), they resumed the fight once they went back home. They are still fighting.

In a 2015 report on corruption in African sports, Transparency International found serious problems with sports governance across the continent. It cited problems with elections to both regional and national associations, the management of players' allowances and bonuses, match-fixing, and even human trafficking.

In some instances, corrupt officials



**Left field: Nigeria's star women footballers are fighting to get paid their due.**

Photo: Justin Setterfield/Getty Images

are often doing a lot more harm than pocketing money. Last October, the BBC revealed that young boys in Gabonese football had been sexually assaulted by coaches, and other older men in sports, for decades. Some of the 30 witnesses who spoke to the reporters, including former Gabon international Parfait Ndong, said national sports officials were alerted to the abuse but did not act to stop or punish it.

In 2019, Ghanaian journalist Ahmed Hussein Suale exposed widespread corruption within the national football federation, causing the federation to be dissolved. He was killed just months after the story came out.

While these may all seem like isolated examples, taken together they show a disturbing pattern of sports managers and administrators impeding the progress of the athletes they are supposed to be supporting. That so many African sports stars achieve glory anyway is a testament to just how deep this continent's pool of talent really is – and a reminder of how much potential there is still to fulfil. ■

# For the Springbok Women, the try line is finally in sight

After decades of neglect, the South African women's rugby team is finally getting the support it needs.

Lee Nxumalo

After a triumphant 2023 Rugby World Cup campaign, the Springboks confirmed their status as the most successful national side in men's rugby. The question that now gets asked is: can the women's side do it too?

While the comparison is inevitable, it is entirely unrealistic. As former Springbok Women coach Stanley Raubenheimer told *Rugby World*: "It would be unfair to expect the women to emulate the success of the men given the vastly different circumstances within the rugby systems in South Africa. Women's rugby is still in its infancy over here, but there is a lot of effort going into the game."

The team was formed in 2004, and two years later they made their debut in the Women's Rugby World Cup, also participating in the 2010 and 2014 editions. But in 2017, SA Rugby decided to forfeit their participation in the tournament to focus on rebuilding the women's game further following disappointing results.

In the following years, there were significant changes aimed at revitalising women's rugby. SA Rugby took steps to

bolster the women's rugby programme, including hiring Lynn Cantwell, a former captain of Ireland's women's team, as the high performance manager. Additionally, 19 other positions were created to develop the sport including the appointment of Raubenheimer in 2018.

This involved creating what Cantwell called the "big pillars", a direction that would move them from a developmental stage to performance-focused goals.

On a senior level, the goal was to get the team back on the world stage after a four-year absence. They managed to secure victories in the Rugby Africa Women's Cup in 2019, 2022, and 2023.

But 2022 brought some challenges for women's rugby. The team endured a disappointing group stage exit at the 2021 Rugby Women's World Cup, losing all three games, including a discouraging 75-0 defeat against England.

Yet Cantwell still found the year to be a step forward for the team. "We managed to get back into the tournament. You can't get good at World Cups unless you're in them," she told *The Continent*. "There's growth. I know everyone judges the programme on World Cups, but where we were at that stage, we needed to gain game experience.



“We’re going to have to play a lot of games and get better and that’s okay because we’re learning to win.”

The Springboks Women are under the guidance of former Springbok Louis Koen, who assumed the role of interim coach in March 2023. The team is 13th in the world rankings and finished their WXV2 campaign with a 33-7 victory over Samoa.

The 20th anniversary of the team this year coincides with preparations for the upcoming Paris Olympics for the sevens team and the 2025 Women’s Rugby World Cup for the 15s and that places a sharp focus on the team’s progress.

On the local front, significant strides have been made on the club level. Last year, the Bulls Daisies, a part of the Blue Bulls franchise, achieved a historic milestone by becoming the country’s first fully

professional women’s rugby club team. Their remarkable journey culminated in winning the Women’s Premier Division title, as they won every game they played throughout the season.

Goitseone Nche, also known as Fox Nche – the younger sister of Springbok Ox Nche – currently plays tighthead prop for the Free State Cheetahs. By her account, she has witnessed a lot of changes within club structures. Not only is rugby becoming a more viable career for women, but there is more visibility, now more than ever.

“I’ve been playing since I was in the unders and there has been a huge change ... there is more recognition as our games are being played on TV and in the past, that didn’t really happen,” the 26-year-old told *The Continent*. ■



**Power through:**  
South Africa's  
Nolusindiso  
Booi smashes  
through the  
Italy line in their  
October 2023  
clash. Photo:  
Ashley Vlotman/  
Gallo Images/  
Getty Images

## PHOTO ESSAY

# Taking us for a spin

The Showmax hit *Spinnners* introduced the world to a daredevil motorsport that was once the preserve of South Africa's underworld. Spinning has its origins in the early 1980s in Soweto, Johannesburg, where gangsters and criminals would steal cars and "spin" them at their friends' funerals. This evolved into a dangerous art form, where drivers perform risky stunts while hanging outside a drifting vehicle – sometimes with their heads only centimetres from the tarmac. The more daring and risky the stunt, the more popular the driver becomes.

Spinning is now a recognised sport with officials, rules, competitions and fans. It is rapidly gaining popularity across southern Africa. Participants load their spin cars onto trailers and drive them to meets in South Africa, Botswana, Eswatini, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The rewards are more about pride than prize money, with even the top drivers only earning just a few hundred dollars per spin. Photojournalist **Shiraz Mohamed** was among the fanatical crowd at events in Manzini, Eswatini and Johannesburg, South Africa.



**Shoulder to the wheel: Driver Nkosikhona Nxumalo (King-Khona) performs a stunt at a crossborder spin event in Manzini, Eswatini.**



Left: Team Ra-Ra's Taahir Hassan wows the crowds with his theatrics at a spin event in a township in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Below: Spin-loving spectators cheer on a driver in Manzini.



Left: Young Alayah Mahomed sits behind the wheel of a Jozi 011 team car. We're not entirely sure whether she's the actual driver or not.



**Top: Sparks fly as a spinner takes things up a gear at a night event on the Manzini course.**

**Bottom: Dust and smoke churn in the wake of an Eswatini spinner's rubber-burning theatrics.**



**Them's the brakes:** Spin cars often break down and it is essential to have an onsite mechanic.



**Pop the hood:** An aerial shot showing a driver tending to his car after its bonnet flew open.



**Tread softly for you dream of my treads:** A crew member carries a shredded tyre.



**Top: People give King-Khona space as he executes a dusty dusk-drive of daredevilry at the pit area in Manzini.**

**Bottom: Eswatini's spin-shakes bring all the boys and girls to the parking lot. As you can see, they can be in tents.**

## Information is power – if you can get it

**A**growing number of African countries – Zambia became the 28th this past December – are enacting right-to-information laws designed to ensure that people can access government information they need to be engaged citizens.

How well are these laws working?

Not very well, in the eyes of ordinary Africans.

Based on Afrobarometer surveys in 39 countries, large majorities say information about local government budgets (81%) and local government bids and contracts (78%) should be accessible to the public. A slimmer majority (55%) favour public

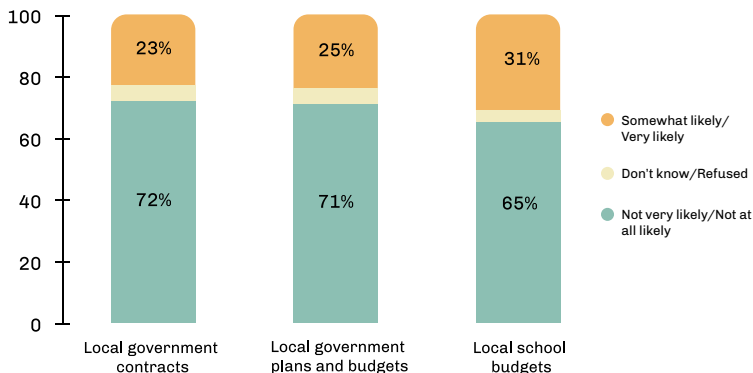
access to information about the salaries of local government officials and teachers.

But few people think they could actually get such information.

Most consider it unlikely that they could access local government contracts (72%), local government development plans and budgets (71%), or local school budgets (65%).

This view is widely shared across countries and demographic groups, suggesting that no matter people's gender, age, education level, economic status, or place of residence, they are largely getting the same message – that information held by public authorities is not theirs to see. ■

### Could you access information held by public officials? | 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 1,200-2,400 people in each country yield results with a margin of error of +/- two to three percentage points.

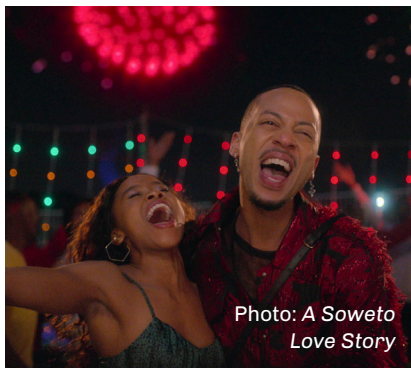


Photo: A Soweto  
Love Story

## Romance lost to labored love

The search continues for a  
marquee Netflix romance  
that's worth watching.

Wilfred Okiche

There is something about the season of love that brings out the mediocre in everyone's favourite streaming platform. From the so-called but not-quite Nollywood-Bollywood mash-up *Namaste Wahala* (2021) to last year's dismal *A Sunday Affair*, Netflix has consistently failed to deliver quality Valentine's Day programming worthy of lovers across the continent. Sadly, the trend continued this year with *A Soweto Love Story*.

An anxious, churchgoing mother, worried that her three sons – all eligible bachelors – might have committed to

remaining single for the rest of her life, comes up with a desperate plan to get them married. She promises the family estate to the first of the children who is able to tie the knot by Christmas, thus kickstarting a race for the altar that leads to not-so-surprising outcomes.

With shows like *Unseen* and *Fatal Seduction*, Netflix has made a strategy of repurposing international property that's worked elsewhere for the South African audience. This disturbing lack of originality rears its head once again as *A Soweto Love Story* is adapted from the 2021 film *A Naija Christmas*.

It isn't quite clear what purpose relocating this story from Lagos to Soweto serves and the director Rolie Nikiwe brings nothing fresh except maybe a cynical calculatedness that functions as an antithesis to the charm and cheese of the better romantic comedies.

Despite presenting at least three potential couplings, there is a dreadful shortage of romance or laughs in *A Soweto Love Story*. The story feels incredulous, characters are merely props that never come to life, and the city pretty much never figures in the design.

No excuses, but Nigerian homophobic laws can probably explain the problematic queer-baiting that marred the original film. Replicating that here in a society that operates a bit differently and just for cheap laughs betrays a creative insufficiency with the team and thinking that cobbled this remake together. Suffice it to say that the film does not justify its existence. ■



# 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**

"No gnus are good gnus, the warthog said, bewildering the bees."



Photo: Marco Longari/AFP

- 1\_** Nana Akufo-Addo is which country's president?
- 2\_** What is the currency of The Gambia?
- 3\_** Gnu are antelope native to eastern and southern Africa. What other name are they also known as?
- 4\_** Egypt's national flag is tricoloured. What are the three colours?
- 5\_** The Richat Structure, or Guelb er Richât, (pictured) is a geological formation found in which country?
- 6\_** In which year did the 'Republic of Upper Volta' gain full independence?
- 7\_** The Republic of Upper Volta was renamed in 1984. Who instituted this change?
- 8\_** Italian Tripolitania was a colony (1911-1934) located in which present-day country?
- 9\_** King Idris I of Libya was overthrown by which colonel in 1969?
- 10\_** South Western Townships is the original full name of which South African township?

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

# In Uganda, the Speaker has not spoken

A trove of leaked documents appear to show that Anita Among, Uganda's Speaker of Parliament, spends a staggering \$100,000 per week. Much of this is disbursed in cash to key aides, raising concerns about corruption and misappropriation. The documents were released by campaigning journalist Agather Atuhairre. The Speaker's office has denied wrongdoing, but the Speaker herself has not addressed the controversy.



**Speak no evil: Anita Among has not personally addressed the controversy.**

Photo: Anita Annet Among/Facebook

## Poem by P.A.

*The Speaker has not spoken*

*The activists have sent a thundering echo across the nation  
A legion of warriors wielding handsets and overtaxed megabytes*

*Baying for blood*

*They say she has the long claws of a nocturnal lemur  
Her talons scrape the dregs from the bottom of the national pot  
She skulks off into the depths of her hulking edifice with caches  
Enough to patch the potholes and the fabric of social services*

*In the corridors of the August House*

*The legislators have laid down the law of gluttonous public duty  
The citizens stifle the pangs of despair with fervent prayers for civic deliverance  
And open their eyes to phantom service delivery*

*The Speaker has not spoken*

*Her legendary sprightly mouth is bountifully sealed!*

**S**patulas at the ready, reader! We've been cooking up a storm in the kitchen lately. And by "cooking" we don't just mean standing in front of the open fridge stuffing our faces with whatever's handy. Needs must, you see, when the gourmet dishes we would like to one day become accustomed to, rather rudely refuse to magically appear out of thin air.

And we wouldn't want to be caught with our aprons down if one or another of our lovely leaders decided to come to dinner.

But what should we put on the menu to satisfy such illustrious palates?

There would have to be dishes from all around the world, so that the current title holder of the Dora the Explorer of Kenyan presidents, William Ruto, will feel at home. Trout,

perhaps! Lightly poached in a peppery tear-gas bouillon, followed by stuffed ballot-box chicken and delicately capped off with some no-term-limit tarts, served on pages of old constitutions.

If they come for breakfast, they'll only get bowls of coup coup pops, but dinner guests will surely relish the rigged rigatoni and stuffed ~~autocrats~~ apricots and, for dessert, "dictators delight", which features

biscuits in the shapes of opposition leaders, so that the gang can literally bite off their heads. (Activity-based pudding always goes down well among those known to favour unjust desserts.) And for the more elderly amongst our leaderly guests who find chewing a little difficult – no names mentioned – they will be served a soupçon of *creme de la corruption*.

Their busy lives mean that picking out a date for our dinner party may be pose a challenge. For example, authorities in Chad recently announced that the country will hold elections on 6 May.

But then just days later the country's interim president Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno made a big announcement – this is one you may want to sit down for, folks – saying that *he* would be throwing

his hat in the ring!

All right, maybe you didn't have to sit down for that. *Quelle surprise*, right? The formal announcement of his decision came just days after prominent opposition figure Yaya Dillo, who had also been expected to run for president, was killed in what authorities claim was an exchange of fire with security forces.

This went down at the headquarters

## Big men, big menu



### CONTINENTAL DRIFT

Samira Sawlani

of Parti Socialiste Sans Frontières, the opposition party accused by the government of leading an attack against the country's intelligence agency. Naturally, amid all this the public's access to the internet was cut off. Par for the course these days, but with two months to the election, it's not a great look.

Also regrettably unable to lunch will be Macky Sall, who has finally announced the date for Senegal's unpostponed elections: 24 March. It's a pity he won't be able to make it. We had intended to apologise for all the scoffing we did when we wondered if he wasn't delaying elections just because he wanted to stay in office beyond the end of his presidential term.

So if you're reading this, Macky old chap, we're sorry. We clearly have some trust issues to work through, thanks in part to the actions of some of your peers. But let's face it, you've been such a busy bee lately that if it wasn't for the constitutional council thwarting your plans, who knows when you would have eventually remembered to leave office!

Now then, to the seating arrangements. We'd better not put the CIA next to the Wagner contingent again, that got so awkward the last time! And we can't seat them near Emmerson Mnangagwa either, after the Americans said they were dropping some old sanctions against Zimbabwe – to make way for a whole bunch of new ones! Including against President Mnangagwa, for “involvement in corruption or serious human rights abuses”. Zimbabwe's government are in *quite* the huff about it, taking “great



**Stroll: Chad's interim leader Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno says he's running for president. Or maybe just sauntering.**

exception to gratuitous slander” by the US, whose sanctions were “a continuation of wanton hostilities against Zimbabwe”.

### Hard to swallow

We are forever aware that having access to food is a privilege, though it should be a right. This week the World Food Programme said the war in Sudan risks triggering “the world's largest hunger crisis”, with over 25-million people across Sudan, South Sudan, and Chad “trapped in a spiral of deteriorating food security”, and unable to access food assistance due to actions of the warring parties.

At the same time we are seeing reports from Gaza of people dying from starvation. South Africa has once more approached the International Court of Justice for additional measures to prevent a catastrophic famine in the Gaza strip.

As fat cats pat their bellies between endless courses, for Sudan and Palestine we ask: When will *justice* be served? ■

# How to end extreme poverty? Give cash *directly* to the poor

**We can accelerate the end of extreme poverty by simply sending the poorest people some cash. We have the technology to do it. So let us create a global fund to raise the money.**

**Cina Lawson in Lomé  
and Rory Stewart**

**E**nding extreme poverty by 2030 is the top priority for humanity set by the United Nations. Despite some progress, and \$200-billion spent annually on international development, we remain far off track. Globally, about 700-million people survive on less than \$2.15 per day. Rapidly scaling up direct cash transfers to the poorest households could accelerate the end of this extreme poverty.

Although less than 5% of the \$200-billion in development aid goes to cash transfers, their positive impact is well documented and undeniable.

Research shows that transfers increase school enrolment and entrepreneurship; decrease skipped meals, illness, and depression; and reduce domestic violence.

Importantly, they neither reduce hours worked nor increase spending on temptation goods like tobacco and alcohol.

Even better, every \$1 transfer has a spillover effect of around \$2.50 in the local economy. Three years after the transfer,

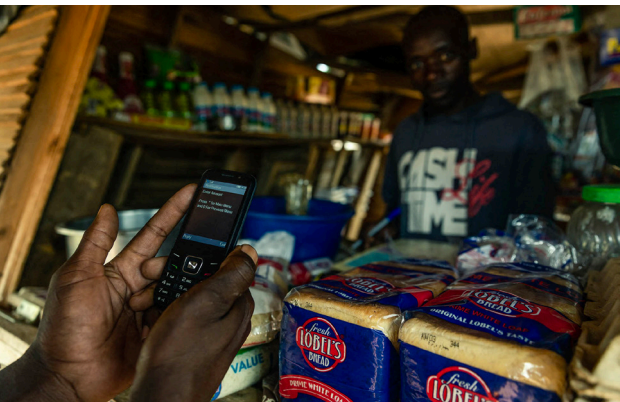
recipients are still earning more and are better educated. Recent research from Kenya showed that a \$500 lump-sum cash transfer was particularly effective in empowering families to make income-generating investments.

Equally important is that we now have the technology to reach the world's poorest people en masse with direct transfers. New digital technologies have dramatically lowered the cost and expanded our capacity to deliver money safely to the poorest parts of the world.

During the pandemic, Togo used mobile-phone data and satellite imagery to identify people in need of relief. Its Novissi programme used USSD tech found on all mobile devices to reach and verify recipients, distributing \$34-million to help 920,000 people. The Togo pilot has been carefully studied and is now being scaled up to a \$100-million programme, with World Bank support.

Now that these and many other programmes have demonstrated the effectiveness of cash transfers, the question is how to globalise this solution.

We propose establishing a new global



**Extreme success: Cash transfer schemes have been shown to lift out of extreme poverty not just the initial beneficiaries, but their communities – benefits that outlast the aid programme.**

Photo: Jekesai Njikizana/AFP

fund for eradicating extreme poverty through lump-sum direct cash transfers. The money required would come from a mix of philanthropists, institutions, and governments, similar to how the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis, and Malaria raises its funds.

Cash transfers would be offered not as a substitute for other interventions, but rather as a complement. After all, if families still lack access to health care, education, and employment opportunities, additional cash will not help as much as it could.

It should be unacceptable in today's world that hundreds of millions of families still struggle for food and adequate shelter.

Children should not face stunted growth and development, or be unable to complete their education.

This type of poverty isn't just painful;

it is a tragic waste of human potential. For the first time, the world has both the money and the methods to break the cycle of extreme poverty and desperation. What are we waiting for?

The benefits of the lump sum direct cash would extend beyond the initial payment. Individuals and families who sign up for mobile money to receive the cash transfer would also gain a financial address, for saving deposits, business financing, receiving remittances from abroad or national government emergency cash support during disasters; and longer-term support if they are part of perennially disadvantaged groups.

By addressing dozens of problems simultaneously, cash transfers have the potential to be transformative. While they alone will not end extreme poverty, they represent a concrete catalyst. ■

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*Cina Lawson is the Minister of Digital Economy and Digital Transformation of Togo. Rory Stewart, a former foreign aid minister of the United Kingdom, is a senior adviser at GiveDirectly, a nonprofit that sends unconditional cash transfers to people living in extreme poverty. © Project Syndicate 1995–2024*

# A change agent's work is never done

## Nigeria's 'Obidient' phenomenon has not birthed a more effective opposition.

**Chris O. Ògúnmodéde**

**A**head of Nigeria's 2023 presidential election, Peter Obi was described as an emergent "third force" candidate. Some even believed he could lead the Labour Party – once a minor concern – to break the duopoly of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Nigeria's largest opposition party.

Although Obi lost, the Labour Party achieved some significant breakthroughs, including winning a gubernatorial race in Abia State as well as 36 seats in the House of Representatives and eight in the senate.

Along with Obi's promise to focus on policy solutions rather than identity politics, this inspired hope that the Labour Party might become a more credible opposition to the APC than the PDP, which has been ineffective since it lost power in 2015.

But this has not materialised.

The Labour Party has proven to be no less constrained by the idiosyncrasies of Nigeria's party system than the two major parties. It was little more than a special purpose vehicle for Obi's presidential ambition, and since his defeat has become

beset by defections and infighting. Just last month, a fresh crisis in the party surfaced over new allegations of the misappropriation of funds raised for the 2023 election campaign.

This helps to explain why the party's candidates have subsequently performed poorly in gubernatorial elections in Kogi, Bayelsa and Imo states and in state and national legislative by-elections held in February.

Obi has also failed to stick to his guns, and has not played a major role in debates about policy or other issues in the public interest. Supporters of Obi and the Labour Party argue that these developments reflect the uphill battle faced by opposition parties in Nigeria, where the ruling party enjoys large advantages of incumbency.

But if Obi does not keep his promise of holding the government to account, it may undermine his ability to once again sell himself as a "change" candidate come the next elections. ■



*Chris O. Ògúnmodéde is a consultant and analyst of West African politics and security. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa*

# THE BIG PICTURE

Cruel tide: Sixty-five people ventured north on the Atlantic from a village in Mauritania, seeking a better life in what was little more than a canoe. When the ill-fated voyage ended in capsizing on the coast of São Vicente in Cape Verde this week, only five were still alive.

Photo: Queila Fernandes/AFP



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