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The Continent



**The price
of beer**

Illustration: Wynona Mutisi



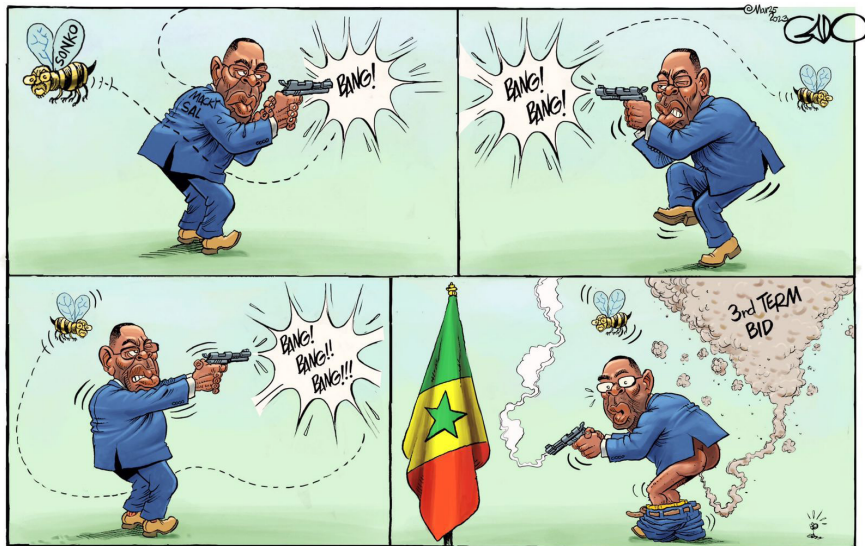
Cover: On land on the outskirts of the Ethiopian capital, Heineken built a new brewery. The venture pushed Heineken towards the top of the market. But to make space, the state sent in bulldozers and special police to force an entire community to relocate, shattering lives and livelihoods. Land grabs are alive and well. (p14)

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We're taking a break

Our journalists have reported from 20 different countries so far this year. You've read their reporting in at least 130 countries (48 of those in Africa). We've tackled racism, cooking on TikTok, elections, the pope, and the climate crisis. Now it's time to wrap up our ninth season and take a small publishing break. Over the next few weeks we'll be observing protocol, planning our next run, commissioning new journalism and recharging our batteries so we can make season 10 *The Continent's* best yet. See you at the end of April.



TUNISIA

Europe or back home: migrants race against time

Nearly 3,000 of the 7,000 Ivorians who lived in Tunisia have registered for repatriation since President Kais Saied triggered anti-black violence with unfounded claims that migrants were part of a plot to “change the demographic composition”. But the panic is driving many others among the country’s 21,000 black migrants to double down on attempting the desperate journey to Europe. The Tunisian National Guard says it intercepted more than 2,000 migrants on the sea in just two days this week.

MOZAMBIQUE

Over 100 arrested for mourning rap icon Azagaia

Mozambican police arrested more than 100 people from street marches mourning the death of rapper Edson da Luz, better known by his stage name Azagaia. He was hated by the ruling elite for his hard-hitting and irreverent lyrics that criticised corruption and poor governance in the country. Social media videos from democracy activists in Mozambique showed police beating up and bundling people at the processions into cars. The country’s president has ordered an inquiry into how the police conducted itself.



Photo: Cotedivoireoff

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Haller 1 – Cancer 0

Ivorian forward Sébastien Haller returned to the national team this week for Friday's Afcon qualifier against Comoros, after cancer treatment that involved two operations and four rounds of chemotherapy. The 28-year-old was diagnosed with testicular cancer just weeks after his transfer from Ajax to Borussia Dortmund in Germany. He has been back on club duty since January, but Friday was the first time he was appearing for Côte d'Ivoire's national team, the Elephants, since his diagnosis.

ETHIOPIA

Tigray rebels are no longer terrorists

Ethiopia's federal government removed the Tigray People's Liberation Front from its list of terrorist organisations and appointed its leader Getachew Reda, to head the region's interim government. This is all part of a belated peace agreement brokered by the African Union last November after two years of war between the two parties killed tens of thousands. Nearly a million were displaced from their homes and traumatised by war brutality that included the use of rape as a weapon.

MALI

French journalist freed after two years in detention

Olivier Dubois, a French journalist who was kidnapped by militants in northern Mali nearly two years ago, was released this week, with the help of the government of Niger. He arrived in France on Tuesday, a day after his release, and was welcomed by the country's president, Emmanuel Macron. He told Radio France International that while his captors didn't beat or humiliate him, they kept him chained and left him outside, even during sandstorms and rain. He was captured in April 2021.

ZIMBABWE

Give the president a ribbon to cut, get a cut of gold

With sanctions in place, Zimbabwean elites are struggling to finance their lush lifestyles. Legally, anyway. This week, undercover *Al Jazeera* reporters recorded a mix of people, including Uebert Angel – Zimbabwe’s ambassador-at-large and envoy to President Emmerson Mnangagwa – offering to launder “dirty” money by swapping it for gold from the state refinery. They were also told a good way to launder money is to buy property, which had the benefit of allowing Mnangagwa “to cut a ribbon” and show how much he is improving Zimbabwe.

UNITED KINGDOM

Braverman’s mixed signals in Rwanda

British home secretary Suella Braverman was in Rwanda last weekend to push the United Kingdom’s “immigration” plan to dump refugees and asylum-seekers in the East African nation. The minister, accompanied by journalists from right-wing newspapers, proclaimed Rwanda to be a wonderful country to end up in, while also saying the prospect of being sent there will “act as a powerful deterrent” for migrants headed to Britain.

UGANDA

Brutal homophobic law breezes through parliamentary vote

After three weeks of considering it, Uganda’s Parliament passed a sweeping anti-homosexuality law that includes the death penalty for what it calls “aggravated homosexuality” and prison terms for simply identifying as LGBTQI, landlords who rent houses to LGBTQI people, journalists who tell stories about them in the media and a fine for lawyers who represent them in court. Even in Uganda, it has been criticised as unconstitutional and will likely be challenged in court if the country’s president signs it into law.



Arrest those rainbows. Photo: Delwyn Verasamy

INTERNATIONAL CRIME

Nigerian politician tried to buy street trader's kidney

Politician Ike Ekweremadu, who was deputy president of Nigeria's senate for 12 years (2007-2019), was convicted this week in the United Kingdom for organ trafficking. His wife and their Nigerian doctor were also convicted. Prosecutors convinced the court that the three transported a 21-year-old street trader from Lagos to London, having paid or offered to pay him to give his kidney to Ekweremadu's daughter, who had dropped out of film school because of renal disease. The buying of human organs is illegal across the world.

NIGERIA

Pre-presidential rest

After a "very exhaustive" presidential campaign, president-elect Bola Ahmed Tinubu needs a rest – and there is nowhere in Nigeria he can get one, apparently. According to various media reports, he has jetted off to London and Paris, though his team would not confirm his location. Nigerians are wary of leaders who spend too much time abroad: earlier in his presidency, Muhammadu Buhari disappeared for months to seek unspecified medical treatment in London, while the late former president Umaru Yar'Adua spent three months in a hospital in Saudi Arabia, only to die in office on his return in 2010.

SOUTH AFRICA

Can't see corruption if the lights are out

At his appointment, South Africa's new electricity minister, Kgosientsho Ramokgopa, was told that corruption plagues the country's power utility Eskom – best known for its rolling blackouts. He is now visiting power stations to see if he can find any corruption. This week he visited Kusile, a power plant whose completion is a decade behind schedule and at least \$10-billion over budget. During the tour the minister said: "The problems I see here are more technical than corruption taking place."



See no evil: South Africa's electricity minister, Kgosientsho Ramokgopa, says he has seen no evidence of electricrery. Photo: Kgosientsho_R

Somalia

The drought killed 43,000 people in 2022

And there is still no sign of rain this 'rainy season'

Liban Mohamed in Dolow

Somalia's rainy season is between March and June. Or, rather, it used to be. If the rains don't arrive this year – and the forecast is for more dry weather – it will be the sixth failed rainy season in a row.

According to statistics released by the government this week, the drought caused at least 43,000 excess deaths last year. Half of those who died are thought to have been children under five.

An estimated 1.4-million people have been forced from their homes by the extreme weather. That's nearly 10% of the entire population.

On the outskirts of Dolow, a small town in the south-west of the country, Kaxareey camp hosts several thousand displaced people.

Among them is Mama Ainab, who fled from Baidoa last year with her two children, losing everything in the process:

her home, her shop, her livelihood. And Hawa Siad, who travelled hundreds of miles in search of food and water for her family, losing a child along the way. She's worried about her other children, who are not getting any education at the camp, and who need more food and water than the camp is able to provide.

"Life has been very difficult," Siad told *The Continent*.

Humanitarian agencies say that Somalia needs \$2.6-billion in emergency aid to cope with the impact of the prolonged drought, which has been linked to climate change.

"The people of Somalia are paying the price for a climate emergency they did very little to create," said Salah Jama, deputy prime minister in the federal government. ■



Dessicated: Baidoa in Somalia has some of the highest malnutrition rates in the country. Photo: WFP/Geneva Costopoulos

Kenya

Meta faces third lawsuit as axed moderators point to ‘union-busting’ tactics

Workers who reviewed Facebook and Instagram content in east and southern Africa say they were blacklisted for speaking out about working conditions

Kiri Rupiah

A judge in Nairobi has issued an interim order blocking Facebook and its partner Sama from laying off its content moderation workforce. The layoffs, thought to affect about 260 workers, were meant to conclude by the end of March. Reuters reported that the social media giant, known for tax avoidance and algorithms that spread hate, is also barred from subcontracting its moderation in eastern and southern Africa.

It is a blow for Facebook’s parent company, Meta, which outsources moderation globally. Using partners like Sama gives it “distance” if anything goes wrong, as it did in Kenya last year when workers revealed details of poor salaries and horrific working conditions, including having to watch and moderate videos of child sex abuse and murder.

Meta said it could not be sued in Kenya because it did not directly employ

the workers. A Kenyan court disagreed and the case is still to be heard. Sama responded by shutting down its content review arm in January.

In a court application on 17 March, those in line for layoffs argued that their contracts were unlawfully terminated, as they were not issued a 30-day termination notice required by Kenyan law, and that severance pay was linked to the signing of non-disclosure agreements. They also claimed that the company Meta picked to replace Sama had blacklisted all of them.

This latest lawsuit is the third Meta is facing in Kenya, after another case was filed last December by Kenyan NGO Katiba Institute and two Ethiopian researchers. It claims that Facebook’s alleged amplification of hateful content – and failure to hire enough personnel with an understanding of local languages to moderate content – may have inflamed the conflicts that have led to the deaths of tens of thousands of Ethiopians. ■

Mauritania

Jailbreak sparks internet shutdown

Louisa Mugabo

Late on Sunday 5 March, four prisoners escaped from the central prison in Nouakchott, killing two soldiers in the process. Authorities described the prisoners as jihadist terrorists.

The next day, internet connectivity was cut for customers of all three major mobile providers – Mattel, Chinguitel and Moov Mauritel – supposedly to prevent the escapees from communicating.

“There was a lot of incomprehension,” recalls Abdou Biye, a comedian and online content creator. A week later, the government said three escapees had been killed and the fourth recaptured. On 13 March, internet connectivity was restored.

Local journalist Aliya Abass said the internet blackout made her work more difficult than usual. “We did not have access to information, and even when we had a piece of information, we had no way of verifying it,” she told *The Continent*.

It was not just journalists who struggled to work. Mauritania is heavily

reliant on mobile connectivity for everyday business. “For a predominantly trading population, the cost must be enormous,” Abass said. On the first day of the shutdown, hundreds of people queued in front of shops selling routers in Nouakchott, as landline access was not affected.

The government justified the internet shutdown by saying “safety comes first”.

National security is among the most frequently cited justifications for internet disruptions globally – although human rights organisations are sceptical.

Last year, Access Now recorded more shutdowns than ever before, with 187 shutdowns in 35 countries

“Mauritania is a serial perpetrator of internet shutdowns,” explained Kassem Mnejja, a regional campaigner for Access Now, a global organisation that aims to protect digital human rights. In June 2019, a near-total shutdown was imposed after a contested presidential election. The internet is also routinely blocked during national exams.

Around the world, governments are increasingly resorting to shutting down the internet – usually in times of political stress. Last year, Access Now recorded more shutdowns than ever before, with 187 shutdowns in 35 countries. ■

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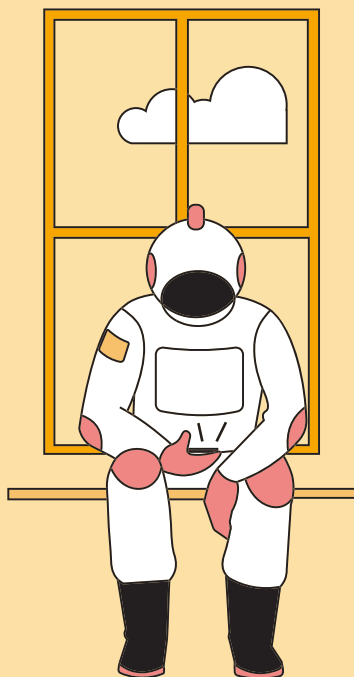
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Zimbabwe



Uphill struggle:
Mountain soil
boon will be over
soon. Photo: AFP/
Getty Images

The desperate short-termism of hilltop farming

Hotter temperatures are sending farmers into the mountains, where rich soil means more food on the table. But the soil will soon deplete, and deforestation means flash floods and mudslides will keep cropping up.

Jeffrey Moyo in Bocha

His forefathers farmed downhill, but three generations later, after droughts and repeated crop failures, Gibson Mudarikwa broke with the tradition. The 57-year-old and his family clambered up a nearby mountain, chopped down its magnificent trees, and turned the peak into a thriving maize field.

Home is still downhill, in the remote district of Bocha, more than 200km east of the capital Harare.

And Mudarikwa is not alone. His neighbour, 46-year-old Ashton Mujenya, says repeated heavy rains washed away the fertile soil in his old field, “leaving sand soils only”. And with fertiliser costs increasing dramatically, hilltops come with the bonus of soil that is incredibly

fertile and rich in nutrients. So he moved up the mountain – and things have turned around: “Last season, I harvested three tons of maize from the top.”

The government says farmers across the region are moving to mountains and hills to escape the droughts, floods, unpredictable seasons and all the other impacts of climate change.

Kudzai Ndidzano, a deputy director at the climate change management unit in the environment and climate ministry, says traditional farmlands “are worn out” and the soil holds less water. The hilltops have better soil because they haven’t been farmed, and years of decaying organic matter have created thriving ecosystems and healthy soil.

The local agriculture ministry says as many as 1,200 farmers have begun farming uphill in the last decade. And that creates a whole new set of problems.

Johnson Masaka, a professor looking at natural resource management at Midlands State University, says mountain tops act as sponges. They then slowly release water into streams that feed the lowlands. Tampering with this ecosystem means there’s less water seeping downhill and, when it does rain, the danger of flooding increases as there are no trees and plants to slow down the angry flow of water.

A geography high school teacher in the area, Jason Murevi, says this will also mean mudslides, which “would wash them all away, together with their homes”.

Railton Masango, an agricultural extension officer with the provincial agriculture ministry, is similarly concerned.

“Villagers farming on hilltops are happy that they are enjoying fertile soil, but soon worse could come,” he says. “With each season of farming, soil cover will erode away, exposing and shifting boulders on hilltops that will one day violently come crashing down on homes, humans and livestock”. With no soil, the hilltops will be as unproductive as the lowland farms people left behind.

Masango adds that villagers who think they have found ways around the drought risk learning the hard way that their solutions were only temporary.

Government’s Ndidzano agrees, reiterating the state’s position that people need to stick to “sustainable areas” for farming. “They should employ other climate change adaptation measures to ensure productivity is maintained,” he says.

But poor governance and a broken economy means that the state has not supported those measures, like rolling out irrigation at scale. This would help farmers grow crops year-round and look after their soil.

“Farmers in this province have no choice,” says agricultural extension officer Masango. “To escape they have to switch to any points on the hilltops where they can access fertile land upon which to continue their farming.”

And that means farmers are able to feed their families – for now, at least.

Thriving for now on the rich soil formed from decaying leaves, sticks, grass and all dead elements on the hills, farmers like Mudarikwa say that for them, there is no turning back. ■

Zimbabwe

Children are starving in Zimbabwe

Over 15,000 children in Zimbabwe were treated last year for severe wasting syndrome – malnutrition at its worst.

Panashe Makufa

Talent Makovero is depressed. “It’s been two weeks since my child fell severely ill. I have seen her body deteriorating, and it’s a difficult journey.”

When her daughter Taisha was born, she weighed 3.9kg. In the 15 months since, her weight has only doubled, leaving her at least 2kg smaller than is seen as healthy at her age.

Makovero, 19, and her unemployed husband cultivate small fields on the outskirts of Harare. Agriculture is the key source of income for two thirds of Zimbabwe’s population.

And yields are going down as the country heats and rainfall becomes more unpredictable.

Last year, Makovero’s family harvested just two bags of maize and some

groundnuts. This year’s harvest looks likely to be worse.

As a result, the family lives from hand to mouth. Taisha is severely malnourished and her health is continuing to deteriorate.

In Zimbabwe more than 15,000 children were treated in 2022 for severe wasting – the most visible and life-threatening form of malnutrition. Children with wasting are at risk of compromised immune systems, leaving them vulnerable to developmental delays, disease, and death.

Takesure Tirivanhu, a nurse who is treating Taisha, works out the danger to children from malnutrition by measuring the circumference of their arms. She says Taisha is in the danger zone, with clear signs of malnutrition.

Children with wasting are at risk of compromised immune systems

The UN Children’s Fund’s communications head in Zimbabwe, Yves Willemot, says climate change is continuously affecting the diets of people globally. Smaller harvests and higher food prices mean that more people go with less food, with less variety and ultimately less nutrition in their diet.

The fund calculates that nearly 100,000 children under five are already suffering from acute malnutrition in Zimbabwe. ■



Lager than life:
Kilinto brewery
in Addis Ababa.

Trouble brewing

On land on the outskirts of the Ethiopian capital, Heineken built a new brewery. The venture pushed the Dutch beer giant towards the top of the local market, and those who were on the land to the fringes.

Olivier van Beemen

On a sunny day in February 2013, the Dutch minister of foreign trade and development co-operation, Lilianne Ploumen, laid the first stone for a new Heineken brewery in Kilinto – then a small village on the outskirts of Ethiopia’s capital Addis Ababa. “Everyone benefits from this,” she said. The brewery was intended to create more local jobs and more profits for the Dutch beer company.

Ten years later, in a working-class area with unpaved roads just a few minutes’ drive from the brewery, many don’t share the minister’s optimism. About 200

villagers were evicted from their land to make way for the new brewery, and some of them were resettled here.

While the farmers did receive some compensation in the form of a small plot of land and one-off cash payment, they consider this to be far below the value of the land that was taken from them.

“It was a depressing time,” says Tolosa Balacha, 69, a man with a grey beard and a green camouflage cap. On a piece of land of 1,000m², he grew barley and teff, Ethiopia’s staple food, before he was told he had to move. In compensation, he received a piece of land measuring 50m² plus 60,000 birr – worth just over \$2,000

at the time. “The plot was too small to build a new house and the money too little to buy one,” he says. “Now I’m a security guard on a construction site. My life is standing still.”

Bezualem Alemu remembers the stress that overwhelmed her father when he was told that he had to leave the land on which he had lived all his life. “He was desperate. ‘What should I do?’ he kept saying. Shortly before we had to leave, he died of a heart attack.”

Alemu was there when the village was razed to the ground. “They came with a bulldozer and an elite police squad. It still hurts. I now work as a maid. My life could have been much better.”

Tilahun Demissie, another former farmer from Kilinto, speaking from his wheelchair, says he didn’t have the strength to resist. “The authorities first arranged temporary accommodation, but I was removed. I lived in a box for a while.”

Anbassa Tesfaye – his name has been changed to protect his identity – did put up a fight. He was given just 24 hours to leave his home, along with his cat, cows and sheep. “I refused and was accused of inciting my neighbours to revolt.”

Tesfaye says police locked him in a cell and tortured him for three days, chaining his hands between his feet, and pouring buckets of water over him. He says he was made to undress and given electric shocks. For several hours, a full bottle of water was hung from his penis.

Eventually, they broke him. Tesfaye agreed to move, and now works at the Heineken brewery. He checks and fixes wooden pallets, making \$40 in a good

month, \$10 in a bad one. “It’s humiliating to work there. Stealing our land has made us hate Heineken, but we’re even angrier at the government. They evicted us and gave our land away.”

At the time of going to print, the Ethiopian government had not responded to *The Continent’s* request for comment.

Moral low ground

By law, all land in Ethiopia belongs to the state. Foreign companies that want to build factories or operate farms must rent land from the government – and it is the government that is responsible for relocating and compensating anyone who already lives there.

In recent years, the Ethiopian government has been enthusiastically renting large swathes of its territory to both local and foreign investors, regardless of who is already living there.

Since 2008, some 7-million hectares have been leased to investors. “The land grabs are done mostly without prior consultation and without adequate compensation, sometimes with no compensation, to the evicted farmers and community members,” wrote Samrawit Getaneh Damtew, a legal researcher at the African Union, in a 2019 article in the *African Human Rights Law Journal*.

Damtew described the phenomenon of land grabs across Africa as a “neo-colonialist scramble for Africa”, of which Ethiopia – as a favourite destination for foreign investors – is the epicentre. According to a 2011 estimate by the World Bank (the most recent available), some 70% of global land grabs were taking place

in Africa. All too often, these land grabs infringe on the rights of the people who were already there. Heineken does not seem to have mitigated against that risk.

“In line with Ethiopian practice, the process of engaging with stakeholders, providing fair compensation and suitable relocation is managed by the Ethiopian government,” Heineken said in response to a request for comment. “We are concerned to hear allegations of human rights abuses and, while we were not directly involved in the resettlement process, we will engage locally to understand what happened and whether there is evidence of mistreatment. If so, we will engage with the relevant authorities to understand what can be done to address the concerns.”

The company declined to respond to specific questions, and denied a request for an interview with the manager responsible for the Kilinto expansion.

The question of what responsibility a foreign company may have in situations like this has come up in other contexts. In Uganda in 2001, a group of farmers were violently evicted from their land by Ugandan soldiers, to make way for a new coffee plantation owned by the Neumann Group, a German company that is the world’s leading supplier of raw coffee.

The farmers sued the Neumann Group for damages, and the high court issued a damning assessment of the group, saying it had a duty to ensure people on the land were adequately compensated and resettled. “Instead they were quiet spectators and watched as cruel, violent and degrading eviction took place through



Fail ale: Former Ethiopian prime minister Hailemariam Desalegn opens the Heineken brewery in Kilinto in 2015.

partly their own workers,” the court said. “They lost all sense of humanity.”

Beer goggles

“Everyone benefits,” the Dutch minister said, on that day in 2013 when the first stone for the new brewery was laid. Indeed, the venture has been a commercial success for Heineken, currently vying for the market leader position in Ethiopia with its French competitor Castel.

But it has not led to increased employment. On the contrary: When Heineken entered the Ethiopian market in 2011 by acquiring two state-owned breweries, nearly 1,700 people worked there. Today, Heineken employs just over 1,000 permanent staff, despite building its third brewery at Kilinto.

A slogan the company likes to use is “Brewing a Better World” – but a better world for whom? ■

A version of this story was published on the Dutch investigative website Follow the Money. Travel expenses were covered by Free Press Unlimited.

Malawi

Battered and bruised, but not beaten

Cyclone Freddy has caused widespread devastation. Without an extraordinary community response, it could have been so much worse.

Jack McBrams in Blantyre

When floods caused by Cyclone Freddy – one of the most powerful storms in history – erupted from the mountains surrounding Blantyre and Mulanje, causing mudslides and rockslides on the weekend on 11 March, they wreaked havoc on the communities below, obliterating both life and property.

As of Friday this week, the storm had killed 511 people, injured 1,333 and displaced 563,771. Another 533 people are still missing, and 576 camps have been set to accommodate the displaced.

President Lazarus Chakwera described the storm as “one of the darkest hours in the history of our nation”.

For three days from 11 March, Cyclone Freddy induced torrential rains and

caused flooding in 14 districts in the south of Malawi – half of the districts in the country.

In the aftermath, as locals dug through the mud with bare hands and rudimentary tools to recover bodies buried under the rubble, ordinary Malawians – at home and abroad – sprang into action.

Stanley Onjezani Kenani, a Malawian accountant and writer working at the United Nations in Switzerland, led a citizen initiative that raised K150-million (\$146,000).

He told *The Continent* that videos of people being swept away to their deaths by water compelled him to step up. “I couldn’t eat or sleep. For me, the only



Pull together: Volunteers ferry food and clothes to flood survivors. Photo: Malawi Land Rover Defenders Club

thing to do, without thinking, was to act.”

The response to his call was overwhelming.

“Within days, we have had a response from more than 5,000 people, Malawians and non-Malawians at home and abroad. We have received money from Malawian students in Russia as well as from kindergarten kids, among others,” he said.

In seven days, this initiative was able to deliver more than 30 tons of maize flour, 5,000 blankets, 4,000 ready-made meals, 1,400 torches and sanitary pads to 65 camps.

In even the best weather conditions, Malawi’s road network is treacherous.

But when the cyclone came raining down, it put the country’s road infrastructure to the test – and the cyclone won, sweeping away over 40 major bridges and ripping several vital roads apart.

In Malawi’s commercial capital

of Blantyre, the Malawi Land Rover Defenders Club offered their rugged off-road vehicles, first to rescue stranded survivors from the disaster areas and then to supply food and vital resources to inaccessible communities.

According to the group’s leader, Penjani Msowoya, they worked with volunteers to solicit donations which they delivered to hard-to-reach areas in Blantyre and the surrounding nine districts.

“A lot of people came in to join us as volunteers and we ended up setting up a camp where we were able to meet and dispatch teams to various areas on specific distress calls as first responders,” he said.

In the first few days of the disaster, hundreds of Malawians sacrificed time and resources to provide for the survivors in the camps.

At a camp at Kapeni Primary School in Blantyre, Hellena Mussa and her two friends bought food and cooked for 500 survivors. “It was a crisis – it demanded that each of us take extraordinary actions to help our brothers and sisters in their time of need,” she explained.

Noel Lipipa, a member of Parliament for the area, says without the help of the thousands of volunteers who stepped up the challenge, the scale of the disaster would have been far worse.

“To put it in context, most of these people had nothing; they lost literally everything in the cyclone,” he said. “So, the help that we got from fellow Malawians really sustained us and ensured that my people were able to retain some dignity as they battled through the storm. And for that, we are truly grateful.” ■



Pushing through: Members of Malawi’s Land Rover club trek through the mud on their way to deliver supplies. Photo: Malawi Land Rover Defenders Club



A brief glimpse inside Uganda's prison system

A journalist for *The Continent* was imprisoned for doing his job. This is what he saw.

Andrew Arinaitwe

Yellow oriole birds perched on the wall of Nkozi prison, whistling. The colour of their feathers matched the yellow of our prison uniforms but our fortunes could not be more different. They were free; we were not. Even unrestrained in the prison yard, I could not be too liberal with spreading my legs, lest I exposed my private parts through the small hole in the middle of the tattered prison shorts.

In Uganda, yellow is a symbol of power, influence, good fortune and impunity. It's the official colour of the ruling party, which has been in power for 37 years and counting. MTN, the telecoms company that is a ubiquitous symbol of capitalism in the country, is branded in yellow. The national flag has two stripes of yellow to celebrate Uganda's warm, gentle sun.

The only place in Uganda where yellow represents powerlessness is in prison.

My journey here began four days earlier, at King's College Budo, a prestigious boarding school on the outskirts of the capital Kampala. At the request of my editors at *The Continent*, I had travelled there to investigate reports of sexual abuse in Ugandan boarding schools, and was trying to obtain comment from the head teacher.

Instead, the school called the police, and accused me of criminal trespass. I was detained overnight on campus, and ordered to report to Nsangi Police Station on 9 March. There, we thought that this simple misunderstanding would be swiftly cleared up, but instead the state prosecutor chose to press charges. We

could not help but notice the presence of a large SUV – with licence plates that began with “UG” and ended in “C”, reserved for vehicles connected with the president's office – stationed imposingly outside.

The state prosecutor denied bail until he could verify the legitimacy of the persons standing surety for me, and the court allowed him five days for that. I would spend those days in prison.

Harsh realities

Prison politics – and the unexpected kinship that came with it – began immediately. More experienced inmates insisted that my people buy me plastic shoes, and the guards said I should bring whatever cash I could. So after being handcuffed and escorted into the van that would take me to jail, a friend threw a pair of knock-off Crocs through the window and I stretched out a hand to receive 12,000 Ugandan shillings (\$3) from my sister.

The school called the police, and accused me of criminal trespass. I was detained overnight on campus, and ordered to report to Nsangi Police Station

The humiliating rituals started before the van began to move. Handcuffed in pairs, we were told to “sit on each other”, with six of us occupying a seat designed for three. I was shackled to Joseph*, a stranger who would become my guide to the arcane rules and rigid hierarchies of



the Ugandan prison system.

On arrival at the prison, the guards – addressed as “afande” by inmates – instructed us to change out of our civilian clothes and into the yellow prison uniforms. By the time I got to choose from the sack on the floor, the only uniforms left were frayed and ill-fitting. The shirt had no sleeves, and the shorts had a hole in the middle.

The reality of prison life was beginning to sink in.

The afande directed us to the back of another building. What a sight! About 30 inmates stood stark naked in the green yard. Some huddled in groups of three or four over a basin, while others walked around unperturbed – even though the facility was in view of the neighbouring

Nkozi University girls hostel.

Just then, before I too had to remove my yellow uniform, I was summoned by another afande for the formal admission.

This was a gruelling process. “What’s your name? What’s your father’s name? Take off your shirt! Do you have tattoos? Any skin marks? What is your level of education? Turn around and stretch your hands! Fold your shorts to your waist! Are you circumcised?”

Satisfied with my answers to his string of eclectic questions, the angry officer gave me prison number 44 and the nickname “nkoko mzungu”, meaning white chicken, for my relatively polished and light skin.

Of the six inmates admitted that day, my master’s degree was the highest academic achievement.

Following the rules

The afande are at the top of the prison hierarchy, and the chief afande is known as Mumerica (“The American”, due to his light skin). Nkozi prison, which had a population of 78 inmates while I was there, is divided into three wards with 26 men in each. Each ward has a leader, a policeman and a rules enforcer, who are elected by the inmates.

There is also a Katikiro – Luganda for “prime minister” – who is appointed by the afande and is responsible for supervising inmates when the prison hires them out to do manual labour on neighbouring farms. The inmates don’t love the Katikiro.

Prison rules, both formal and informal, are strictly enforced. More senior inmates explained them to the newcomers at a meeting on our first night. Observe cleanliness and good behaviour; never walk behind an afande; address women officers as “afande” – never “madam”; don’t sit on the pavements in the yard; clap when the Mumerica walks in, and don’t stop clapping until he tells you to; always squat on tip-toes such that your butt does not touch the ground; squat in the “foreign ku foreign” (back to back) position with another inmate; “sala size” (cut your size) by squatting on the toilet even if you are only peeing; never do “ku tano” (long call) when others are eating.

When these rules are broken, afande punish “their inmates”.

The rules enforcer (the mateka) pointed to an injury on his head that he had received when he failed to follow the rules, and said that he would be hard on

us for our own good. He made us repeat the rules over and over again. “I am not punishing you, I am just ensuring that you learn the rules for your stay while at the prison.”

He made us repeat the rules over and over again. ‘I am not punishing you, I am just ensuring that you learn the rules for your stay while at the prison.’

The inmates also explained which prison guards can be trusted, although this didn’t help me much – on day three, one afande would swindle my relatives out of 225,000 Ugandan shillings (\$60) by saying that he needed to hire a van to take me to my next court appearance.

Prison life

Over the next few days, I obeyed the rules – and even secured a few exceptions. The Mumerica took a liking to me after finding out that I was a journalist, and exempted me from having my hair shaved and from farm labour. I moved wards, as there were so many smokers in the first ward that it was like being inside a chimney.

In the new ward, I was reunited with Joseph, who let me sleep on his bed which had the luxury of a mosquito net. Most prisoners sleep on the floor, on their sides like sardines, with the poorest prisoners closest to the door to shield the rest from the elements.

Conflict among inmates is common, but so is humour. One inmate was teased



about his long legs; another about his enormous appetite.

Not everyone knew why they were behind bars, or when they would get out. One older prisoner has been in jail for four months over a land dispute, but the case is taking forever to be heard at the high court. Similarly befuddled was one good samaritan who went to assist a young motorcycle washer who had been accused of theft, only to be arrested himself.

I spent much of my own time reading Barack Obama's *The Audacity of Hope*, which was sent to me by Barbara Kaija, my editor-in-chief at *New Vision* newspaper, along with her personal Bible.

My colleague Charles Etukuri brought it for me when he visited Nkozi on my third day inside, along with the latest copy

of *New Vision*.

A headline on page two read "Vision journalist remanded over criminal trespass".

Five days after I arrived, I left Nkozi prison in the back of a 14-seater passenger van. Even though there was plenty of space, six of us squeezed into the back row designed for three, once again told to sit on top of each other. We soon discovered why: the empty seats were left for regular, paying commuters.

At the court, my family, colleagues and supporters from civil society were there in force. A few hours later, bail was granted, and I was officially out of jail. But with charges still hanging over my head, I'm not sure when I might be back. ■

*Name changed to protect his identity

PHOTO ESSAY

Africa rises up

This month, a lot of people on this great continent have had a lot of things to protest about.



A Senegalese police officer carries a stick as he clears away a fire after violent protests broke out in Dakar, on 3 March 2021. The protests came after opposition leader Ousmane Sonko was arrested. He has been charged with rape, but his supporters have dismissed the case as politically motivated. Photo: John Wessels/AFP via Getty Images



Two days before Sonko appeared in court on 16 March – this time on charges of defamation brought by the country's thin-skinned tourism minister – his supporters gathered in Dakar to register their dissatisfaction. Many believe that current President Macky Sall intends to seek an unconstitutional third term in office – and, so far, Sall is refusing to rule it out. Photo: Guy Peterson/AFP



Supporters gesture during a rally in Mathare in Nairobi called by Raila Odinga, the leader of the Kenyan opposition coalition Azimio la Umoja, on Monday. Odinga claims the last presidential election was stolen and blames the government for the sharp increase in the cost of living. Photo: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP via Getty Images



Odinga has called for his supporters to repeat the protests every Monday and Thursday, and said that they should remain peaceful. Not everyone got that message. There were clashes in Nairobi between opposition supporters and Kenyan police, who used rubber bullets and tear gas to disperse the crowds. At least one person was killed.

Photo: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP via Getty Images



Economic Freedom Fighters, a minor opposition party in South Africa, protest in front of the presidential Guest House in Pretoria on Monday during a “national shut-down” called by their party. The streets of the capital city were indeed quiet on that day – but this may have had more to do with the next day’s public holiday. Photo:

Emmanuel Croset/AFP via Getty Images



There has been sporadic protest action in both Lagos and Abuja (as pictured here) ever since the controversial conclusion of the recent presidential election. Ruling party candidate Bola Ahmed Tinubu was declared the winner, but his main opponents both said that the election was stolen, and have launched legal challenges.

Photo: LP



The policeman and the thief

Crime and justice collide when twin brothers are reunited – as adversaries

Wilfred Okiche

After being orphaned early in life, twin brothers find themselves on opposite sides of the law. Akin (*Big Brother Naija* alum Tobi Bakre) is a convicted felon who has spent the past 10 years in and out of jail. Recently released, Akin is determined to never go back to prison, even when he cannot bring himself to stay on the straight and narrow. Wale (played by rapper Falz) takes a divergent path, blossoming into a promising officer in an elite police

unit. Their paths cross when Wale starts investigating a criminal gang terrorising his aunt's neighbourhood.

Brotherhood, an enjoyable if forgettable action thriller from Jade Osiberu's Greoh Studios, teases out the tension between the siblings and lets the magnetism of the actors do the heavy lifting. Bakre fares much better than Falz who, for the most part, seems restricted by the straitjacket role he is handed. The screenplay raises interesting ideas about kinship, blood bonds and chosen family but never quite does anything meaningful with any of it.

Initially billed as an exemplar of cross-cultural collaboration, it saw Osiberu, one of Nollywood's brightest talents, hire Ugandan sensation Loukman Ali (*The Girl in the Yellow Jumper*). Ali brings his feel for high-octane action to *Brotherhood* but distanced himself from the project in post-production, citing creative differences. He retains credit as the sole director and cinematographer, though.

An obvious commercial play, *Brotherhood* was a huge hit at the Nigerian box office as audiences fell for its attractive cast, ambitious heist scenes and the massive needle drop that closes the film. It benefits from overwhelming local flavour – language, context, dialogue – as well as the filmmaker's commitment to spectacle, despite modest resources. These factors eventually make up for the poor pacing, spotty special effects and thin plotting.

Points for effort. ■

Brotherhood is streaming on Prime Video

Accountability is gaining ground

Would you rather have a government that is accountable to its citizens or a government that gets things done?

Maybe it's not a fair question; who wouldn't want both? But it does get at whether people are fully committed to accountable democratic governance, even if an authoritarian ruler might move faster.

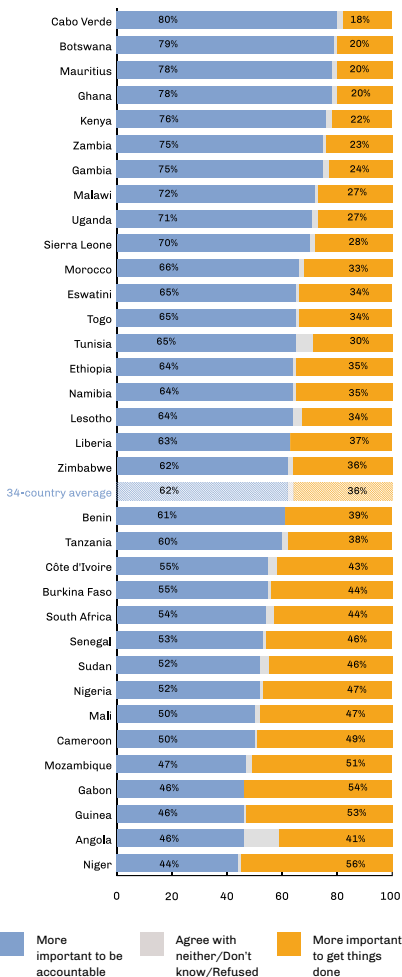
For most, accountability is worth the price. In Afrobarometer surveys in 34 countries, more than six in 10 respondents (62%) prioritised an accountable government over an efficient one.

In all but five countries, half or more of citizens chose accountability, ranging up to more than three quarters in Cabo Verde (80%), Botswana (79%), Mauritius (78%), Ghana (78%), and Kenya (76%). Only four countries recorded majorities who favour efficiency: Niger (56%), Gabon (54%), Guinea (53%), and Mozambique (51%).

The share of pro-accountability voices has increased by 10 percentage points over the past decade – a remarkable trend considering the many needs that people want their governments to address.

More than any other Afrobarometer finding, the growing demand for accountable governance seems to suggest a deepening of popular democratic understanding and commitment. ■

Government is accountable vs. gets things done | 34 African countries | 2019/2021



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

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

"Unity Palace? More like Yaounity Palace, am I right?"



- 1_ True or false: Niger is a landlocked country.
- 2_ What is Madagascar's currency?
- 3_ What is the demonym for people from Libya?
- 4_ Name the presidential candidate who finished third in Nigeria's recent elections.
- 5_ In which year did Namibia gain independence?
- 6_ The nakfa is which country's currency?
- 7_ Which two cities are classified as Côte d'Ivoire's capital cities?
- 8_ Which country's presidential palace (pictured) is also known as Unity Palace?
- 9_ Abdel Fattah El-Sisi is which country's president?
- 10_ Afrikaans is an official language of which country?

HOW DID I DO?

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

Breaking point



Continental Drift

Samira Sawlani

Breaking news, reader! Or rather, news about a break: ours, to be precise. Though we will of course miss you rather terribly, following the shenanigans of our favourite leaders is a little bit exhausting, and the chance to recharge the batteries of pan-African journalism is as welcome as a month of uninterrupted electricity supply in Soweto.

It's pretty audacious, isn't it? Taking a break. But we can't take credit for the concept: we got the idea from no less a personage than Nigeria's president-elect, Bola Tinubu himself.

The Noob, as we probably shouldn't call him, is apparently so exhausted from running from door to door to convince people to either vote for him or maybe not at all, that he needs a little R&R himself.

Unlike us, however, who will be checking in the holiday resort of D'couch in T'Lounge, the prez-to-be has pre-presidentially elected to zoot off to Paris and London.

His spokesperson says he'll be using his getaway to plan his transition programme, so it won't be all play and no work!



Brakes are off: Kenyan opposition leader Raila Odinga has called on supporters to protest every Monday and Thursday. Photo: Raila Odinga

And we guess he wants to give his President Buhari some space to clear out his desk. Roughly 5,000km of space.

Very considerate.

It's also a great opportunity to check out the hospitals and clinics in France and the United Kingdom in case he ever needs a doctor's note to excuse him from Nigeria for a few months, like a few of his predecessors. (It's known in the biz as a precedent-elect.)

He may not want to get *too* comfortable

though: rival Peter Obi this week filed a petition challenging the election results, including Tinubu's eligibility to run for president in the first place.

Broken dreams

While some of us are born to holiday and some of us aspire to holiday, others have holidays thrust upon them.

The whole of Kenya, for example, where opposition leader Raila Odinga announced that Monday 20 March would be a national holiday and urged people to take to the streets on that day and participate in anti-government protests.

Kenyan authorities scrambled to point out that Odinga is not actually allowed to declare national holidays, what with not being president and everything, and said there had better not be holidaying – or protesting, heaven forbid – or else.

So when opposition supporters and people upset about the rising cost of living took the day off and hit the streets to protest, out came the tear gas, the water cannons and rubber bullets.

And then the real bullets.

Police said they were attacked by protesters and six officers were injured. One person died in the crackdown, they claimed, but the Independent Medico Legal Unit, a human rights group, said that four people were killed.

Odinga has since announced that protests will take place every Monday and Thursday until further notice.

Tear gas suppliers have no doubt cancelled all leave and are firing up their factories in anticipation.

No rest for the wicked.

Breaking humanity

We sometimes wish the wicked would give it a rest, though. Uganda's lawmakers this week passed their brutal, cruel and dehumanising bill which would see people jailed for being part of the LGBTIQ community. Just saying you are gay will carry a jail term while "aggravated homosexuality" is punishable by death.

What is "aggravated" homosexuality? Good question.

The whole bill has drawn outrage not just from LGBTIQ rights groups, but governments, international organisations and the United Nations itself, but critics have said "aggravated homosexuality" is so vaguely defined that it could lump same-sex sexual assault of minors in with consensual same-sex relations between people under the age of 18 or who have a disability or who are living with HIV.

Journalists could also be jailed for "promoting" homosexuality simply by reporting on the law and related prosecutions in a way that authorities don't like.

The bill now goes to President Yoweri Museveni, who will have to decide between alienating lawmakers – whose support he may need to call upon to ward off the presidential ambitions of his own son – or turning Uganda into a pariah state on the global stage.

On that sombre note we end this week's Drift by wishing you all some rest in these difficult times, Ramadan Kareem and Happy Easter to all those who observe.

See you in a few weeks! ■

Free yourself: Queer fear is a divide-and-rule colonial trap

Where do our homophobic beliefs come from – and exactly how ‘African’ is it to shackle ourselves to tools of imperial control?

Aileen Waitaaga Kimuhu

Over the past weeks we have been told that “queerness is un-African”. African religious and political leaders have lined up to argue that it is a “Western import” that does not align with our history. This is a lazy attempt to delegitimise queer identities and sexualities. It is quickly debunked simply by asking: “According to whom?”

Pre-colonial African societies engaged with queerness in different ways that were often accepting. Take, for example, the Motsoalle relationships among the Basotho of Lesotho, or female husbandry among the Agikūyū.

These and countless other examples demonstrate a history of queerness, described in different terms and concepts, throughout pre-colonial Africa.

To argue that homosexuality is “un-

African” is a denial of our collective lived experience. It presupposes a single, static and commonly shared understanding of “African-ness” that has never held true.

We need to ask where this “understanding” came from and who created it, though the answer for some may be uncomfortably plain: Exclusion of queerness is a legacy of colonialism – and it is one that a genuine process of decolonisation would have removed.

As pre-colonial Africans were not the authors of their own history, the colonisers who documented their societies recorded the Africa they desired.

Any reference to queer sexualities in Africa was framed as an aberration – a “problem” for white hands to “cure”, justifying the “need” for colonialism’s “civilising” mission. In its wake, it left discriminatory legislation and queerphobia.

Do we want to continue to uphold a colonial myth?

Is our capacity and passion for self-determination compatible with the internalisation of imperial, oppressive and inauthentic ideas of “African-ness”?

We must decide if we want to renege on the vision that birthed our struggles for independence and freedom – the desire for true self-mastery. ■

Aileen Waitaaga Kimuhu is a writer, consultant and podcast host interested in the intersection between history, identity and politics. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa



The Big Picture

Photo: Marco Longari/AFP
via Getty Images

File photo: Saif el Islam al Ahmed Mahmoud pores over one of the 700 manuscripts preserved in his family's private library in Chinguetti in Mauritania. Chinguetti is a world heritage site, home to 13 libraries of documents dating back to the middle ages. The texts include some of the world's most important medieval Qur'anic works, Islamic law, astronomy, mathematics and poetry, collected during pilgrimages to Mecca.



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