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The Continent

with Mail & Guardian



Spinning out of control

Illustration: Wynona Mutisi



Cover: *The Continent* is not in Sharm El-Sheikh this week, where the world's rich and powerful are gathered to solve the existential crisis of man-made climate change. The costs of attending 'the African Cop' are so prohibitive that to do so would have forced this African newsroom to cut back on reporting on things like the climate crisis. Instead, in this edition, we are looking at stories that illustrate what African countries can do to save themselves from the disasters that are coming – and the considerable obstacles that stand in their way.

Inside:

- **Review:** If this doesn't work out, let's go live in *Wakanda Forever* (p11)
- **Pipe dreams:** Uganda and the EU at odds over East African pipeline (p13)
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■ **Barking up the wrong tree:** Mass tree-planting is not the answer (p23)

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COMPENSATION

Energy giants owe \$65-billion a year – campaigners

Global Justice Now, a campaign group, says that its research shows that five energy giants, Chevron, ExxonMobil, BP, Shell and TotalEnergies, have contributed 11% of the historical emissions that have messed up the earth's climate. The group wants world leaders to make the five companies pay up to \$65-billion a year to countries in the global south, which are bearing the brunt of climate change. Collectively, the five companies made more than \$170-billion in profit over the last 12 months, the campaign group says.

TANZANIA

Tragedy and heroism in Lake Victoria plane crash

A plane operated by Tanzania's largest private airline, Precision Air, plunged into Lake Victoria on Sunday, killing 19 of the 43 passengers on board. The rest were rescued after three fishermen rowed to the downed plane and smashed the rear door open. The Tanzanian government has since appointed the youngest of those fishermen, Jackson Majaliwa, to its fire and rescue service and rewarded him with a million Tanzanian shillings (\$428), *The East African* reports. The deceased include the plane's pilot and co-pilot.



SPACE

Uganda and Zimbabwe launch their first satellites

Two special satellites, ZimSat-1 and PearlAfricaSat-1, entered space this week. They are the first to be built by local scientists in Zimbabwe and Uganda respectively. Both teams were supported by Japanese counterparts and the satellites were launched by NASA, the US space agency, out of its station in Virginia. In Uganda the launch was celebrated with an official ceremony but went largely unnoticed by the general public. It triggered some reactions in Zimbabwe with some online citizens admonishing their government for not focusing on basic services instead.

ENVIRONMENT

When money grows on trees

The African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative (AFR100) will receive \$2-billion from SouthBridge Investments, a pan-African investment bank, and the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa. With the money, AFR100, which aims to restore 100-million hectares of damaged African forests by 2030, will make loans and grants to communities and entrepreneurs working on land restoration. Bezos Earth Fund, a philanthropy financed by US billionaire Jeff Bezos, also threw in an additional \$50-million.

COVID

What doesn't kill you makes you disabled

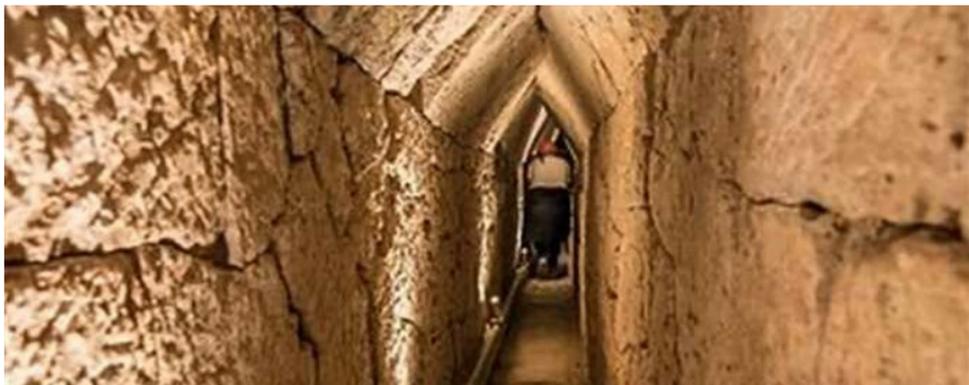
An Irish study involving hundreds of people suffering from Long Covid has added to the growing evidence that, for many, a coronavirus infection is not something that goes away after a few weeks. Of the 988 patients studied, 16% are unable to work, while 40% are severely limited in their ability to. The typical patient reported that they still suffered at least eight symptoms of Covid-19 including fatigue, malaise, chest pains, nausea, headache, muscle pain and joint pain.

EGYPT

Ancient engineering miracle unearthed

West of the Egyptian city of Alexandria, a team led by a Dominican archeologist who is searching for the tomb of Egypt's historical Queen Cleopatra unearthed

what has been called an engineering miracle: a tunnel that is 1,305 metres long, buried 13 metres underground. It's part of a massive ancient religious centre in which they also found artefacts like busts, statues and gold coins portraying Alexander the Great, Queen Cleopatra and the Ptolemies, a dynasty that ruled Egypt from 305 to 30 BC.



FOOTBALL

Mané down but not out

Senegal included its superstar player, Sadio Mané in its World Cup squad, despite a leg injury he suffered earlier in the week. Senegal's opening game is on 21 November. Earlier reports had ruled Mané out after he limped off the pitch on Tuesday, during Bayern Munich's game against Werder Bremen. Mané was invaluable to the Lions of Teranga in this year's Africa Cup of Nations, leading them to the title with his winning penalty.

BURKINA FASO

Starts and stops for new government

The new government in Ouagadougou, sworn in in late October after Ibrahim Traoré deposed the previous military junta, is settling in with stumbles. This week, Traoré's prime minister, Apollinaire Tambèla, had to fire and replace two of the new ministers, whose appointments triggered protests. His trade minister was accused of impropriety during his time as a trade union head, and the lands minister allegedly mismanaged a public housing project.

LESOTHO

New PM slashes Cabinet

Sam Matekane, Lesotho's new prime minister, cut the number of Cabinet ministers from 36 to 15. The millionaire businessman upset the country's political establishment when his six-month old party won the highest number of seats in last month's parliamentary elections. He now leads the ruling coalition. Twenty percent of the ministers in his smaller Cabinet are women, compared to 13% in the previous Cabinet. But that is just three female ministers compared to his predecessor's five.



COP27

Show us the money, say African leaders

At the global climate change negotiations in Sharm el-Sheikh, African leaders are demanding that rich nations pay for the damage caused by their polluting activities. "Many of my peers are frustrated with Western hypocrisy and its inability to take responsibility," wrote Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari in the *Washington Post*. "Don't tell Africa that the world cannot afford the climate cost of its hydrocarbons – and then fire up coal stations." Malawi's Lazarus Chakwera, in a speech at the summit, said: "It's not about charity. This is paying for what you have deliberately used."

EGYPT

Activist kept alive by hook or crook

Alaa Abd el-Fattah, an imprisoned activist who rose to prominence in Egypt's 2011 Arab Spring uprisings, is likely being medically force-fed, after he escalated his months-long hunger strike by refusing water. The escalation was meant to draw attention to his plight as Egypt hosts this year's UN climate change summit. Authorities told his family that he is on "medical intervention" that was done with the knowledge of a judicial authority.

THE AGENDA

◆ The African Union is hosting the **2022 e-Commerce Conference** in Harare. Top of the agenda is how to allow for digital payments to cross borders. Solving this problem will go a long way towards making the African Continental Free Trade Area a reality.

◆ The Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) is hiring an **East Africa Regional Editor** and a **Middle East and North Africa Investigations Editor**.

◆ 100% Ugandan cacao. Artisanal Namibian gin. What's not to love? South Africa-based Rrraw Handcrafted Chocolate – founded by a dedicated *The Continent* reader – is teaming up with Omavi Omeya Gin for a **Chocolate and Gin Pairing** in Centurion. Get tickets on [Quicket](#).

◆ **The 6th Africa Conference on Emergency Medicine** takes place from 16-18 November at Accra's University of Professional Studies.

◆ It's the **13th annual Dullah Omar Memorial Lecture** on 16 November in Cape Town. The lecture will be delivered by South Africa's former public protector, Professor Thuli Madonsela, who rarely pulls her punches.

◆ Fact-checking specialists **Code for Africa** are looking for a news editor to manage a pan-African newsroom that fights misinformation.

◆ Grammy Award-winning **Wizkid released his latest album, *More Love, Less Ego***, on Friday. The release was delayed out of respect for his fellow Afrobeats superstar Davido, whose 3-year-old son Ifeanyi died in an accident on 31 October.

◆ Ten aspiring editors from southern Africa are pitching their innovative media ideas at the **Internews Hackathon** from 15-16 November. Two winners walk away with \$10,000 to kickstart their projects. *The Continent* is on the judging panel.

The Agenda is a new section in *The Continent* that highlights the best upcoming music, movies, books, conferences, reports, product launches and job opportunities. We want to hear from our readers: please let us know if you or your organisation has something cool in the pipeline that our audience should know about on agenda@thecontinent.org. In some cases, we may accept payment for agenda entries (we'll make it clear when we do) – which will help us keep the newspaper free.

Madagascar

The litchi trade's bitter fruits

The island's litchi exports are immensely profitable – except for the people who do all the actual work

Transparency International this week called on authorities in Madagascar and France to investigate potential corruption in Madagascar's lucrative trade in litchis (a sweet fruit).

In 2019, Madagascar exported 15,000 tonnes of litchis to Europe, which represents over two-thirds of Europe's total litchi consumption. All of those litchis were sold through just two French companies, who received exclusive licences – without any apparent open tender process.

These licences were granted by the Groupement des Exportateurs de Litchis (GEL), a private association that has been mandated by the government of Madagascar to manage all litchi exports.

The GEL did not respond to a request for comment from *The Continent* before going to print.

“Most profits of the lucrative litchi



Rotten: Litchis are packaged for export at a factory in Madagascar. Photo: Agri4Agriculture

trade between Madagascar and the EU are concentrated in the hands of a few powerful and politically-connected individuals – at the expense of tens of thousands of small-scale litchi producers and collectors who do not get their fair share,” said Ketakandriana Rafitson, executive director of Transparency International Madagascar. “We call on the French and Malagasy authorities to investigate and take appropriate measures to bring justice, fairness and transparency to the litchi sector.”

The quality and volume of Malagasy litchis has declined in recent years, further reducing the profits available to farmworkers. ■

Social Media

A stormy week for social media

Social media companies are shrinking their workforce. African users now face even more risk for using their platforms

Life has not been the same for anyone at Twitter for the past two weeks, after Elon Musk, the billionaire son of a South African mining baron, was compelled to follow through on his offer to buy the raucous social media platform for \$44-billion. In short order, he fired half the company staff, alienated its advertisers and dazed its users with back and forth changes to how the platform functions.

This week, Hurricane Musk made landfall in Accra, sweeping out all but one person in the company's only Africa office.

CNN reported that the Africa staff were laid off with only one month of termination pay, compared to the three-months pay that Musk said he offered to staff laid off in the US and Europe. The Twitter Africa office was first opened in April 2021 and staff worked from home until this month, only to be fired days after coming back to work.

Across the social media pond, Meta, the company which owns Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram, announced

that it will lay off 11,000 people across its global workforce. The news does not bode well for regions like Africa where the company's workforce was already too small to properly counter harmful content. *The Continent* reported a year ago that the company's Facebook platform was used with impunity to fan the flames of ethnic violence in Ethiopia's Tigray conflict.

CNN reported that the Africa staff were laid off with only one month of termination pay

Meanwhile African social media users continue to be harassed and abused by authorities for merely expressing themselves via these platforms. The latest example comes from Nigeria where two people, Mubarak Isa Muhammad and Muhammad Bala, were sentenced to whipping (20 lashes) for posting a video to TikTok and Facebook, in which they mocked a government official for alleged corrupt conduct. ■

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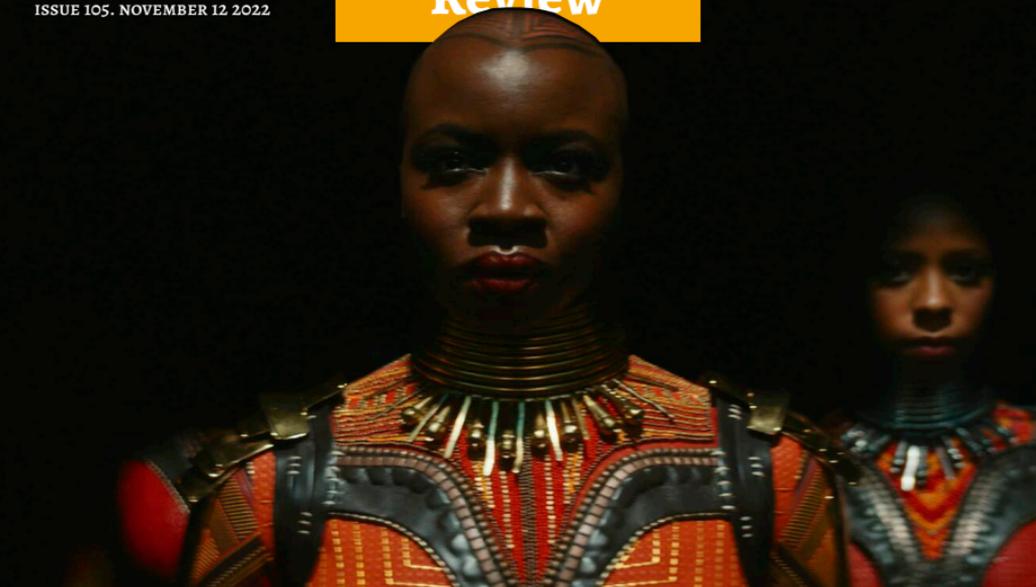
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Wakanda's women save the day, almost

The *Black Panther* sequel delivers – even in the absence of the Black Panther himself

Wilfred Okiche

There is a gaping hole at the centre of *Wakanda Forever*, director Ryan Coogler's hotly anticipated sequel to the culture shifting, box-office dominating phenomenon that was *Black Panther*. And it is a problem even he cannot fix. The 2020 death of star Chadwick Boseman was a tragedy that almost set the franchise adrift. But Coogler, with the support of top brass at Marvel studios and Disney, has managed to change course with aplomb. At a runtime of two hours and 41 minutes, *Wakanda Forever* isn't always smooth sailing, but Coogler manages to

bring the ship to an acceptable – and respectable – conclusion.

Boseman played the titular character in the 2018 original as well as in a series of Marvel films before and after. He may be gone, but he looms large in *Wakanda Forever*. With Marvel making the choice not to recast his character, the film addresses his absence head on in the opening sequence. Prepare for the waterworks. His specter haunts the air beyond the gorgeous frames rendered lovingly by cinematographer Autumn Durald Arkapaw. *Wakanda Forever* is among many things, a loving tribute from a community of artistes to a fallen

comrade.

The timeline puts *Wakanda Forever* at about six years after the events of *Avengers: Infinity War*, specifically that great disappearing act manifested by supervillain Thanos. Ramonda (Angela Bassett, seizing her chance to shine) is now sovereign of Wakanda and has doubled down on her country's policy of isolation, despite external threat from the Americans and the French.

None of these rivals is really any match for the superior might and technological advancement of Wakanda. And so to complicate things, Coogler and his co-screenwriter Joe Robert Cole introduce an enemy that is worthy of the most powerful nation on earth.

Namor (Tenoch Huerta Mejía) is king of Talokan, an underwater kingdom, descendant of a meso-American tribe which, very much like Wakanda, has kept themselves hidden away from the rest of the world in order to preserve themselves. *Wakanda Forever* continues Coogler's indictment of western imperialism and highlights another community that is able to thrive only because they have avoided the gaze of would-be colonisers. Namor is one of Marvel's more fascinating villains, and Huerta imbues him with the pluckiness and pathos of someone invested in the intensity of their cause.

Wakanda Forever goes beyond its celebrated Pan-Africanism – although there is plenty of that, including a nod to Haiti – and reaches out to other oppressed communities of colour. The film advocates for some sort of fellowship amongst people of colour, especially in the

face of external threat. The soundtrack, for instance, masterminded by Ludwig Göransson, is a meeting of worlds between African pop (read Nigerian and South African) and contemporary sounds from Mexico.

The world of Wakanda has been richly explored in previous films and while there are still plenty of new sights to gawk at, the centrepiece attraction for *Wakanda Forever* is the underwater world of Talokan. Coogler and his production design team pull out all the stops to flesh out this ancient but terribly advanced civilization of mutants.

All of the elements that made the first film so thoroughly enjoyable are revisited. The instantly iconic characters, the quips, the fashion and technology, the action set pieces, the celebration of cultures, Baaba Maal and everyone's favorite coloniser Everett K. Ross (Martin Freeman.)

In a valiant stab at sealing the Chadwick Boseman hole, Coogler elevates the women of Wakanda to be the major drivers of the unwieldy plot. Bassett, Letitia Wright, Lupita Nyong'o and Danai Gurira step up to be counted, with some help from newcomers Michaela Coel and Dominique Thorne. Shifting between dramatic moments and the demands of spectacle, they give it their all despite being undercut by a far too busy screenplay that doesn't know when to quit.

Lacking the provocative sense of wonder of the first film, as well its star, *Wakanda Forever* nonetheless does a credible job of keeping the franchise moving forward – and sets the stage for more. ■

Uganda

The controversial pipeline that exposes Europe's hypocrisy, and its power

The European Union doesn't want it to happen. Some climate activists don't want it to happen. But Tanzania and Uganda insist that the East African Crude Oil Pipeline is going ahead regardless – and that they are not the bad guys

Assad Mugenyi in Kampala

Since 2006, when commercially viable deposits of oil were discovered in western Uganda, the government has been trying to figure out how to get that oil to international markets. Its solution is a 1,443-kilometre pipeline that will stretch across Uganda and northern Tanzania, ending in the port of Tanga. It will cost \$5-billion to build, and when completed it will be the world's longest heated oil pipeline.

The East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) will also, at a stroke, make both Uganda and Tanzania billions of dollars of much-needed revenue.

That's the plan, anyway. But as the world grapples with the threat of climate change, this massive fossil fuel project is rushing headlong into the complexities

and the paradoxes of global climate politics. As it stands, construction work on the pipeline itself has not yet begun (in Tanzania, some work has been done on support structures such as worker accommodation and storage yards).

It is already running into considerable opposition, however.

Multinational 'monstrosity'

In September, the European Union Parliament passed a motion that called for an end to all oil exploration and extraction activities in Uganda. It said that the international community must "exert maximum pressure on Ugandan and Tanzanian authorities" to protect sensitive ecosystems, and asked the French oil giant TotalEnergies to pause its involvement there for at least a year, and to explore alternative projects based



Deadly: Activists in *Squid Game* costumes with TotalEnergies' logo on masks hold a fake pipeline to urge Total to divest from fossil fuels. Photo: Alban Grosdidier

on renewable energy instead. China's state-owned China National Offshore Oil Corporation is the other major player involved in the pipeline project.

The EU's resolution reignited the #StopEACOP campaign, which is backed by 260 civil society organisations around the world. Campaigners have petitioned world leaders including Pope Francis and French President Emmanuel Macron, and staged protests in Uganda and Europe.

Campaigners warn that the pipeline will violate the human rights of the communities who are displaced by its construction, and may threaten the region's water supplies. It will also double Uganda and Tanzania's annual carbon

emissions, according to a recent analysis by the Climate Accountability Institute.

"It is time for TotalEnergies to abandon the monstrous EACOP that promises to worsen the climate crisis, waste billions of dollars that could be used for good, bring mayhem to human settlements and wildlife along the pipeline's path," said Richard Heede, the institute's founder.

Hype and hypocrisy

The Ugandan government does not agree with this assessment. They point out that Uganda is already much better than Europe in renewable energy use, with 80% of the country's energy coming from renewable sources like hydro-

power, solar and biomass. As a result, its total emissions since 1750 are less than a hundredth of those of Belgium, the seat of the EU. They argue that the new pipeline will provide the funding necessary to invest in even more renewable energy. The increased energy supply will also save the country's rainforests, which are hugely important carbon stores – if people have access to energy, they won't need to chop down trees for firewood, which is a major cause of deforestation.

Among Ugandan officials, there is a palpable sense of outrage that the European Union should have the nerve to accuse Uganda of failing to protect the environment. The entire African continent contributes just 3.8% of global carbon emissions (and this figure is distorted by South Africa, which is one of the biggest polluters in the world). The EU, with less than a third of Africa's population, is responsible for more than double this. It has also built its prosperity through the careless burning of fossil fuels – which is what got the world into this mess in the first place. But it is not offering to share any of this prosperity with Uganda or Tanzania as an incentive to halt the pipeline.

The EU Parliament's intervention represents “the highest level of neo-colonialism and imperialism against the sovereignty of Uganda and Tanzania,” said Thomas Tayebwa, the deputy speaker of Uganda's Parliament.

Nor is it lost on Uganda that when Europe's own energy needs were under pressure, thanks to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, European leaders had no qualms

about increasing their own reliance on dirty fuels like oil and gas. “This is the purest hypocrisy. We will not accept one rule for them and another rule for us,” said long-serving Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni in a statement this week.

Pipe dreams

The Ugandan government's outrage may be understandable, but it is not especially helpful, said Dickens Kamugisha, who runs the Kampala-based African Institute for Energy Governance. “Arrogance will not help us,” he said. Yes, the Europeans may be hypocritical – but that does not mean that the East African pipeline makes sense for Uganda.

“After all, the over \$5-billion required for EACOP will come from the West or China. You want loans from someone but you don't want that person to ask you questions? Let us be humble.”

Besides, he adds, the grandstanding would be more understandable if the Ugandan government could be trusted to follow through on all its promises – and fix all the other barriers that prevent people from accessing electricity. For example: it does not matter how much power Uganda generates if eight in 10 Ugandans remain off the grid entirely.

Nor will all those planned billions change anything if they disappear into the pockets of the ruling elite. The government promises that the pipeline will bring untold economic benefits to Uganda, but “the efforts to address corruption tell us a different story,” concludes Winnie Ngabiirwe, the executive director of Global Rights Alert. ■

South Africa



Fanning the future:
More wind energy
plants are launching
across the country.

Photo: Rodger
Bosch/AFP

The government wants to build an entirely new energy system – and the world is watching

South Africa's \$100-billion energy plan, and its support from the G7, will be a blueprint for others. If it works.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Sipho Kings

South Africans get their electricity from Eskom, a monopoly utility created to power the apartheid state. Its dozen ageing coal power plants are some

of the biggest and dirtiest in the world.

On a good day, they work at just over 50% capacity. On a bad day, homes and businesses lose power in two-hour slots. These rolling blackouts have been rebranded as “load shedding” in an effort to slap on a veneer of organisation to the

chaos behind the scenes.

The power plants, some half a century old, are kept going through a mix of hammers, welding torches, masking tape, engineering ingenuity and bravery.

Energy shortages cost the economy \$100-million a day. They have been happening since 2008. The same party, the African National Congress, has been in charge throughout.

Now, the ANC says it wants to fix things.

Last week, the government published its \$100-billion plan to build a new energy system. The rusty carcasses of old plants will be dismantled as wind, solar and battery farms rise up next door. The 100,000 people who work in the coal industry will be retrained for this new industry. Electric vehicles will proliferate. Cheap solar energy will create green hydrogen, a key source of power for the world's industry.

The foundation for this plan – the Just Energy Transition Partnership – came at last year's climate negotiations in Scotland, where five rich countries offered \$8.5-billion in funding to support the initial component of this plan. At the ongoing climate negotiations in Egypt, another \$10-billion in funding has been promised, most of it in the form of low-interest loans from rich countries and institutions like the World Bank, which South Africa must repay.

There is a lot at stake – not just for South Africa, but for other large developing world nations. If it works, it could be a blueprint for countries like Indonesia, Vietnam and India, which also

have polluting power grids. The G7 group of rich countries endorsed the plan earlier this year and are already in negotiations with Indonesia.

If South Africa gets it right, it could also solve a toxic problem for the G7, which consists of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States. It is their pollution that is driving deadly climate change, and they are under enormous pressure to help poorer countries adapt to the changing world.

Rich countries don't want to do this, which is why the \$100-billion annual target – the amount they are supposed to give to poorer countries, as agreed in previous climate negotiations – has never been met.

The funding model that underpins South Africa's plan, which relies on concessional financing – that is, loans extended on favourable terms – is far more palatable, and gives a practical example of how polluters can pay developing countries to grow sustainably.

Realpolitik

It is no coincidence that South Africa is being used as a test case.

It plays an outsized role in climate politics. It has historic ties to the West thanks to colonialism; with Africa due to its location; and with Russia, India and China due to the Brics alliance.

It also has most of the skills and the natural resources, including abundant sunlight, to make its new energy plan work.

But would-be funders do have one major reservation: who is going to look



Heated: Bokpoort solar thermal plant in Upington, South Africa. Photo: Acciona/Sener

after the money?

The story of South Africa's power cuts is a story of corruption. Eskom and the attached coal industry have been used to loot the state. A case in point are two new coal plants – Kusile and Medupi – which are supposed to be the biggest of their kind in the world. Construction of these plants began in the late 2000s. They still do not work, and are \$10-billion over budget. This is part of the reason the country's debt is rated as junk, because the state guaranteed Eskom's debt.

Corruption has derailed several previous energy plans. A pioneering renewable energy programme – so ambitious that countries like Germany borrowed from it for their own programmes – was throttled by the former president, Jacob Zuma, because its open procurement made theft hard. Instead, the state pursued a nuclear power build to be run by Rosatom. This was stopped in court after investigative reporters raised major concerns about irregularities in the

signing of that deal.

Another concern from international investors are the close links between the state, which is supposed to implement this grand plan, and the coal industry. Deputy President David Mabuza is the former premier of Mpumalanga, the industry's epicentre and the person who helped the current president into power; while current Energy Minister Gwede Mantashe is a former coal miner with a track record of blocking renewable energy projects.

As it stands, South Africa's energy decisions have too often been about what can profit the ruling party, and not what can power the country. That's why it is the 13th biggest carbon polluter on earth, and responsible for a third of Africa's emissions.

Changing how these decisions are made will determine whether South Africa's new energy plan succeeds or fails – and, by extension, whether this blueprint will be rolled out to the rest of the developing world. ■

Ghana

Why the government is paying billions for power it does not use

To solve previous power crunches, Ghana signed contracts with international institutions that are stymieing its economy today

Sipho Kings

In 2015, amid a global plunge in energy prices, Ghana was running out of power. A gas pipeline from Nigeria was not delivering as much as promised, and its own existing oil and gas projects were not designed to meet local demand.

In desperation, the government turned to the International Monetary Fund for a bailout. It got one. With the IMF's support, the World Bank organised a \$1-billion loan to develop Sankofa, a new gas field, with the local market in mind. The World Bank noted that this would reduce Ghana's carbon footprint.

Ghana and its 32-million people are responsible for 0.06% of global emissions.

Sankofa got funding from other groups, like the UK's export credit agency, to a total of \$7.9-billion. This made it the single biggest foreign investment in Ghanaian history. Italian oil company Eni and Dutch-Swiss traders Vitol, who developed Sankofa, said that it meant that "Ghana is able to count on at least 15 years of stable, reliable and affordable gas supplies."

To sweeten the deal, Ghana promised to pay for the gas produced, even if it did not use it. In its own analysis of the project, the World Bank said this "sovereign guarantee" could be as high as \$600-million a year.

A new gas power plant was subsequently built, and an emergency contract was signed with a Turkish company to anchor a power ship offshore, which burnt gas to produce electricity. Despite the World Bank and the other funders publicly committing to tackling the climate crisis, these loans went ahead without any real investment in Ghana's renewable energy capacity. Renewables still make up less than 10% of the grid.

Today, Ghana's power grid creates 5,000-megawatts of capacity. But the country only uses 3,000-megawatts. Nonetheless, because of the terms of these loans, the government must pay for the gas that it does not use (much of this extra gas is burned, adding to global carbon

High tide: A British vessel in Singapore gets ready to head off to Ghana. Photo: Nicky Loh/Bloomberg



emissions).

In 2019 the government said it spent \$1.3-billion on power that it did not need. In the years before this, it was spending at least \$500-million a year on unused power. The national debt is now at 80% of GDP. Government spends nearly half of all the money it takes in on paying off that debt.

Ghana's current government, led by President Nana Akufo-Addo, came to power in 2018. It has publicly criticised the energy deals signed by the previous administration. It blamed the state utility, the Electricity Company of Ghana, for giving bad advice. In its 2019 budget, the state said the new power had been bought "at exorbitant prices under flawed

[contracts]."

But the country is still on the hook. It has tried to renegotiate the loans. If it does not honour them, it risks defaulting on its debts and suffering even more.

To pay back the debts, it is taking on more debt. One of its proposals is with the World Bank, for a \$300-million loan to pay for the energy that it did not use. This ensures that the international investors get their money back, even as Ghanaians live through one of the worst economic crises in living memory.

The national currency, the cedi, is currently the worst-performing currency in the world, while annual inflation hit a 21-year high of 40.4% in October. It has to pay back its loans in dollars. ■

Discrimination: It's what the poor get more of

“Discrimination” brings to mind ethnic prejudice, gender bias, religious intolerance.

But Afrobarometer survey findings show that a more common experience of discrimination – both by the government and other citizens – is based on not having much money.

On average across 34 African countries surveyed in 2019/2021, poorer people report facing discrimination at much higher rates than their wealthier counterparts – sometimes twice as high. This is true not only of unfair treatment based on economic status, but also of

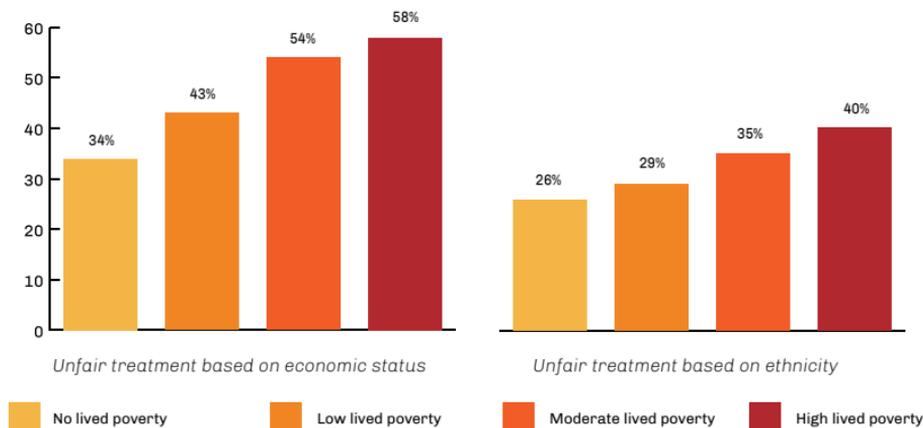
ethnic and religious discrimination.

A solid majority (58%) of the poorest citizens feel that the government treats them unfairly based on their economic status, compared to the 34% of wealthier citizens who feel this way.

But poorer citizens are also significantly more likely to face unfair treatment by the government based on their ethnicity (a 14-percentage-point gap) and religion (a 4-point difference).

Unfair treatment is generally less often attributed to fellow citizens than to the government, but the poor-versus-rich pattern is the same.

Unfair treatment by government based on economic status and ethnicity | by level of lived poverty | 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

"There's only one species of quiz genius and I belong to it."



Photo: Rieger Bertrand/AFP

- 1_** Name the ruins of the medieval city pictured above.
- 2_** From which two African countries did the parents of the United Kingdom's home secretary, Suella Braverman, emigrate from?
- 3_** Ahmed Abdallah Sambi is the former president of which island country: Comoros or São Tomé and Príncipe?
- 4_** Cameroon, Congo Republic and Equatorial Guinea all border which West African country?
- 5_** How many species are there of zebra in the world: three, four or five?
- 6_** This week NASA transported two satellites from two African countries for the first time respectively. Which two countries are they?
- 7_** In South African parlance, what is a "smiley"?
- 8_** In which African city does (or did) Twitter have an office?
- 9_** Who was Lake Victoria named after?
- 10_** The Atlas Lions will be representing which country at the FIFA World Cup this month?

HOW DID I DO?

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

Missing the forest for the tree planting

Photo: Great Green Wall Initiative

Planting lots of trees sounds like a great solution to the climate crisis – but only a fraction of seedlings actually survive

Jeffrey Moyo in Harare

In 2016, Never Bonde was crowned Zimbabwe's tree planting ambassador. Since then, he says he has planted 72,500 trees at schools and hospitals, in towns, cities and rural areas across Zimbabwe.

While Bonde is typically a lone ranger in his tree planting, he is part of a broader national, African and even global push to address the climate crisis by planting trees.

Zimbabwe's forestry commission says that over 18-million trees had been planted in communal areas and on commercial timber lands across the country last year. That's an improvement

from last year's 16-million trees planted, but the commission is aiming for 25-million new trees per year.

It's not just Zimbabwe pursuing this perceived climate panacea. In 2007, the African Union got 11 countries to commit to the Great Green Wall initiative – planting a giant belt of trees, 15km wide by 1,775km long, stretching all the way from Senegal to Djibouti. The goal is to stem the accelerated expansion of the desert, one of the most evident signs that our world is becoming increasingly unlivable.

By 2020, billions of trees had been planted as part of this initiative, according to an official progress report. Mauritania

said it had planted 2.272-billion trees. Ethiopia said it had reforested over 370,000 acres of land.

Tree planting is everybody's favourite climate response. Thirty countries have committed to restore 311-million acres of forest, under the African Forestry Landscape Restoration Initiative, surpassing its initial target of 248-million acres in 28 countries. Globally, under the Bonn Challenge, 58 countries have committed to 860-million acres of forest by 2030.

But, critics say, it's often all show and no impact. "Trees are often the idea politicians turn to in order to earn political support," Nesbit Machimbira, an environmental activist in Zimbabwe, told *The Continent*. But, too often, they pay "too much attention to the quantity of tree seedlings planted while little time is given to nursing the planted trees to keep them alive in the long term."

That is a problem that plagues all tree-planting initiatives. "Working alone makes it difficult to follow-up on all projects and the survival of the donated trees will then be dependent on those receiving them," Bonde admits.

Much larger efforts than Bonde's also fail to increase forest cover or soak up carbon. An analysis published last month by Yale University's School of the Environment looks at massive tree planting initiatives in Türkiye, the Philippines, Mexico and India. It found that in many cases, only 2%-10% of the newly-planted trees survive. "Typically, only a minority of seedlings survive because the wrong trees are planted



Seeds of doubt: Zimbabwe's first lady Auxillia Mnangagwa plants a sapling in Goromonzi in 2019, but not everyone thinks indiscriminate tree planting is such a good idea. Photo: Zimbabwe Presidency

in the wrong places, and many are left untended," commented Lalisa Duguma of World Agroforestry in Nairobi in the Yale report.

It's an outcome that is all too familiar to Benjamin Muhwa, a retired high school geography teacher who lives in Harare. "I have seen many planted trees being left to die without receiving any care from the people who plant them, which means this tree planting talk is just cheap talk," Muhwa said.

But Bonde would rather keep trying than give up. He says his goal is to plant 5,000 trees each year, for as long as he can. "We need trees for air purification, a balanced ecosystem, a complete water table, balanced seasons, cooling off and rain-making." ■

The heat is on



Continental Drift

Samira Sawlani

Towards a beautiful town overlooking the Red Sea we turn this week, the faintest sparks of hope flickering in our hearts as the champions we, the people of the world, have chosen to represent us descend on Sharm el-Sheikh to try to save the planet. Here they come now, the defenders of nature, of life itself – our best and our brightest, the wisest and smartest of us all, the true cha... hold on a sec...

Is that... Rishi Sunak? What the heck is he doing here? And look, it's not just him, it's a whole fleet of private jets come smogging in, flooding Egypt with a who's who of the rich and shameless.

Have they come to gloat?

As this week's prime minister, the United Kingdom's Rishi Sunak said that taking action on climate change is "more important than ever". But with his and his party's track record we assumed by "action" he meant he wanted to hurry it all up. We realise now we were mistaken.

Clearly we misheard when we thought we heard him pledge his support for a ban on onshore wind. And we could have sworn we heard him announce tax breaks earlier this year for oil and gas companies



Plane stupid: UK PM Rishi Sunak arrives in Sharm el-Sheikh

who invest in fossil fuels.

Maybe we misjudged Britain's new leader, who not so long ago insisted he had no plans to attend COP27. Clearly his mind was changed when he realised how important this global conference was... and also that Boris Johnson would be here. (Oh no. Boris Johnson is here.)

But perhaps that means our faves are, too! Our dear, glorious African leaders. How could they resist the opulent hotels, the hors d'oeuvres, the cocktails, the chance to discuss which brand of tear gas is the most environmentally-friendly, or how to reduce the emissions of all those

pesky human rights defenders who have been releasing all sorts of toxic comments about them into the atmosphere.

How relieved they would surely be to be able to discuss limits on something other than their own presidential terms, not to mention the endless possibilities for renewable power.

Fossil fools

Guinea's Alpha Condé might be forgiven for not being there, we suppose. Especially seeing as he was deposed in a coup more than a year ago.

This week's episode of *Keeping Up With The Coupdashions* has picked up his storyline again, after the country's minister for justice gave the go ahead for charges of corruption, embezzlement and money laundering to be brought against Baba Alpha and 180 members of his former government.

If Condé himself is going green it's probably just from envy at Cameroon's President Paul Biya, who this week celebrated 40 years in office. Across the country, celebrations were held in his honour – without the man of the hour anywhere in sight. Come to think of it, has anyone seen him in the past 12 months?

He's always been a bit of a jetsetter, but maybe he's been keeping a low profile because he heard everyone wants to ban fossil fuels and thought they meant him?

Rising temperatures

With all the anxiety percolating about global warming, we feel it incumbent upon us to draw attention to all the hot air coming from Kenya lately.

Just this week parliamentarian Salah Yakub of the United Democratic Alliance called for lawmakers to reconsider the two-term presidential limit, and just recycle leaders who are “performing well” back into office until they hit 75.

The UDA has distanced itself from Yakub's suggestions for how to preserve the political environment, but we remain impressed that any lawmaker would be brave enough to voice an innovative idea like that when preserving the actual environment is commanding everyone else's attention, as the drought in East Africa continues to devastate the region.

Recent reports by Kenyan media have featured two young boys being hospitalised after eating a chameleon because they were so hungry. Hundreds of animals have died, NGOs say children are dropping out of school due to the drought, and millions are facing starvation.

Meanwhile in West and Central Africa terrible floods have left more than 3.4-million people homeless, in dire need of help and hope, as they find themselves on the front lines of climate change.

It is on their behalf, and ours, that the true champions of COP27 are fighting against the vested interests of nation states and the stubborn stain of old-school energy peddlers.

So it's the activists we are cheering on. Those who turned up. Those demanding action. Those reminding world leaders that the people most affected by the climate crisis are they who have done the least to cause it.

And that ultimately, this is not just about the future: it's about justice. ■

Can a new electoral system save Sierra Leone's ruling party?

The changes could undo the country's post civil war progress

Ibrahim Barrie, Shebora Samba Kamara and Bilal Joaque

In a bid to keep his ruling party in power despite its flagging popularity, President Maada Bio has directed the Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone (ECSL) to change the electoral system ahead of polls scheduled for June 2023. In the legislative elections voters will no longer choose their representatives directly in a “Westminster” style system. Instead, the country will use the system of proportional representation that was made up on the fly during the country's civil war, when there were no recognised constituencies and the conflict rendered some areas inaccessible.

The move has caused uproar, and would have been unlikely to pass had it been proposed in a democratic manner. As the leader of the opposition All People's Congress has pointed out, the Public Elections Bill 2022, which originally proposed the use of PR, was eventually

withdrawn after receiving harsh criticism from legislators. The attempt to introduce these changes through presidential fiat has therefore been particularly controversial, and risks undoing the democratic progress the country has made since the end of the civil war.

So why has President Bio gone to these lengths? Many Sierra Leoneans – including the National Election Watch, a coalition of civic and non-governmental organisations – worry that it is the prelude to election rigging. When elections are held on a constituency basis, the victory of a ruling party candidate in an area that is known to be pro-opposition can quickly be detected as questionable and investigated. When results are aggregated at the national level, it can be much harder to tell where the manipulation was done.

Much now depends on the electoral commission. The National Election Watch has asked for “the commission's justification for the proposed change in our electoral system”. As public disapproval mounts, it is not too late for the ECSL to stand up and be counted: protecting the existing electoral system means protecting democracy – and reducing the chance of a return to the dark days of political violence. ■

Ibrahim Barrie teaches Public Policy, Shebora Samba Kamara teaches Sierra Leone Politics, and Bilal Joaque is a final year LLB student, all at the University of Makeni. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa.



The Big Picture

Photo: Alexis Huguet/AFP

Good fences: Senegalese peacekeepers with the United Nations Organisation Stabilization Mission and Congolese police officers patrol the city of Goma, DRC, which sits on the border with Rwanda. Over the past two weeks, the March 23 Movement – allegedly backed by the Rwandan army – has doubled the size of the territory under its control, approaching 30km from Goma.



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