

with Mail & Guardian

# The Continent



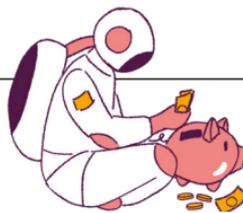
**The great  
climate  
finance scam**



**Cover:** The climate pollution caused by rich countries could be \$400-billion a year in losses and damage to communities around the world. After a lot of pushing, those rich countries have started to deliver some reparations (not that they approve of that word). And they say they're on track to raise the \$100-billion a year promised for climate finance for the developing world – but only if we let them do the accounting. *The Continent* reports on the negotiations that got us here (p11); the creative accounting of rich nations (p13); the price Tanzanians are paying for sea level rises (p15); the morally dubious carbon markets (p18); and the deforestation in West Africa fueled by the “war on drugs” (p21).

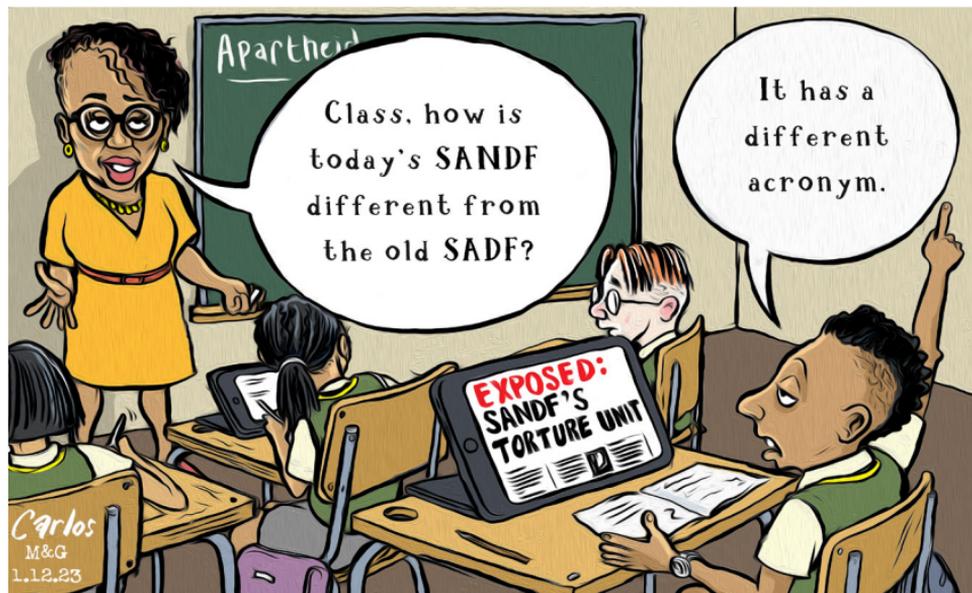
## Also inside:

- **Israel:** Importing Malawians to fill the labour gap created by sending workers to war (p7)
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A new investigation by Open Secrets in South Africa alleged this week that a torture unit exists within the the South African National Defence Force (SANDF). It has implicated this unit in beatings, waterboarding and even a murder. For many South Africans, this is tragically reminiscent of the brutality of state security forces – including what was then known as the South African Defence Force (SADF) – during apartheid.

## SOUTH AFRICA

### July riots instigator jailed for mall maul

Mdumiseni Zuma has been sentenced to 12 years in prison for instigating deadly riots in July 2021, in which 350 people were killed and shops in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng were looted. Zuma shared a video on social media urging an attack on a mall, causing \$26.5-million in damage. The riots began when ex-president Jacob Zuma (no relation) was jailed after refusing to appear before a commission of inquiry into corruption.

## EAST AFRICA

### Regional court rules in favour of oil giants

Construction on a \$4-billion oil pipeline can continue after the East African Court of Justice threw out a challenge by civil society activists. The 1,445km pipeline will transport Uganda's oil to the coast via Tanzania. Activists say it will destroy ecosystems in its path, and have a devastating impact on the climate. The court dismissed the legal challenge on a technicality, saying that it was filed too late. An appeal is expected.

**NIGERIA****Forsake thy fuelish ways – on a budget**

The Nigerian government will spend \$34.84-billion in 2024, according to the budget presented by President Bola Tinubu on Wednesday. Nearly a third of that will service the country's debts. What is left will be spent mainly on the military, education and infrastructure. Funding for education has nearly doubled compared to 2023. The government has a little more cash than usual after Tinubu scrapped a controversial fuel subsidy, which has exacerbated the rising cost of living. The president described his spending plan as the "Budget of Renewed Hope".

**UGANDA****Age ain't nothing but a number**

Safinah Namukwaya, a 70-year-old Ugandan woman gave birth to twins this week, her second delivery after the first in 2020. Both pregnancies were conceived with in vitro fertilisation, at a women's hospital in Kampala. She is the oldest recorded new mother in Africa and second globally after Indian woman Mangayamma Yaramati, who gave birth at 73 years, in 2019. Separately, Uganda is considering a law on surrogacy and reproductive technology which may restrict future IVF for certain groups of women.



**Ken you not: Ex-Zambia prez Kenneth Kaunda's drip dropped by Kenya.**

**KENYA****Fashion police in Parliament**

Lawmakers will no longer be allowed to wear the Kaunda suit in Parliament, according to speaker Moses Wetangula. The classic short-sleeved safari shirt with matching trousers, popularised by former Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda, is a favourite of President William Ruto. According to his tailor Ashok Sunny, Ruto wants to promote local fashion and manufacturing. Wetangula wants male MPs to wear western-style suits. Women's "skirts and dresses should be below knee-length and decent" and "sleeveless blouses are prohibited".



## CULTURE

### Rema takes moment to calm down

Nigerian pop-star Rema, of chart-topping *Calm Down* fame, is cancelling all his scheduled concerts for December because he needs time to recuperate. The cancelled shows include one in South Africa and three in Nigeria. He has had a great but duelling year. *Calm Down* became the most successful African song of all time on the US Billboard Hot 100 and led to a tour which included the recent O2 Arena concert in London, at which he spectacularly brought attention to the Benin Bronzes looted by British colonialists from Nigeria.

## MADAGASCAR

### Come, Mr DJ, song pon de replay

Andry Rajoelina has been re-elected as president, according to the electoral body. He received 58.9% of the vote. This figure would be more impressive but for the fact that the election was boycotted by the main opposition candidates, who predicted rigging. They are still saying that. Opposition leader Siteny Randrianasoloniaiko has asked the High Constitutional Court to cancel the vote and disqualify the president. Rajoelina, a former DJ who initially came to power in a coup, thanked citizens for choosing “the path of continuity, serenity and stability”.



**In it to win it: Andry Rajoelina has been re-elected as the president of Madagascar.** Photo: Rijasolo/AFP

## SAUDI ARABIA

## Prince pours oil on things already on fire

Saudi Arabia intends to be the last oil producer left standing, so it needs to hook more people on its product. Enter the Oil Demand Sustainability Program. An investigation by the Centre for Climate Reporting reveals that the programme, run by the kingdom's crown prince, plans to invest Saudi wealth in ventures that need lots of oil to run, like ship-mounted power plants for Africa. A similar plant, a Turkish power ship, recently plunged Sierra Leone's capital Freetown into darkness over a \$40-million unpaid bill.

## SPORT

## Uganda all set for cricket World Cup

Namibia and Uganda will join South Africa in representing Africa at the 2024 men's T20 cricket World Cup, taking place in the West Indies and the United States in June. This will be the first time Uganda has played in the tournament, bagging their spot by beating Rwanda on Thursday. Captain Brian Masaba told journalists that after years of toil, hard work and sacrifice, the moment they qualified was surreal for the team. They edged out Zimbabwe, who have played in the World Cup six times before.



## SENEGAL

## An unusually high tide

Police in Senegal have seized three tonnes of cocaine from a rusty ship moored in international waters just off the coast. Ten

crewmembers were also arrested. West Africa has become a major transit zone for cocaine en route from South America to European noses. This is the second major bust off Senegal's coast this year: in January, police seized 800kg of the drug.

# Malawi/Israel

## Israel is headhunting Malawian workers

**Israel needs its workers to stay in the army. But it also needs to keep its economy going. So it's importing Malawians.**

**Jack McBrams in Lilongwe**

Last Saturday, 221 Malawians left to go work on farms in Israel. Under an undisclosed agreement, their government is planning on sending more and Israeli recruitment agents have been advertising for people aged 25 to 35. They will get paid \$1,500 a month – a fortune in a country struggling with inflation and poor management of the economy.

One of that first cohort, 27-year-old Andrew Chunga, told *The Continent*: “It is very difficult to make money in Malawi.” Talking from the Israeli village of Gefen, the former teacher with a diploma in agriculture said he used to earn \$47 a month working in Mzimba in the north

of his home country. He hopes to use the money to build “at least 10 houses” in Lilongwe.

Israel’s ambassador, Michael Lotem, told local media that the labour export deal is a win-win which Malawians ought to celebrate. “Malawians will be earning \$1,500 a month and on top of this they will gain knowledge. I think the biggest incentive is knowledge. Money comes and money goes but knowledge stays.”

Noting that “it is a pity that there are a lot of political connotations on this in Malawi”, Lotem said: “We need this labour after 350,000 Israelis were recruited in the military and left a gap in some sectors.”

Critics of the recruitment drive have raised questions about the ethics of sending young people to a country at war. Opposition leader Kondwani Nankhumwa denounced the arrangement as “an evil transaction” by the government.

Leaders of civil society organisations, like the Human Rights Defenders Coalition and Centre for Social Accountability and Transparency, have demanded that the Malawian government release the agreement under which the recruitment drive is happening.

Malawi government spokesperson Moses Kunkuyu said the labour deal “is an understanding in principle but an MOU [memorandum of understanding] is being finalised.” His country is willing



**War's labour lost:**  
**As more Israelis are**  
**pressed into military**  
**service, Israel recruits**  
**more foreign workers.**  
 Photo: Andrew Chunga

to send as many youths as Israel can allow them to, he added.

Kunkuyu said the Malawi government has been assured that the areas where the young people will be stationed are safe zones. “Anything can happen anywhere but we are assured that the same level of safety that is being accorded to Israelis will be accorded to Malawian citizens.”

More than 30,000 Thai nationals work in Israel’s agriculture sector as migrant workers. Thai nationals made up the largest group of foreign nationals killed or taken hostage in the 7 October attack by Hamas. Hamas has since warned foreign governments, through the negotiators who secured the release of Thai hostages, that it considers some of the kibbutz areas of collective farming to be disputed territory and will continue to attack them.

Israel’s ambassador Lotem said of the

Malawian workers: “They are not going to Gaza. They will work in Israel. They will not be less secure than any other Israeli. We will take care of them as much as we are taking care of Israelis. Of course, we are cautious that we do not have to allow people into certain areas that are targeted by Hamas.”

Under President Lazarus Chakwera, a former Baptist preacher, Malawi has taken a decidedly pro-Israel stance. In 2021, Chakwera announced that Malawi would open a full embassy to Israel in Jerusalem, becoming the first African nation in decades to do so in the contested city. Most countries locate their embassies in Israel’s commercial capital of Tel Aviv, because while Israel regards all of Jerusalem as its capital city, Palestinians seek the city’s east as the seat for a future Palestine state. ■

# Sudan/UAE

## UAE champions climate action while arming genocidal rapists

The host of this year's climate negotiations is reported to be supplying arms to one side in Sudan's civil war.

### ANALYSIS

Kiri Rupiah

War is bad for the climate. That hasn't stopped the United Arab Emirates from hosting this year's COP climate negotiations while bankrolling one side of the war in Sudan. And, despite gender justice being a stated principle of COP, that side is accused of using rape as a weapon of war.

Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo's paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) is one of two parties in the Sudan war. Since April, it's been fighting General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the de facto ruler of Sudan and leader of the Sudanese Armed Forces, who first came to power in 2019 after pro-democracy protesters ousted longtime dictator Omar al-Bashir.

In September, the United States imposed sanctions on RSF leaders, whom it accused of being armed and supported by the Russian military contractor Wagner Group. So the RSF turned to the UAE for weapons and support, according to reporting by the US-based *Wall Street*

*Journal and New York Times*.

In recent weeks, the RSF has advanced into the Darfur region in western Sudan. It has been accused of ethnically motivated mass killings, and of using rape and sexual violence as weapons of war.

In an open letter published this week, African feminist and anti-war activists call out the UAE's complicity and see its hosting of COP as "greenwashing".

Helen Kezie-Nwoha, executive director of the Peace Centre in Uganda, told *The Continent* that the impact of war on gender inequality and climate change is starkly apparent in Sudan. If the UAE wants its hosting to be seen as a genuine promotion of human rights, it cannot be funding the RSF, she said.

Abdullahi Boru Halakhe of Refugees International said the US sanctions against RSF leaders are useless without the UAE snipping the purse strings.

In response to questions from *Reuters*, a UAE official said their country had "consistently called for de-escalation, a ceasefire, and the initiation of diplomatic dialogue" in Sudan. ■

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**The Continent**

# Africa is finally at the climate negotiations table

**Climate negotiations have often excluded Africa. But in the past year negotiators from this continent have started to change the exclusionary structures.**

**Sipho Kings**

**A**t climate talks, Africa is on its own. It's time to act like it.

That was the front cover of *The Continent* a year ago, as climate negotiations rolled into Egypt. The year since then has been the hottest in recorded history. And that's after 1°C of heating. The United Nations predicts up to 2.7°C of heating by 2100. Opening this year's COP in Dubai, its secretary general, António Guterres, said: "We are living through the climate collapse in real time."

Libya, Malawi, Madagascar and Mozambique have been hit by floods this year. Somalia, Botswana, Niger, Mauritania, Lesotho and Zambia have had drought and intense heat waves.

They are not unique. This climate collapse has killed thousands of people and cost tens to hundreds of billions of dollars this year alone.

In climate negotiations, for the last three decades, African countries have wanted this loss and damage to be the focus. The continent is responsible for less than 4% of all emissions.

Instead, rich, mostly Western,

countries have made all agreements focus on reducing carbon emissions.

They do not want to be liable for the consequences of their pollution.

In 2009 at negotiations in Copenhagen, African countries and their peers in the developing world decided they'd had enough and threatened to collapse the COP process (which falls under the UN).

It took the next meeting in Cancún and the 2011 one in Durban to create a new climate agreement, which would balance the need to reduce emissions with the work of helping countries adapt to a rapidly changing world. That would turn into the 2015 Paris Agreement, which included 195 countries.

But since then, rich countries and big polluters have fought hard to block parts of Paris that would see money go to those being destroyed by a hotter world. A promise of \$100-billion in funding was only met this year, three years late, and as *The Continent* reports later on, there are serious questions about the way these funds are disbursed and accounted for.

Africa's fight to change the structures that have for so long favoured polluters has in practice meant lots of phone



**COPs and robbers:  
Climate crisis got you  
down? Why not try  
being rich. Photo: Sean  
Gallup/Getty Images**

calls, emails, video calls and in-person meetings, built around personal relationships between negotiators.

Those negotiations delivered a crucial victory at the COP in Egypt last year. Led by that country's chief negotiator, Mohamed Nasr, an agreement was reached to create a fund that will pay for the loss and damage caused by a hotter world. That moment was a decade in the making, going back to the 2013 COP in Warsaw.

Since Egypt, five meetings have taken place to work out what the fund will look like. *Politico* reported this week that US negotiators ensured there was no wording on liability (meaning that polluters can't be asked to pay commensurate with their pollution) and then that the fund is hosted by the World Bank (an institution often seen as representing everything that is wrong with the current world order).

In early September, Africa's negotiators met on the sidelines of the big African climate meeting in Nairobi. A declaration was issued afterwards, detailing what countries want from climate efforts. Later that month, the influential Least Developed Countries Group of negotiating countries, chaired by the Senegalese Madeleine Diouf Sarr, met in Dakar and issued its own declaration. Most of the points boil down to money.

On 30 November, the first \$420-million was announced for the fund. It won't be enough – the G77 + China negotiating bloc says it would need \$1.3-trillion by 2030. And big polluters will continue to shirk their responsibility. But each of these steps is pushing towards big, structural changes that mean the rich world will increasingly struggle to rig all things climate, and particularly the flow of money, in its favour. ■

# Rich countries give with one hand, and take with the other

**Big polluters are finally putting money into a 'loss and damage' climate fund. But, if recent history is anything to go by, most of that money is going to go straight into the pockets of Western consultancies and organisations.**

**Lydia Namubiru**

**O**n the first day of COP28, the UN climate summit happening in Dubai, delegates rose to their feet to applaud a major announcement: five rich countries, plus the European Union, have pledged \$420-million as seed funding for a new “loss and damage fund”. The fund, agreed in principle at last year’s COP27, will help developing countries respond to the impacts of climate change.

Two days earlier, there was another bit of good news. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), a collective of 37 mostly rich countries, said that developed countries

are finally delivering on their promise to mobilise \$100-billion a year in climate finance for developing countries, according to preliminary data.

This is progress. But it remains to be seen how exactly the money will be spent – and whether it will, in fact, reach the countries that need it most. The devil will be in the detail of how climate finance is structured, and what counts as climate finance. Recent history is not encouraging.

In the past 12 years, for example, the United Kingdom has given Africa at least £6.6-billion (\$8.3-billion) in climate finance. In theory. But a closer look at the figures reveals that nearly two thirds of that money went to companies and organisations based in the Global North. Nearly 40% went to groups headquartered either in the UK or the United States, according to a new analysis by *The Continent* and UK-based media outlet *Carbon Brief*. This is based on a study of over 10,600 disbursements from the UK’s International Climate Fund (ICF).

More than a billion dollars of that money was handed to Global North consultancies like Abt Associates, Adam Smith International, KPMG and PwC.

The UK gave consultancies like these about \$200-million more of its “climate finance for Africa”, than it gave to international NGOs, which, even when foreign registered, have a better track record of providing services on the continent. More than 90% of the UK climate funding supposedly disbursed to

Nigeria and Ghana was in fact handed to such consultancies.

“This is not helpful”, said Faten Aggad, a professor at the Nelson Mandela School of Public Governance in South Africa. “Africa has real needs in climate finance. The money needs to reach those who need it. We know historically that these consultancies are expensive.”

Aggad said that consultancies can increase the cost of aid projects by as much as 30%. She also warned of the danger of local knowledge being sidelined in favour of “parachuted, overpaid western consultants” who come in with a “cut and paste approach” from other contexts.

There is also little clarity about what counts as climate finance as opposed to regular aid. For example, UN agencies and other multilateral institutions received nearly \$3-billion of the UK’s \$8.3-billion in climate finance for Africa.

But often, the projects funded – while important – were peripheral to climate, like the \$21-million disbursed to the United Nations’ children’s agency to avert maternal and neonatal deaths.

This project included training health workers and providing “uninterrupted and sustainable clean energy systems and climate resilient water supply and infrastructure”. In that case, a portion of the money will be reported as climate finance, even though the project cannot be considered a direct climate action.

The practice of relabelling other aid projects as climate finance is a widespread problem. A recent estimate by the ONE Campaign, a US-based advocacy group, found that \$115-billion in international



**Hard to swallow: Though important, projects unrelated to the climate crisis are seeing their funding categorised as climate aid.** Photo: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP

climate finance was spent on things that have little to do with climate change.

“Putting the world back on track will take unprecedented investment, but instead we face the ‘wild west’ of climate finance – where efforts to protect both people and planet are undermined by broken promises, falsehoods and dubious accounting,” said David McNair, the executive director of policy at ONE. “Without better reporting, hundreds of billions of dollars will continue to get swallowed in this black hole.”

The new fund will be housed by the World Bank. Developing countries were opposed to this, and wanted it to be independently managed. They feared that the multilateral institution – influenced by the developed countries that are its biggest shareholders – will be able to fudge the numbers in a way that makes it look like the developed world is doing its fair share, even when the money rarely reaches where it is needed. ■

# Tanzania



**On the ropes: Nasir Haji inspects her sponge farm on the coast near Dar es Salaam. All photos: Kizito Makoye/ The Continent**

## The rising sea imperils Tanzania's coastal communities

### Kizito Makoye in Dar es Salaam

**A**s the rising sun's rays glimmer through the mangrove trees along the Indian Ocean coastline, crabs scuttle in coral reefs and catfish dart in and out of ponds. Here in the Ununio neighbourhood of Dar es Salaam, the beauty of nature is complemented by equally beautiful architecture. Both are under threat from the rising sea.

Some apartments have already been abandoned and are now engulfed by sea marshes. A sagging single-storey home is submerged in knee-deep water and infested by green algae. An old Mercedes-Benz is rusting in a submerged driveway. Elsewhere, saline intrusion is quietly peeling the paint off homes and choking vegetation. Residents can often taste salt in the contaminated groundwater.

"The sea is moving closer to my house,



**Intrusion: Saltwater is seeping into the land, destroying vegetation.**

and saltwater is eroding wall plaster,” says Andrew Kimweri, a lawyer who lives nearby. “My home is being swallowed.”

As the sea levels rise, seawater is seeping into ground aquifers. Residents in the Ilala, Temeke and Kunduchi areas of Dar es Salaam tell *The Continent* that water from the local wells is no longer potable. “The well water is too salty to drink,” says Anna Kisesa, who lives close by in Kunduchi. “You can’t even use it for washing clothes.”

Scientists say rising sea levels are driven by climate change, which is melting glaciers at the earth’s poles and driving more water into the oceans.

In the Rufiji Delta, 156km south of Dar es Salaam, saltwater is devastating rice paddies and the livelihoods of the farmers who depend on them. “Saltwater is our big

enemy. It is affecting our incomes,” says Omari Jumanne, a farmer at Nyamisati village.

**Scientists say rising sea levels are driven by climate change, which is melting glaciers at the earth’s poles and driving more water downstream into the oceans.**

But in Zanzibar, a group of women are swimming against the rising tide. They have turned to farming sponge. The puffy aquatic crop is exceptionally soft yet durable. Buyers use it as a bath loofah or for cleaning surfaces. Notably, it is a crop that is touted as being especially resilient to changes in the climate.

Among the new sponge farmers is Hindu Rajabu, a 31-year-old mother of two, who wears goggles and a snorkel as she tends to her floating sponge farm in a shallow lagoon. “They’re very delicate, you must handle them with proper care,” she says. Rajabu switched from farming seaweed to sponge cultivation in 2020, and is now earning nearly four times as much as she was before, going from a monthly income of 70,000 Tanzanian shillings (\$28) to 250,000 shillings (\$100).

Her success story is an isolated case, however. The much larger seaweed industry, which employs tens of thousands of Zanzibari women farmers, has suffered due to rising temperatures, stronger

winds, and erratic rainfall. According to official statistics, production of seaweed dropped by 47% between 2002 and 2012 – and the climate has only become more erratic in the decade since.

Even if world leaders at COP28 – the big United Nations climate conference – succeed in their ambition to limit global temperature increases to 1.5°C, this will still lead to further sea level rises.

The UN estimates that developing countries, including Tanzania, will collectively need at least \$200-billion every year by 2030 to adapt to new climatic conditions, including rising sea levels. Let’s hope there’s a big market for loofahs. ■



**Net profit: Mkasi Abdallah and Hindu Rajabu get their sponges ready for market.**

# Carbon markets are dodgy AF

**They risk undermining Africa's climate adaptation – and allow rich countries to keep evading responsibility.**

**David Ngira and Lucia Masuka**

**T**he Nairobi Declaration from September's inaugural African Climate Summit proposes carbon markets as a solution to the climate crisis. Carbon markets are now African leaders' top agenda at COP28, the United Nations annual climate summit currently happening in Dubai.

This should be of serious concern to Africans.

Carbon trading enables polluters to continue profiting from emissions at the expense of everyone else. Commodifying nature in exchange for undeterred pollution is neither a just nor a wise response to the climate crisis.

The trade allows heavy greenhouse gas emitters to buy carbon credits from others, ostensibly offsetting their emissions. The most popular trades in Africa involve getting countries on the continent to adapt to renewable energy, plant trees and protect natural forests. In return, emitters like oil and gas companies can give them some money and claim carbon credits that allow them to offset their own emission.

The Africa Carbon Markets Initiative

was established at COP27 in Egypt. African countries already trading carbon credits, often at small scale, include Kenya, Nigeria, Malawi, Gabon, Egypt, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Madagascar, Ghana and Mozambique. African leaders see this entry into the carbon market as a way to fund climate adaptation and mitigation.

Though endorsed by leaders, the carbon credit system is not in Africa's interest. It shifts obligation from the wealthy countries most responsible to the poorer countries most affected. It overburdens poor countries with adaptation and mitigation (plant trees, build solar projects) while allowing wealthy ones to shirk their responsibility to reduce the emissions that caused the crisis in the first place.

Using money in this way to trade off a duty is morally reprehensible.

Carbon markets are also insufficient in taming runaway pollution. Yes, forests sink some of the carbon emitted by industrialised economies. But to keep global warming below two degrees, as scientists agree we must, carbon sinking cannot be just another commodity in the market economy and should only be pursued in addition to zero-emission



**Road to ruin: Trading in carbon lets rich countries off the hook and strains the natural resources of the countries most at risk.** Photo: Junior Kannah/AFP

targets which may require abandoning use of fossil fuels altogether.

Any money Africa makes from the carbon markets will be insufficient against the magnitude of climate crisis impacts on its communities. Mitigating and responding to flooding, droughts, famine, displacement, hurricanes, and tropical storms requires substantially more investment than carbon markets can unlock.

The African Carbon Market Initiative seeks \$6-billion through 2030 but the continent needs \$ 1.7-trillion for climate adaptation by 2035. And given that carbon credit demand fell by 7% over the last two years, even the \$6-billion may remain just a dream.

Moreover, carbon offset projects may inadvertently create other problems.

Planting quick-maturing trees to absorb carbon is a mainstay of offset projects, but these degrade soil by

absorbing and reducing soil moisture, undermining agricultural productivity and creating food insecurity in rural areas.

Carbon offset projects have also led to forced evictions of rural communities and other human rights violations. The ongoing eviction of the Ogiek from forest land is linked to Kenya's carbon trading ventures. Similar claims emerged in Liberia where the government is leasing about 10% of the country's land area to a Dubai firm, Blue Carbon.

Finally, without local legislation to regulate carbon trading, including how its proceeds are shared between corporations, governments and communities, African leaders are putting the cart before the horse in going to the carbon markets. Gabon received \$150-million to preserve its rainforests but the benefit to rural communities is unclear.

The climate crisis will not be addressed without the bolder, more assertive leadership of African states witnessed at the Africa Climate Summit. But that leadership must be in service of people, not profit.

Going into COP28, African delegates must unequivocally reject commodifying and commercialising pollution. It is time for our governments to recognise that carbon trading, anchored on the Paris Agreement and Nairobi Declaration, is a false solution – morally dubious and ineffective. ■

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*Dr David Ngira is the Eastern Africa and Great Lakes economic, social and cultural rights researcher at Amnesty International. Lucia Masuka is the executive director of Amnesty International-Zimbabwe.*

# Global policies on illicit drugs fuel climate injustice in West Africa

**A byproduct of the Global North's war on narcotics is the growth of illicit drug corridors in West Africa – which in turn accelerates deforestation**

**Charles Ebikeme**

**M**ore cocaine was seized in the first three months of 2019 in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde alone than in the entire African continent between 2013 and 2016. That is because coastal West African countries – stretching from Senegal, through Gambia and Guinea-Bissau to Guinea – are now a major corridor for cocaine from Latin America en route to end markets in Europe.

That was not always the case, but the “war on drugs” in the Americas is pushing drug producers and traders to seek more remote areas of operation. West Africa is very well suited to this, as it is both coastal and deeply forested.

The Guinean forests of West Africa

stretch across Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, and Ghana to Togo in the east, extending from Benin through Nigeria and Cameroon, and down towards Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Republic of the Congo, Angola, and Democratic Republic of the Congo.

They make up a vast, poorly-policed expanse in which producers can hide farms and stocks for illicit drugs. And there is easy access to the sea.

Drug activity is linked to an increase in deforestation, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Between 2002 and 2022, Guinea lost 7.4% of its primary forest, and saw a 24% decrease in tree cover overall. The Guinean forest is one of the most severely threatened forest systems in the world.

By driving the producers of illicit drugs into our ocean waters and forests, the Global North's “war on drugs” is fuelling land grabs and deforestation in the same ecosystems that are so crucial to our climate survival. ■



**Up in smoke: Africa's forest belt has had to be tightened too much and too quickly.** Photo: Alexis Huguet/AFP

# The real magic of the kola nut

**Writer Chimamanda Adiche asked elders to allow women to break kola nuts in Igbo rituals – sparking a debate about gender roles in traditional ceremonies.**

**But what is the big deal with kola nuts anyway?**

**Odeyinka Oluwatobi explains.**

**I** was probably less than six years old the first time I tasted a kola nut. My late grandfather offered me a bite saying, “Obi níí bi ikú, obi níí bi àrùn” – “It is the kola nut that wards off death, it is the kola nut that wards off illness”.

In many communities in Nigeria and West Africa, especially among the Yoruba and the Igbo people, the kola nut is believed to have superpowers in the medicinal, nutritional and spiritual realms. Obi is the Yoruba word for it; the Igbo people call it oji.

The kola tree, which is indigenous to West Africa, grows in two varieties: cola acuminata and cola nitida. Cola nitida, which the Yoruba call obi gbanja, has two cotyledons or lobes and is commonly eaten. Obi abata (cola acuminata) can have more than five lobes and is traditionally used to welcome guests, seal agreements, seek favours from elders and open meetings. It is also indispensable in weddings, naming ceremonies, funerals and festivals.

When my uncle sought his bride’s hand in marriage, we included some kola nuts in the symbolic food items sent to her

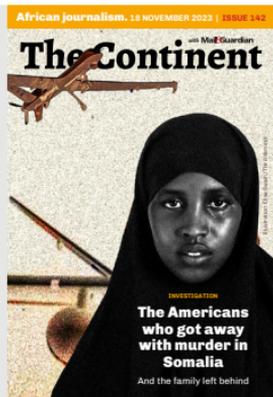
house. Each food item presented to the bride’s family symbolises something – a wish, prayer, or an admonition.

Yam tubers are a wish for wealth while kola nuts, particularly the variety with many lobes, are a prayer for fertility – may the bride have many children as the kola nut has lobes.

With the introduction of Abrahamic religions, the kola nuts suffered some relegation in our societies. Nowadays, people prefer religious or court weddings to traditional weddings where the kola nut would have featured prominently. But it is still prominent in traditional festivals and ceremonies in Igboland. ■



**Deez: Kola nuts contain caffeine, which as we know is where the magic happens.**  
Photo: Issouf Sanogo/AFP



**EDITOR'S NOTE:** In 2018, a US drone strike killed Luul Dahir Mohamed and her four-year-old daughter. Two weeks ago, an investigation by Nick Turse that was published in *The Intercept* and *The Continent* uncovered the damning report of a secret US military investigation into the incident. The report found that the soldiers involved were confused, inexperienced and operating with faulty intelligence – but nonetheless exonerated them all. This week, Luul's family responds.

# An American drone killed my sister and niece – and tore my family apart

**Despite admitting their mistake to themselves, US authorities have ignored our efforts to contact them.**

**Abubakar Dahir Mohamed**

**M**y sister and her daughter were killed as they tried to escape a United States drone strike. In over five years of trying to get justice, no one has ever responded to us.

My sister Luul was funny, social, and clear-spoken. She liked people, and people liked her. Even though her daughter Mariam, my niece, was only four, it was clear to everyone that she was growing up to be just like her mother. She would get excited whenever family members would visit, running down the road to hug them.

The two of them had a special bond. When my brother found their bodies, Luul was still holding Mariam in her arms.

Luul and Mariam were killed in an American drone strike in 2018, leaving my family with just memories and shock. Ever since, my family has been trying to get justice. Last week, the journalist Nick Turse published information about our story (which ran in both *The Intercept* and *The Continent*).

He referenced an officer from the task force that investigated the attack, who “determined that his unit had killed an ‘adult female and child’, but expressed

doubt that their identities would ever be known.”

For more than five years, we have tried to make sure the identities of Luul and Mariam are known to the US. At the time the officer claimed that they may never be able to identify the victims, I had already contacted Africom – the US Army’s Africa Command – through their website’s contact page, and written an email to the Public Affairs Officer at the US Embassy in Somalia.

When I found out later that the US admitted that they killed civilians in the attack, I contacted them again, telling them that the victims were my family members. I am not sure if they even read my complaint.

In June 2020, Africom added a civilian casualties reporting page to their website for the first time. I was very happy to see this. I thought there was finally a way to make a complaint that would be listened to. I submitted a description of what happened, and waited. No one got back to me. Two years later, in desperation, I submitted a complaint again. Nobody responded.

I now know that the US military has admitted not only to killing Luul and Mariam, but doing so even after they survived the first strike. It killed them as Luul fled the car they targeted – running for her life, carrying Mariam in her arms. The US has said this in its reports, and individual officers have spoken to journalists. But it has never said this to us. No one has contacted us at all.

Since the strike, our family has been broken apart. It has been more than five

years since it happened, but we have not been able to move on. My father is perhaps the most affected. His eyesight has worsened to the point he can barely see. He cries so regularly, even now, that it has caused him serious injury. He is anxious, constantly worried about the next attack. His only solace is talking about Luul – her qualities, and the memories he has of her. His asthma has worsened. He is weak and unable to exercise control over his own body. Two of us have to be with him every day, to take him to the hospital when he needs to go, or to carry him to the bathroom.

My father has asked us, his sons, to be responsible for trying to get justice for Luul and Mariam. For more than five years, we have been trying to do this – trying to contact the US, to talk to journalists, to demand the US see us and acknowledge the harm they have caused. But in all that time, even as we have contacted them in every way we know how, we have never been able to even start a process of getting justice. The US has never even acknowledged our existence. Having to explain this to my father, every time he asks about our progress, is humiliating.

The family I come from hates the merciless al-Shabaab. I have been working for the Somali government for 10 years. I am a person who loves to participate in rebuilding my country – who has worked towards sustainable good governance in Somalia, where we peacefully coexist, and where terrorism and the use of violence are eliminated. I played an important role in the war led by the tribal forces known



**From left to right: Shilow Muse Ali, the father of 4-year-old Mariam Shilow Muse and husband of 22-year-old Luul Dahir Mohamed, both of whom were killed in a U.S. drone strike in 2018; Luul's father and Mariam's grandfather, Dahir Mohamed Abdi; and Luul's brothers and Mariam's uncles Qasim Dahir Mohamed, Ahmed Dahir Mohamed, Hussein Dahir Mohamed, and Abdi Dahir Mohamed, in Mogadishu, Somalia, on May 10, 2023. Photo: Omar Abdisalan/*The Intercept***

as Ma'awisley – a group who has made the most significant strides in fighting al-Shabaab in decades, with the support of the Somali government and the US.

If the government and the US want local people to help them defeat al-Shabaab, they shouldn't kill those people. The US shouldn't commit human rights violations, and then refuse to make any amends. This also makes it easy for al-Shabaab to get people on its side. It can say, "Look. To them, we are all targets. Militants and civilians. Don't think you are any different to us." Al-Shabaab spin a lot of propaganda, but when they say this, they don't have to lie. It seems that the US really believes that Somali people who live with al-Shabaab are no different to them, and giving them anything is a crime.

It is painful that my family have had to live at the mercy of al-Shabaab, who rule the territory they live in, subjecting them to constant extortion and oppression. Now we are facing another problem from

the governments we were looking for help – both the US government, and our own. We are in the midst of all of these problems: al-Shabaab is a cruel enemy; the US is killing us and does not allow us to talk to them about the pain they have caused; and the Somali government is not prepared to protect us, its citizens, who stand and fight with it against al-Shabaab.

So, what should I do? Do I give up on seeking justice for my sister? A missile was targeted at her after she escaped the first airstrike, while running with her little girl, 50m away from the original strike. My sister was killed, and she won't be back again – but doesn't she have the right to get justice, and for her family to at least be compensated for the loss of her life?

The US claims that it works to promote democracy, social justice, the rule of law, and the protection of rights around the world. As we struggle to get them to notice our suffering, we hope the US will remember what they claim to stand for. ■

## Gen zZz is not impressed

Seeing as Africa's median age is about 19, the views of its youth should matter (more than they often seem to).

When Afrobarometer asked about 28,000 youths (18 to 35) in 39 African countries what they consider the most important problems their countries face and their governments should address, the priority cited most often was unemployment. Economic management ranked second, then health, infrastructure and roads, water supply, and education.

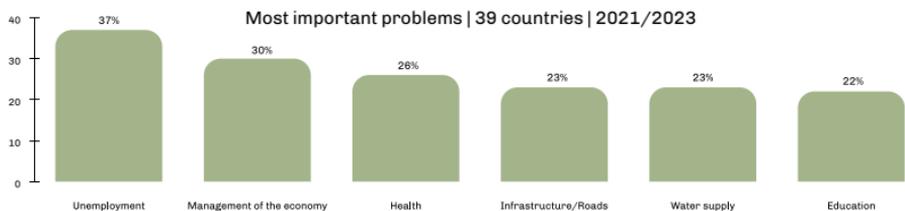
The bad news, or maybe the corollary, is that they increasingly see governments as failing them on these issues.

Since Afrobarometer's Round 6 surveys in 2014/2015, young people's ratings of their government's performance in addressing unemployment, economic management, and health have declined significantly across 32 countries surveyed consistently during this period.

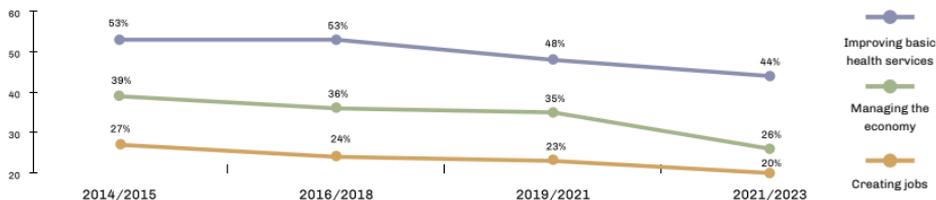
Approval of leaders' efforts has dropped by seven percentage points (from 27% to 20%) on job creation, by nine points (from 53% to 44%) on healthcare delivery, and by 13 points (39% to 26%) on economic management.

Now, if young people would get out and vote... ■

### Youth priorities and approval of government performance | respondents aged 18-35



### Approval of government performance on top three priorities | 32 countries | 2014 - 2023



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

# A day in your life as a Kenyan woman

Joan Masinde in Nairobi

**I**n the invigorating, daunting labyrinth of Nairobi, the day begins in earnest as you step into the bustling current of the city streets. The matatu, a vessel of camaraderie and contention, awaits with its cacophony of voices and scents both pleasant and not so pleasant. Before you get into the metal capsule that will hurtle through the city, you meet several unsolicited comments about your skin, dress or body. Mrembo. Msupa. Macho nne. Mali safi. Mami. The catcalling is not subtle, and has been woven into the fabric of matatu culture. Have I mentioned the unnecessary groping as you step on board? Sometimes there is that too.

In the realm of public transportation, you become a silent warrior, gracefully watching the city unfold outside your window – a pulsating mosaic of dreams and struggles, a reflection of your own.

Your phone is in one hand, the fare is clenched in the other, and your bag is on your lap – zipped, of course. You go through the daily tabloids and catch up on the latest chaos caused by Kenyans On Twitter.

Usually, the ride is smooth, but on this unlucky day, your peace is disrupted by a man “landing” on the seat next to you. In his attempt to be comfortable, he

spreads his legs wide, places his shoulders next to yours, and folds his arms with his elbow too close to your chest. You silently simmer because, once again, you must choose your battles – so you gracefully readjust to accommodate his size. The traffic in the morning escalates your discomfort but you sit quietly, killing the man with your thoughts and wondering why this gender can be so inconsiderate.

When another seat avails itself, you quickly squeeze out of your space, past the man, and into it. Before you can process all the improper displays of power, it's time to alight and head to the office.

The guard at the building's entrance greets you. “Mrembo, habari ya asubuhi?” There's that unsolicited name again. It is hard to ignore, considering that the same security guard greets the men as “Chief”, “Boss” and “Mkubwa” – regardless of their size.

You respond with reluctance in your tone. He is just a product of his environment. You shrug it off and walk to your desk to start the day peacefully. Before you can plan your workload and put on your Spotify playlist, your entitled male workmate has arrived. “How are you, mami?” he says.

At the morning coffee break, whispers of salary disparities flutter through the air. A new female hire is earning less than two



**On the line: Your clothes. Your home and your family. Your job, your self-respect and your future. Your sanity and your safety. Your life.** Photo: Amaury Falt-Brown/AFP

other colleagues in the same role. They are both men, of course. On average, Kenyan women earn 55 shillings for every 100 shillings paid to a man.

That is true for you, too: Solomon, your lazy male colleague who comes in late and takes credit for the presentation you spent hours preparing, was recently given a salary raise. Your increase was denied. Defeated by this part of your job, you walk to your desk.

The clock hits 5pm and the thought of enduring more matatu commentary is exhausting. With a sigh, you start the journey home. The man seated next to you in the matatu is manspreading as if he paid for both seats. Afraid for the contents of your handbag, you hold it tight and begin a battle of the thighs hoping he'll get the hint and sit properly.

At your house, your sanctuary, the night shift begins. The mouths that live

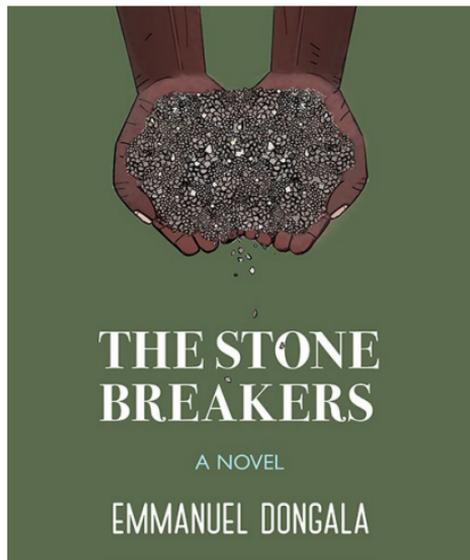
there must be fed, the chores done, the souls nurtured. Your husband is not the chore-sharing type. With quiet fortitude, you make sure that everything and everyone is ready for tomorrow.

Finally, you sit down. You take in the silence. Nairobi is hushed, sleeping. This city is a paradox: it presents obstacles at every turn, and also cradles your dreams. It undermines your worth on a daily basis, while also witnessing your unyielding spirit. Amidst it all, you persist.

These thoughts are disrupted by an 11.30pm text. "Nice outfit today." Remember that entitled workmate? Yes, it's him. You sigh. You turn off your screen and lay your head to rest, hoping that tomorrow will be less exhausting. *Aluta continua.* ■

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*Joan Masinde is a feminist storyteller who is passionate about social justice.*



## Breaking stones, breaking barriers

**For women who have been through it all, taking on a corrupt state is nothing.**

**Jacqueline Nyathi**

**D**riving through Harare recently, I saw a woman sitting in front of her tiny house, breaking rocks. I wished afterwards that I had stopped to speak to her, to hear a little of her story, but I was in a hurry, and the moment was lost.

It's not that I ever forget that I'm a woman, but it's easy to begin to take one's own experiences and stories for the only truth, to forget that women's experiences are incredibly diverse, and that womanhood is no monolith.

In a way, that is what's at the heart of Emmanuel Dongala's novel *The Stone Breakers*, about women who break stones on the banks of a river in an imagined African country and who decide to push for a better return on their labour.

Reading about how each ended up here is enlightening – the author blows up the assumptions we form when we find people in more precarious positions than our own.

The story that follows is wonderful: going up against a powerful and corrupt autocracy, encountering a powerful woman minister and a stereotypical and very familiar first lady on the way. They come up against brutal police, a broken health system and all of the ways people try to survive a broken state. There's also room for an awful ex, a budding romance, and even a happy (if somewhat bittersweet) ending.

The women have overcome sometimes terrible odds to even be at the riverside, and it's a mistake to underestimate these warriors because of their current station in life. But even though many of their experiences are grim, this is ultimately a feel-good and powerful story – one that the minister of women's affairs in the novel, and anyone who claims to advocate for women, would do well to read. ■

# THE QUIZ

What countries do the flags below represent?



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

"The answers, my friend, are blowing in the wind."

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

**A**s Mariah Carey would say: “It’s timeeeeeee!” Unless it is urgent, please do not send that work email. Put all tasks on hold till January and get ready to party – and may whichever deity you choose or choose not to believe in fill your pockets with all you need!

Here at Drift we’ve been sitting by the door waiting for our invite to the African Union Christmas Party. We’ve even prepared a Christmas hamper for each leader featuring an array of treats including tear-gas scented candles, Snakes and Ladders board game (complete with a rigged dice so only they can win), and decorations in the shapes of famous opposition figures so they can “hang them” on their Christmas tree. Inexplicably, our

party invite has not yet arrived. If any of our leaders are reading this, we can also be reached on email! You wouldn’t want us to rock up without an invite, surely?

We aren’t the only ones thinking of crashing the party, though. Last Sunday authorities in Sierra Leone declared a nationwide curfew as they announced that “unidentified individuals” had attacked military barracks in the capital Freetown.

The government said the attackers had been repelled and calm had been restored, adding that security forces were continuing to “root out the remnant of the fleeing renegades.”

Of course, the “C-word” hung in the air like an overly adventurous sprig of mistletoe (we are trying to be more sensitive: spelling out the word “coup” can be a bit triggering for our leaders).

And lo, just days later the country’s minister for information, Chernoh Bah, confirmed that the attack on the military barracks was a failed coup attempt, the intention of which was “to illegally subvert and overthrow the legally elected government.”

According to the government, some of the coup leaders

are in custody while others remain on the run. Seems this group were rather eager to join the cast of our show *Keeping Up With The Coupdashians* in time for the AU Christmas party.

A party where two guests don’t get on can always be a bit awkward, so the AU may want to be prepared in case they are inviting the European Union and the head of Niger’s military government, General

## Arrest ye merry gentlemen



**CONTINENTAL DRIFT**

**Samira Sawlani**

Abdourahmane Tchiani, who this week revoked a 2015 EU-backed law that criminalised the transporting of migrants through Niger.

The legislation was widely seen as being one of the reasons behind the reduction in the number of people making the journey from West Africa to Europe. Nevertheless, the junta stated that the law is not in the interest of people, possibly due to the fact that residents in cities like Agadez had been dependent on migrants travelling through the area, and thus their livelihoods were affected by the law.

The EU is clearly fretting over the move, and it does not seem that relations between them and the junta, which have been frostier than a snowman since the coup, will be improving anytime soon.

With all his travelling, we aren't sure if Kenya's President Billy Ruto will make it to the shindig, and so we decided to send his Christmas hamper to him in Nairobi.

Unfortunately, we've been told that it got waterlogged as a result of the flooding that has hit Kenya.

At least 120 people have been killed by the floods, which also displaced an estimated 500,000 people.

As if flooding wasn't enough, Kenyan leaders have other pressing issues on their minds. Like what to wear!

This week speaker of parliament Moses Wetang'ula decided that of all the things plaguing the country, what was most important was to update the dress code.

And so it was that he announced that Kaunda suits – named for the zooty safari suity attire favoured by Zambia's favourite



**On the move: General Abdourahmane Tchiani is rolling back Nigerien laws that hamper migration to Europe.**

Photo: AFP

ex-president, Kenneth Kaunda – are “prohibited” and that skirts and dresses should extend below the knee, and that honourable lady members must also avoid “tightly fitting clothes and revealing attire”.

Regrettably, he neglected to stipulate how tight and revealing men's attire ought to be, so we're afraid they're just going to have to wing it.

Knee deep in debt, yet Kenya's main concern is drip. How about y'all worry more about money and less about my knees? Please and thank you.

News from neighbouring Somalia is also bleak as President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud announced that flooding has killed 101 people and displaced a million more.

We hope the alarming increase of natural disasters in number and intensity is registering in the minds of the world leaders at COP28, as they fly in on private planes and fuel up their guzzling vehicles.

Or are they just there to make sure they outwit, outplay and outlast the rest of us? ■

# Can Kenya's Parliament stand up to Ruto?

Legislative oversight is weakening even as presidential powers gain strength.

Oscar Ochieng and Darmi Jattani

Kenya's Parliament has been lauded as one of Africa's strongest, but has often failed to stand up to the executive and threatens to be a "weak link" in the country's fragile democracy. Now there is a concern that President William Ruto's energetic and attentive determination to force his legislative agenda through, will undermine the legislature further.

The handling of the recent Finance Bill does not inspire confidence in the prospect that legislators will stand up to the president.

The bill was unpopular for a number of reasons, including income tax increases and a new housing levy that will see Kenyans pay 1.5% of their gross monthly salary, with employers forced to match this amount. Critics argue that these changes will make people poorer while undermining business profits and so harming employment.

Despite this, Ruto used his influence to push the bill through Parliament, using two main strategies.

First, his Kenya Kwanza government organised caucus meetings to drill MPs on how to vote.

Second, key government leaders including the president, deputy president and speaker – who is supposed to remain impartial – warned critical MPs they would be starved of development projects if they shot down the bill.

A number of other worrying trends pose an even greater challenge to accountable government. Since the tenure of Uhuru Kenyatta, Kenyan presidents have been making increasing use of executive orders to bypass Parliament.

Partly as a result, the "index of legislative constraint on the executive", created from Varieties of Democracy Institute data, shows that Kenya's Parliament actually got weaker between 2011 and 2019.

If this continues, the capacity of the legislature to check the president, and protect the 2010 Constitution, will be fatally undermined. ■

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*Oscar Ochieng is a communication specialist based in Nairobi. Darmi Jattani*

*is an economist with experience in public finance research and policy. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa*



# THE BIG PICTURE

Jingle polls: Opposition politician Moïse Katumbi will be one of over 20 candidates who will be challenging President Félix Tshisekedi in the Democratic Republic of Congo's election on 20 December, amid a tense political climate and relentless fighting in the east of the country.

Photo: Alexis Huguet /AFP



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