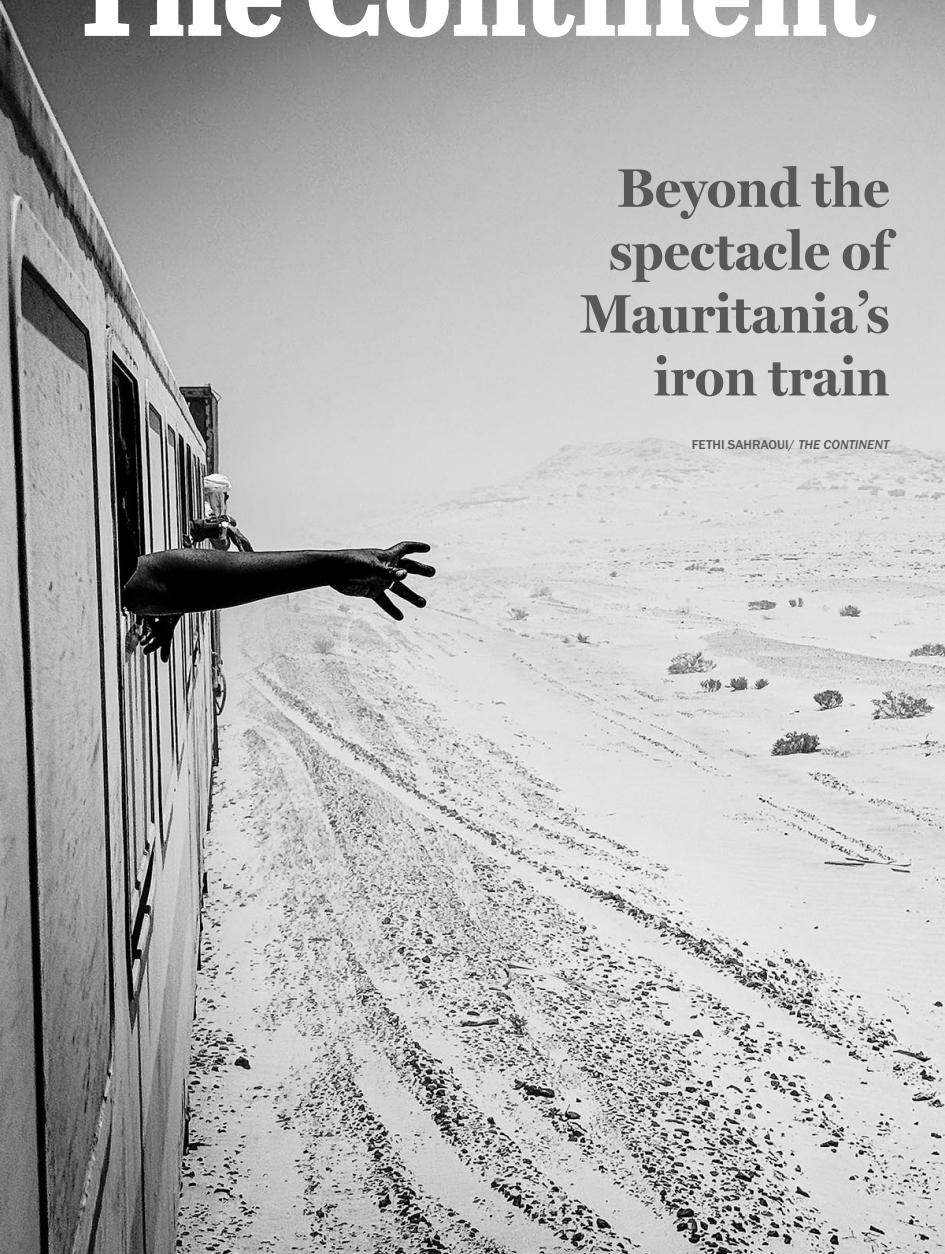


The Continent

Beyond the spectacle of Mauritania's iron train

FETHI SAHRAOUI/ THE CONTINENT





COVER: Mauritania's iron ore train holds some of the world's records for length and tonnage, as it hauls ore from iron-rich hills in the Sahara to the coast for export. The train has also gained interest in recent years from travel bloggers and influencers, who ride atop the train as an ultimate "bucket list" experience. Mauritanian authorities have cracked down on the dangerous practice, but the exoticisation of the train persists – our photographer was drawn to ride the train himself after watching the Spanish film *Sirāt*, which references the train and its passengers as a backdrop in the protagonists' journey. He returned with a photo essay that captures the beauty of ordinary moments, away from the spectacle of social media (p12).

Inside

- 7 Diamonds:** Deploying terminology as a weapon against an industry in decline
- 10 Nigeria:** Africa's biggest IPO promises to make investors millionaires, maybe
- 20 Interview:** The unfinished struggle is not an abstraction
- 25 Tech:** Content moderators call time on Meta's hide-and-seek
- 28 Review:** A family confronts pain and finds redemption in the shade of a jacaranda
- 29 Quiz:** The World Athletics Championships is coming home – but to which city?



Time to touch grass

We are going on a publication break for two weeks to exhale.

While we're away, the next edition of *The Atlas* – our international co-publication with Coda Story – will be delivered to subscribers of *The Continent* via your usual channels on 24 September. Our flagship publication will be back on 10 October for you to read and share.

THE WEEK IN BRIEF

STOLEN HISTORY

Smuggled artefacts returned

Lebanon has handed 37 artefacts back to Egypt at a ceremony at the National Museum of Beirut. The artefacts date back to the pharaonic civilisation and were smuggled into Lebanon six years ago. Culture Minister Ghassan Salamé said the ownership of the items was investigated and they were returned in compliance with the 1970 international convention that prohibits the illicit trafficking of cultural property. The artefacts –



comprising masks, wooden dolls, pieces of Coptic textiles and amulets – had been seized at the Port of Beirut.

NIGERIA

Killer cocktail

More than 49 people have died after consuming a herbal drink in Ondo State. The state health commissioner said 170 others were hospitalised, the *Punch* newspaper reports. The producer of the locally made concoction was arrested on suspicion of adding methanol to the drink to increase its potency, and another 15 accomplices have been detained. Nigeria's food and drug agency is currently enforcing a ban on alcoholic drinks sold in sachets and plastic bottles under 200ml in a bid to thwart underage drinking.

ALGERIA

Death for arson = overkill

Amnesty International has urged Algeria to back off plans to restore the death penalty for those guilty of arson, calling it a “severe blow” to human rights. After a deadly wildfire killed 12 people last month, President Abdelmadjid Tebboune had urged the justice ministry to “reintroduce” the death penalty as punishment for intentionally starting or instigating forest fires. Algeria has not carried out any executions since 1993. The international organisation called for the abolition of the death penalty.



Russia is pushing its influence in Africa a notch higher by opening up eight more “Rossotrudnichestvo” or cultural and education centres, in addition to the 16 Russian Houses it already has across the continent.

SEYCHELLES

EU fleets are choking island shores

An awful lot of plastic and discarded fishing gear is washing up along the shores of the Seychelles, devastating fragile marine ecosystems and local economies. Computer simulations by two researchers at the University of Oxford show that most of this waste comes from vessels operating directly within or near Seychelles’ waters. Much of it is likely dumped by fishing vessels from Europe, the researchers say. These industrial fleets have long held lucrative rights to fish the region’s waters under a bilateral agreement between the European Union and the island nation.

MOROCCO

An embassy for an embassy

Israel and Morocco have agreed to level up their relationship by opening embassies in each other’s countries and appointing ambassadors. Morocco’s Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita and his Israeli counterpart Gideon Sa’ar met in the United States to discuss this development, *RFI* reports. The two countries established ties in 2020 as part of the US-led Abraham Accords. That deal led to the US recognising Morocco’s sovereignty over Western Sahara. But public sentiment shows that many Moroccans strongly identify with the Palestinian cause and oppose close ties with Israel.

GUINEA

Looks like a duck, coups like a stool pigeon

Guinea's High Authority for Communication condemned *France 24* for describing President Mamady Doumbouya as a putschist. The country's media regulator said the outlet ignored the president's legitimacy and has asked it to correct this misrepresentation on all its platforms. Since Doumbouya came into office through a coup in 2021 and won a controversial election in 2025, he has dissolved political parties and banned protests while cracking down against dissent. Not a putschist at all.

SOUTH AFRICA

Do the white thing, huffs a spiky US

The United States has announced visa restrictions against people it decides are discriminating against South Africa's white minority. Secretary of State Marco Rubio accused the South African government of not doing enough to protect Afrikaners, and that the move was the first in a series of possible escalatory steps against those who enable land expropriation without compensation. Rubio did not name any individuals targeted by the restrictions, the *BBC* reports. South Africa has repeatedly denied accusations of persecuting white people or confiscating their land.



Up and at 'em: President Salva Kiir's son, Atem Kiir, is now boss of protecting his dad.

SOUTH SUDAN

The son also rises

South Sudan President Salva Kiir has placed his son at the centre of the country's presidential guard, *Business Insider Africa* reports. Major General Atem Salva Kiir has been appointed to command the elite force responsible for protecting the president and senior officials. A military spokesperson defended the appointment, saying it was on merit and had "nothing to do" with Atem being the president's son. But the move mirrors similar trends in Uganda and Rwanda, where the sons of long-term presidents have also risen to key military positions.

ETHIOPIA

Mourners murdered

An armed attack on Wednesday in Central Ethiopia Regional State has led to the deaths of 16 people, the *Addis Standard* reports. The violence began with the killing of a young child on Monday. As mourners gathered to console the child's family, armed attackers opened fire on the crowd. Women and children were also abducted, and local sources report the kidnappers have started demanding ransoms ranging from 800,000 to 2.5-million Birr (\$4,900 to \$15,300) for their release. Residents attributed the attack to an Amhara militia group named Fano.

DRC

Too early to celebrate

As authorities declare that the Ebola outbreak has reached its peak, the World Health Organisation has called for caution, *RFI* reports. More than 7,000 cases have been recorded with more than 3,000 deaths in seven provinces in the DRC. Government officials point to a gradual slowdown in transmission since mid-August as proof of a cooldown, but the WHO says trends at the national level do not reflect what is happening at the provincial level. No approved vaccine has been developed for the Bundibugyo strain that is responsible for the current outbreak.

KENYA

All roads lead to Nairobi

Nairobi will become the first African city to host the World Athletics Championships after securing hosting rights for 2029, beating London's and Rome's bids. World Athletics president Lord Sebastian Coe announced the decision this week, describing Nairobi's bid as "compelling and emotional". Kenya is the second-most successful country at the Championships, with 72 medals predominantly in middle- and long-distance running. The event



will be held at the 48,000-capacity Kasarani Stadium, which is expected to undergo major refurbishment in preparation for the event.

NEWS

ANGOLA - BOTSWANA

Jewel of denial: ‘Lab gems can’t be diamonds!’

Angola and Botswana deploy semantics in bid to stonewall sparkling synthetic creep.

KELETSO THOBEGA IN GABORONE

AS LAB-GROWN diamonds grow rapidly in market share, Angola and Botswana are pushing to reserve the name “diamond” exclusively for mined gems.

Lab-grown diamonds account for about 20% of the global jewellery market – up from just 1% 10 years ago, and projected to rise to 33% within 10 years.

Last week, Botswana’s President Duma Boko and Angola’s President João Lourenço signed the Luanda Accord, which will set aside 1% of their rough diamond sales to aggressively market natural diamonds globally. They are calling for the name “diamond” to be attributed only to natural stones.

“A synthetic gem that is made in a lab could never be a diamond,” President Boko said, quoted by state media.

Diamonds are Botswana’s biggest export earner, and have become Angola’s second-biggest export. Together they



PHOTO: BOTSWANA PRESIDENCY

***Executive derision:** Botswana’s President Duma Boko and Angola’s President João Lourenço.*

account for just under a third of global rough diamond production by volume.

Anglo American holds an 85% stake in De Beers, the world’s leading diamond producer, but wants to sell its share for \$1-billion – down sharply from the \$5.2-billion it paid in 2012. Botswana already owns 15% and is angling for a majority stake, and Angola has also expressed interest.

Experts are divided on Angola and Botswana’s move to pursue a buyout. Economist Maatla Kgasa sees joint ownership as a chance for both nations to control global diamond distribution.

However, veteran industry executive Blackie Marole has urged caution, pointing to falling demand and De Beers’ declining value. He warned that Botswana “cannot reverse this value decline” and should instead focus on diversifying its economy. ■

DRC



PHOTO: SAMY NTUMBA SHAMBU/YAP

Power move: Protesters in Kinshasa march against changes seen as a step towards president-for-life.

If they won't join you, beat them

PROSPER HERI NGORORA IN GOMA

A protest against a constitutional amendment that would allow President Félix Tshisekedi to seek a third term in office was violently broken up by security forces in Kinshasa on Tuesday.

One person was killed and several others were injured in the clashes.

An opposition alliance had mobilised hundreds of protesters for the march. They were confronted by security forces and what some activists said was a private militia-for-hire.

The DRC has a two-term limit for the presidency. Tshisekedi was elected in 2018 and 2023. Pro-democracy activist Muyisa Christophe told *The Continent* that instead of clinging to power, Tshisekedi should focus “on the important issues of war, insecurity and also the Ebola epidemic”.

The DRC has seen more than 7,000 cases of Ebola, nearly half of which have been fatal. “I hope one day we will have leaders who prioritise our well-being over power and personal interest,” said Kinshasa resident André Kalala. ■

Reading is resistance



Get *The Continent* delivered for free every week.

Message +27 73 805 6068 on [WhatsApp](#), [Signal](#) and [Telegram](#), or email read@thecontinent.org and send "Subscribe"

THE TEAM

Christine Mungai Editor-in-Chief
Athandiwe Saba Editor at large
Refiloe Seiboko Production Editor
Matthew du Plessis Managing Editor
Lisa Muchangi Communities Lead
Simon Allison International Editor
Yusuf Omotayo Commissioning Editor

Yemsrach Yetneberk Illustrator
Paul Botes Photo Editor
Sipho Kings Publisher
Dumi Sithole Distribution
Evania Chiza Finance
Kiri Rupiah Reporter
Gado Cartoonist
Ashleigh Swaile Designer
Wynona Mutisi Illustrator

OUR PARTNERS

The Continent has received support from the following institutions: 11th Hour Project, African Climate Foundation, Africa No Filter, African Union, Amplify SA, Ford Foundation, Fred Foundation, GiZ, Luminate, National Endowment for Democracy, Mott Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Pulitzer Centre and the Swiss Philanthropy Partners.

NIGERIA

Dangote IPO: Jollof jackpot or just another cunning stunt?

Here we go again: Harnessing hype and wishful thinking to make the wealthy wealthier.

SEKINAT OJENIYI IN LAGOS

ON MONDAY, Aliko Dangote launched the continent's largest share sale with the initial public offering (IPO) of his oil refinery. He plans to raise \$2.1-billion by offering up roughly 3% of the company.

Dangote needs \$14.3-billion to expand the refinery's production capacity from 700,000 barrels per day to 1.4-million by 2029. The refinery is currently benefiting from a boom in sales of refined petroleum to Western countries as a result of higher demand due to global disruption caused by the US-Israeli strikes on Iran.

Africa's richest man described it as the people's IPO and has urged ordinary Nigerians to invest as he doesn't "want to be the only one enjoying". He said he wants this IPO to be like Amazon's, "where if you invest thousands of dollars

today, you could become a millionaire in the years to come".

Whether this is possible depends on the refinery's earnings, dividends and share price, alongside inflation, the naira's performance and global oil prices.

"The question is less whether significant capital appreciation is possible than how long investors are prepared to wait and whether the business remains profitable enough to reward them for doing so," financial analyst Kalu Aja told *The Continent*.

Olumide Adesina, a senior accountant and capital markets analyst, said while this is possible, it would take a long time for that to materialise. "[The] minimum investment of N5,250 would need to grow by approximately 190 times to reach N1-million," he told *The Continent*.

Those highly likely to make millions are those already within the billionaire's inner circle. In July, Dangote raised \$2.5-billion in a 6% private sale. Private investors bought their stakes in the company at a discount as the deal valued the company at \$40-billion.

Among them was his long-term billionaire friend, Femi Otedola, who liquidated his entire stake in Geregu Power Plc to invest \$100-million. The public IPO was launched at a valuation closer to \$49-billion.

The structure of the sale is also



Slick schtick: Aliko Dangote launches his IPO at the stock exchange in Lagos. PHOTO: SUNDAY ALAMBA/AP

significant. Retail investors will have the same ordinary shares as other shareholders, but they will collectively own a small slice of a company in which Dangote retains overwhelming control, with 87% ownership.

Adesina told *The Continent* that everyday investors should pay close attention to how the company handles payouts, debt and future fundraising. Since the main owner still controls the vast majority of the company, regular investors will have “limited influence” in these important financial decisions.

Beyond the financial return, the project is perceived as a vote of confidence in Nigeria. The refinery was built at a reported cost of about \$20-billion, and according to Aja, it demonstrates the country’s ability to “deliver a project of this scale and sophistication”.

But whether the refinery has bettered

the lives of Nigerians is still in question. While it has helped to maintain energy security and create jobs since it began operations in January 2024, it has not eased the cost of fuel for Nigerians.

Oil marketers have accused Dangote of stifling competition and aiming for a monopoly, which has raised the price of fuel. He has taken legal action to stop or limit fuel import licences being issued to rival companies.

High fuel prices, inflation and global oil-price movements have also limited the effect on household purchasing power. “The IPO can expand Nigerians’ participation in the refinery’s financial gains, but it may not directly reduce fuel prices or raise living standards,” Adesina said.

The longer-term outcome, he added, will depend on profitability, dividends and corporate governance. ■

PHOTO ESSAY

Snaking through the Sahara

Mauritania built one of the world's longest trains to haul iron ore across the Sahara. For decades, locals have ridden it because they need to. Then ✨influencers✨ arrived looking for adventure – and turned an essential journey into a dangerous bucket-list attraction.



WORDS AND PHOTOS:**FETHI SAHRAOUI IN ZOUÉRAT**

THE town of Zouérat in Mauritania's north is dwarfed by the barren expanse of the Sahara Desert and its iron-rich hills. Opened in 1963, a single, 704-km heavy-haul line drags tonnage across the Sahara from Zouérat through F'dérik, Choum and on to the Atlantic port of Nouadhibou. The line was designed for one primary purpose – moving iron ore to the coast for export.

These trains hold some of the world's records for length and tonnage – loaded trains typically run 2.5km to 3km long, among the longest regular trains in the world. Each cart carries almost 85 tonnes of iron ore, and a train can carry 20,000 to 22,000 tonnes in a single run.

The railway also runs a few dedicated passenger carriages on the train, providing one of the few transport links for people in the far north.

After spending two nights in the town of Zouérat, we took a shared taxi to the train “station”, a simple metal shelter beside the railway with a double checkpoint at the entry. Sometimes, out of 250 wagons, only two cars are reserved for passengers. Those who can't afford a ticket simply climb onto the ore wagons.

While locals scale the open wagons out of pragmatism, in recent years a wave of travel bloggers and social media influencers began flocking to the line. They framed the gruelling 16-20 hour journey as an ultimate test of endurance, recording stunts atop moving piles of iron





ore into a viral “bucket list” challenge for their followers.

Mauritanian authorities say this has turned the informal practice into a social media spectacle. It’s dangerous – riders face searing daytime heat, freezing nights, dust storms, no toilets or safe water, and no easy way to get off a moving train in an emergency. Falls from wagons travelling at around 60km/h can be fatal.

Faced with a growing hazard, the railway authority shifted from passive tolerance to an explicit prohibition. A formal declaration issued in late 2024 clarified that freight cars are meant solely for raw minerals, explicitly outlawing unofficial riders on the open wagons.

And so, we wait to board the few passenger cars available. This will happen when the last ore wagons have been loaded at the mines.

At the makeshift train station, people gathered, desperately searching for a few inches of shade beneath the blazing sun.

We waited for more than six hours. At first, there were only six of us. As the hours passed, more came – young and old, men and women, children running between them. Conversations about nothing and everything unfolded. Tea was shared. Stories were exchanged. Smartphones were scrolled.

Then, a massive explosion echoed across the desert. For most of the people here, it was part of the routine. Some even cheered. It meant that more iron had been extracted from the mine.

After eight hours of waiting, the long, slow serpent heading to Nouadhibou finally appeared on the horizon. We hopped in for 704km; the rest of our time belonged to photography. ■









We love to hear from you

UNLESS you're a 2026 subscriber (hi!), you'll remember our most recent Big Annual Survey™, in which 1,481 of you took part. In it, we asked you to tell us about your Happy Place™. We'll be sharing a few of those responses with you this season. Look out for our mascot Astro, who's hiding somewhere in each illustration.

“The sea. Coming from a Mauritian, this may sound clichéd. But the sea really is part of the cultural identity of practically everyone who lives in this multicultural place.”



ILLUSTRATION: WILLIAM RASOANAIVO

Coffee with The Continent



INTERVIEW

Welcome to Coffee with *The Continent*, where we chat to smart people with smart ideas. You're all invited. This week, our guest is **WINNIE BYANYIMA**, executive director of UNAids, former Oxfam head and Ugandan liberation war veteran.

VENUE* A grass-roofed kiosk on the shores of Lake Nakuru or Lake Elementaita, watching the flamingos.

DRINK "Coffee – black and strong, like my men. Ugandan coffee is the best, no apology." She loves Kapchorwa blend from the mountains of eastern Uganda. "An Arabica. Special. I can smell it now."

READING Nobel laureate (2021) Abdulrazak Gurnah. His novels tell the story of the East African coast and its history, taking readers back to when the Arabs first arrived, then the Portuguese, through slavery and colonialism. She's currently reading *Desertion*.

MUSIC *To Be Young, Gifted and Black* by Nina Simone is her favourite.

MONUMENT** "I go around the world seeing monuments and wanting to crush them – because they tell the story of



PHOTO: BRIAN OTIENO/UNAIDS

men making history. What rubbish! History is made by men and women." As a young woman, Byanyima was inspired by Che Guevara and wanted to connect with the Cuban revolution. Che Guevara's Mausoleum naturally stood out for her. But she is now critical of the monument's scale and its focus on a single leader. Even though others are also represented, she believes it places Che Guevara above the broader struggle, and reinforces the idea that history is driven by one man.

*We interviewed Byanyima online. Her dream venue was brought to life by illustrator Wynona Mutisi.

**Last year, The Continent ran a series on iconic monuments across Africa. We're asking each guest to nominate a monument iconic to them.

Representation is just the start



PHOTO: CONSCIOUS EXPLORER

Flow state: The Victoria Nile closes in on Lake Albert in the Great Lakes region of the Rift Valley.

"I'M A child of the Great Lakes. I grew up near a little town in south-western Uganda, close to the beautiful lakes in the western Rift Valley. I call this area home, and I like to be near the lakes," Byanyima says. "It refreshes my spirit."

Growing up there shaped her, as did having parents who were active in social justice. Both were teachers; her father later became a parliamentarian. They taught Byanyima three things: "That you belong to a community, that you have a duty to give back to that community, and to stand for justice for it."

Byanyima grew up watching her

mother organise women around literacy, income generation and girls' rights to education. Her teenage years under Idi Amin were shaped by fear and violence.

"Girls would disappear to bury their fathers, and never speak of it. They'd come back with shaved heads, and that's how we knew." They also lived in fear of being picked up on the streets by soldiers who "could turn you into a wife, no questions asked... Our bodies were right there for them to attack and control. That's how I grew up."

These early experiences are why Byanyima is a feminist. An experience

at Makerere University, where she'd enrolled to do civil engineering, changed her life. One night, a lecturer came to her room and offered to help her pass her exams if she slept with him. "I said no. I didn't need his help. I was one of the best students in the country. But saying no had consequences."

Byanyima had to flee her home and arrived in the United Kingdom as a refugee, with just \$300 to her name. She returned to university on a scholarship and chose aeronautical engineering because she wanted to pursue a field few Africans had studied before, which took her to Manchester University.

Her thoughts tortured her. "It would keep me awake at night that I could never return home unless Amin died or left power. I'd think, what if they killed my father? He was always in trouble, a target, having been a politician before. I wouldn't be able to bury him."

But, she says, the UK opened many doors, and her mind. She joined the anti-apartheid movement, organised for Zimbabwe's liberation, and for other places on the continent. She became active in feminist, peace, and Ugandan human rights movements.

Disillusioned with aeronautical engineering's links to the Cold War military-industrial complex, she turned down a PhD opportunity in the United States. Returning home instead, she joined the National Resistance Army while working at Ugandan Airlines as an underground activist.

"One of the hardest lessons of my life is that winning power is not the same as

transforming power. What we saw in my country is that the liberators of that time turned into the dictators of today."

Still, she says: "We did many good things. After the war, we wrote a new Constitution through a participatory process. I was part of that; I led the women's caucus. One of the best moments in my life [were] those years I supported women coming out of the kitchen to take power, to sit in local government, to sit in parliament."

"You belong to a community, you have a duty to give back to it, and to stand for justice for it."

But representation is "just the beginning". As head of the Directorate of Women, Gender and Development at the African Union until 2006, Byanyima still sees Africa's liberation as unfinished.

Independence did not deliver the economic freedom her generation imagined: "We can't continue to be on the periphery of the global economy, to be hit by pandemics and not have medicines, crippled by cycles of debt.



African countries can't even come together and address that question jointly. We are very far from our vision of political and economic liberation."

She does not exempt herself from this. "I'm part of the generation of collective failure. We failed!"

But there is no resignation in the admission. "What must we do now? Reorganise and fight." This next struggle, she believes, belongs to a younger generation, "led by young women", taking on global economic rules and climate injustice. However, she has little faith that this can happen under the institutions inherited from an earlier era. The African Union, she says, is not equal to the task. Neither is the United Nations.

For Byanyima, the unfinished struggle is not an abstraction. It leads home to Uganda, where her partner, opposition leader Kizza Besigye, is detained and

facing treason charges. She is deeply moved by Kenyans who have mobilised for his release. "Thank you for taking up our struggle and standing with us."

Their solidarity matters: many Ugandans cannot safely protest. "Our neighbours speak for us," she says.

And although Besigye is her partner, she is careful not to make the struggle about him – or herself. "I'm not looking for justice just for him." What she wants is a country where justice does not depend on having a famous name, powerful connections or "a spouse with a big job at the UN who can command the media and get attention ... I want every Ugandan to have their freedom and dignity, the right to express their views."

It is, in many ways, the same liberation she returned home to fight for decades ago. Only now she is looking to another generation to finish it. ■



PHOTO: BRIAN CALVERT/AP

Constably numb: Police keep step with anti-apartheid protesters in Oxford Street, London, in 1961.

FEATURE

Justice in moderation: Will Meta finally face the music?

Facebook's parent company is adept at playing hide-and-seek with accountability, but this month a Nairobi court will hear the long-delayed case brought by nearly 200 African moderators against Meta over traumatic working conditions.

KUNLE ADEBAJO

YEARS after exposing the brutal reality of moderating graphic violence for Meta in Nairobi, former content moderators are still awaiting justice from the courts.

Their landmark legal battle is seeking roughly \$1.6-billion in damages for exploitative working conditions, psychological harm and union-busting. Its next crucial hearing, on 29 September, follows years of legal manoeuvring and repeated postponements.

For workers like Kauna Malgwi, the ordeal began when she accepted what she thought was a dream job as a Hausa call centre agent. She had moved to Kenya from Nigeria in 2019 for a master's programme and needed extra money. It turned out to be a nightmare.

Meta had subcontracted the Nairobi-based company Sama to manually filter violent, graphic and abusive posts on Facebook. Recruits like Malgwi were hired by Sama from Kenya, Burundi, Nigeria, Somalia, South Africa and Uganda. At first they were given

harmless posts to assess. Within weeks, however, they were abruptly exposed to extreme violence: live-streamed suicides, terrorist executions, child sexual abuse and graphic killings.

Required to review hundreds of posts daily while maintaining a 95% quality metric for less than \$4 an hour, moderators frequently wept, fainted or fled the hall. Malgwi says she sought medical treatment for panic attacks and insomnia but had to lie about what she did because Sama had made the workers sign a non-disclosure agreement.

Following a whistleblower report by former content moderator Daniel Motaung, Sama exited its contract with Meta in 2023 and laid off its workforce. The workers subsequently filed a lawsuit alleging exploitative conditions, inadequate mental health support, low pay, unfair dismissals and union-busting. Motaung had filed a separate lawsuit on similar grounds, and the two cases are being heard concurrently.

Out-of-court settlement negotiations broke down in 2024. Meta argued that,

as an American company, it should not be subject to Kenyan jurisdiction, but Kenya's Court of Appeal rejected Meta's appeal, confirming that local courts have full authority to hear both cases.

Since then, former workers say Meta has deployed relentless delay tactics, seeking postponements and filing appeals at every opportunity. The upcoming hearing follows such a postponement from February.

Meanwhile, Meta's outsourcing pipeline in East Africa has continued to generate scandal. Following reporting in February 2026 revealing that Sama workers in Nairobi were reviewing intimate footage recorded by Meta's Ray-Ban smart glasses for AI training, Meta terminated another contract with Sama, triggering more than 1,000 additional data worker layoffs.

That reporting has also fed into an amended US class-action lawsuit – filed on 31 August 2026 – on behalf of “bystander” plaintiffs who say they were

recorded without consent.

Alhassan Ibrahim, research director at the Tunani Initiative, points to a systemic failure across the continent to protect workers from what he terms “exploitative digital labour”.

“It's on African countries to establish proper protective mechanisms, but unfortunately that is not happening,” he told *The Continent*.

For Malgwi and her former colleagues, justice means holding global tech giants accountable on African soil and securing compensation to pay for long-term mental healthcare.

But as legal delays drag on, the human toll continues to mount.

“We've seen our colleagues getting lost in drug addiction because they do not know how to deal with their traumas. Some have attempted suicide,” she said. By the time the case is finally resolved, some former workers may have died already. “We don't know how many will reach the goal post.” ■



Four years ago: Kenyan lawyer Mercy Mutemi speaks to the media in December 2022 after filing a lawsuit against Meta on behalf of moderators challenging unfair labour practices.

PHOTO: YASUYOSHI CHIBA/AFP

DATA

Can governments make economic cents?

OVER the past decade, Africa’s economic growth per person has been the slowest of all world regions, and our data shows that lived poverty levels have been rising across the continent. Thirteen African countries struggle with double-digit inflation rates (or worse).

It’s no surprise, then, that across 28 countries we surveyed consistently for a decade, only about a third (35%) of Africans are impressed with their government’s overall management of the economy.

Half as many (18%) say the government is handling inflation well. And fewer than three in 10 think it is doing a good job on tackling poverty (28%), creating jobs

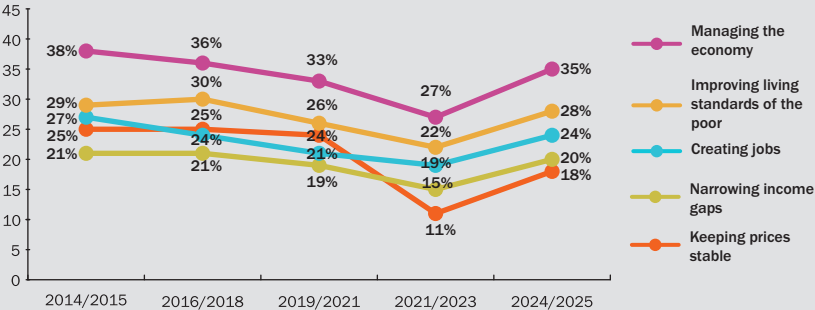
(24%), and reducing inequality (20%).

More than eight in 10 respondents offer negative assessments on all five indicators in Nigeria, Gambia, the Republic of Congo, South Africa, and Cameroon.

Many African economies have rebounded from the pandemic-induced crash, reflected in positive evaluations that are up by between five and eight percentage points since 2021/2023. But they remain below the levels recorded in 2014/2015.

Unemployment, the higher cost of living, and poverty are among the top 10 concerns Africans want their governments to address. ■

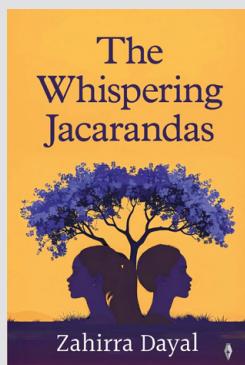
Positive assessments of government economic performance | 28 African countries | 2014-2025





TC BOOK REVIEW

BY JACQUELINE NYATHI



When the bough breaks

**Two sisters are bound
by a terrible secret
– and then torn apart.**

ZAYNAH and Amira spend their days at their grandmother's house, their refuge from a tumultuous home life. Ma is loving and present; the girls' parents are not. But one night during Ramadan, their childhood innocence is shattered, and a shadow cast over their lives in their insular community during Zimbabwe's post-independence years.

The strength and emotional core of *The Whispering Jacarandas* is in Zahirra Dayal's descriptions of growing up Muslim and Indian in Zimbabwe, of the peculiarities of being in a community within a community. But most of Zaynah's childhood will be familiar to any Zimbabwean of that time and place.

Dayal also unpacks the prejudices of that community. Zaynah's mother is Coloured – in the sense of the Southern African ethnic identity – and therefore not fully accepted in the Indian community. Neither are her children, particularly Zaynah – dark in complexion with curly, Afro-textured hair. And the patriarchy is never far away: women's lives are often in service to men who overrule them.

The novel is profoundly tender and evocative. Using jacarandas as the novel's central motif will be meaningful to many Southern Africans, for whom this tree is a favourite. The novel shares a legend about how jacarandas came to Zimbabwe, in an example of the emotional potency of Dayal's writing.

Although *The Whispering Jacarandas* tackles a difficult subject – child abuse, and a family's reluctance to face it – Dayal's reconstruction of a Zimbabwe that has passed into memory is truly beautiful. Difficult as its subjects are, *The Whispering Jacarandas*, thankfully, finds a redemptive note. ■

The Quiz

- 1 In which Egyptian city is the Great Sphinx statue located?
- 2 Which city was just selected as the host of the 2029 World Athletics Championships?
- 3 Which former Cameroonian footballer is head of the country's football federation?
- 4 The Youth Olympic Games will take place in Africa for the first time – in which city?
- 5 In which country is the Tour d'Afrique (pictured) found?
- 6 How many colours are on Côte d'Ivoire's flag?
- 7 What is the capital of Tunisia?
- 8 What is Africa's largest island?
- 9 What is the capital of Djibouti?
- 10 Which country is billionaire Aliko Dangote from?



HOW DID I DO?

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

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

"I once tried to enter the Tour d'Afrique but it was really quite hard to get my bicycle up all those stairs."

PHOTO: INSIGHTS/UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Big Pic

Mane attraction: A ringmaster directs a horse at the Karacena Biennial in Salé, northwestern Morocco, which celebrates circus, dance, music, and equestrian arts in the service of social causes that support vulnerable children.

PHOTO: ABDELMAJID BZIOUAT/AFP



The Continent is a member of the Press Council of South Africa. This means we adhere to its Code of Ethics. It also means that there's an independent body you can reach out to with a complaint about our reporting. That process is on their website — www.presscouncil.org.za.

**all protocol
observed.**

publisher of **The Continent**

The Continent is published by All Protocol Observed, a not-for-profit based in South Africa. Our home is dedicated to creating a space for African journalists to do quality journalism, which we then get to you wherever you are. For suggestions, queries, complaints, or to make a donation, please contact us at read@thecontinent.org.