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The Continent



\$2.8-trillion

The cost of averting catastrophe

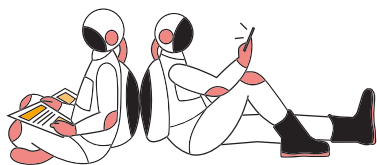
Photo: Mkimemia



Cover: The upside to dirty air? Great sunsets. The downside? The end of life as we know it. Delegates at the Africa Climate Summit in pollution-choked Nairobi (p11) got to enjoy the former while trying, desperately, to prevent the latter. The bottom line is that Africa can survive climate change – but someone is going to have to pay for it, and do the work. And that person is going to have to be you (p7).

Inside:

- **All at sea:** Ghana's fishermen come home with empty nets (p13)
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SOUTH AFRICA

Big Pharma's savage profiteering exposed

During the pandemic, South Africa, like many Global South countries, was forced to sign secret contracts with pharmaceutical firms to access Covid-19 vaccines. Now a court has ordered that these contracts be made public – and no wonder Big Pharma wanted secrecy. They show Johnson & Johnson charged South Africa 15% more per dose than it charged the European Union, and Pfizer charged 32.5% more than its cost price. The deals are “so one-sided, so in favour of multinational corporations that they beggar belief,” said the Health Justice Initiative, which led the court challenge.

COLONIALISM

DNA links stolen remains to the living

In what has been described as a “small miracle”, researchers in Germany have identified the living descendants of people whose remains were stolen from Tanzania and taken to Germany for “scientific” experiments during the colonial era. Since 2017, Berlin’s Museum of Prehistory and Early History has been studying the origin of 1,100 skulls looted from what was formerly known as German East Africa. The skulls were stolen by anthropologist Felix von Luschan during German colonial rule. He called it research. The actual phrase is grave robbing.



Get out: Israeli forces arrest a man from Eritrea. Photo: AFP/Getty Images

ISRAEL

Netanyahu calls for Eritreans to be deported en masse

On Sunday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he was mulling the deportation of more than 1,000 Eritrean asylum seekers and migrants who were allegedly involved in riots in Tel Aviv over the weekend. The violence, which left scores injured, began when a demonstration against a pro-Eritrean government event turned sour. International law bars the mass-deportation of asylum seekers, but Netanyahu says he is determined to root out “infiltrators who violate the law”. The prime minister has form: he previously built a wall on Israel’s southern border to keep out the “hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Africans who would have again stormed the state of Israel”.

CHAD

More trouble for French forces in the Sahel

Protests have erupted at a French military base in the north of the country after a French army nurse shot and killed a Chadian soldier. The soldier – who was “not in a normal state”, according to the regional governor – had first attacked the nurse with a scalpel. France has already been forced to pull its forces out of Mali and Burkina Faso, following military coups in those countries, and is under pressure in Niger. The last thing it needs is trouble in Chad, whose president remains close to Paris.

GABON

Ali Bongo freed from house arrest

On Wednesday, the deposed president of Gabon, Ali Bongo, was given a cup of tea by the general who ousted him – and told that he was free to leave the country. “He has freedom of movement ... and can travel abroad if he wishes,” said General Brice Oligui Nguema, after a televised meeting with his former boss. Meanwhile, opposition leader Ondo Ossa has said that he won last month’s disputed elections, and that the coup was designed to prevent him from taking office – and, in so doing, keep the same old political elites in power.

MADAGASCAR

Play it again, DJ

Former DJ-turned-President Andry Rajoelina is seeking a third term in office, he announced at a rally in Antananarivo on Wednesday. Rajoelina first came to power in a coup in 2009.

He did not contest the 2013 election, but successfully ran in the 2018 vote. In June, leaked documents revealed that Rajoelina had acquired French citizenship in 2014 (allegedly in return for not contesting the previous year's election). Dual citizenship is prohibited under Malagasy law – but it seems the man in charge gets to march to the beat of his own drum machine.



One more time: Supporters of now-president Andry Rajoelina cheer during a rally in Antananarivo, Madagascar in 2018. Rajoelina now says he fancies another term in office. It will be his third. Photo: Gianluigi Guercia/AFP via Getty Images

WEATHER

Blind to change

The whole of Africa has 37 radar facilities that can track weather. Europe has 347. Half of the ones on the continent are not able to provide data that's accurate enough to predict weather patterns, according to research published in the journal *Nature* last month. This makes it really hard for countries to plan for changes in their climate – or to protect communities in a changing world.

GUINEA

A deadly anniversary

Tuesday marked the two-year anniversary of the military coup in which Mamady Doumbouya brought himself to power. The night before, security forces allegedly raided the homes of activists who were planning protests against the junta. According to the Forces Vives, an alliance of parties and civil society groups that want a swift return to civilian rule, at least two men were killed in the raids.

RWANDA

10 bodies uncovered in man's kitchen

Police found 10 bodies buried in a pit under the kitchen of a Kigali home on Wednesday. A man has been arrested on suspicion of multiple murders. “He operated by luring his victims, mostly prostitutes, to his home, where he stole their phones and personal belongings before strangling them and burying them in a pit dug in his kitchen,” said the Rwandan Bureau of Investigation. A source within the prosecuting authority claimed that “the suspect confessed to having learned to kill by watching [videos about] known serial killers”.

MOROCCO

Two senseless deaths

Two Moroccan holidaymakers on jet skis were shot and killed by the Algerian coast guard when their group strayed accidentally into Algerian territorial waters last week. The incident has heightened tensions between Morocco and Algeria, who have had no diplomatic relations for the last two years. The border between the two countries has been closed since 1994. Algerian authorities claim that the tourists were warned before being shot at with live ammunition. Human rights groups in Morocco have this week protested against the “military regime” in Algiers.



Wonderstruck: Mali's Salif Keïta on the field in France for Saint-Etienne.

Photo: Universal/VCG via Getty Images

FOOTBALL

Mali's Black Panther mourned and celebrated

The first footballer to ever win the African Footballer of the Year award has died aged 76. He was buried on Wednesday. Salif Keïta, known as the Black Panther, was a trailblazing Malian striker who won the first iteration of the award in 1970. He was one of the first African footballers to forge a successful career in Europe – paving the way for many to follow – and had to overcome considerable odds to do so. He was forced to leave one club, Olympique Marseille, when he refused their demand to give up his Malian nationality and take French citizenship instead. Later in life, he led the Malian football federation.

Climate

How Africa weathers the climate storm

To avert complete climate catastrophe, African countries need at least \$277-billion per year in additional climate finance. We know that rich countries won't pay for the damage they caused – so we are going to have to come up with our own solutions.

Lydia Namubiru in Nairobi

In Nairobi this week, African leaders gathered alongside some of this continent's smartest minds for the first ever Africa Climate Summit. Their goal: to figure out how African countries are going to survive in a much warmer world. And what it will cost.

The summit was, in part, a reaction to the failure of the developed world to take meaningful responsibility for causing the climate crisis (Africa is responsible for just 4% of global emissions).

Despite repeatedly promising action, rich industrialised countries have not delivered much in the way of action or funding. A pledge to pay \$100-billion per year to those countries most affected by climate change has gone almost entirely unfulfilled.

In Nairobi, experts, activists,

government officials and politicians repeatedly said that the continent needs at least \$277-billion per year in climate finance, which works out to \$2.8-trillion in the decade from 2020-2030, according to the Climate Policy Initiative. It has so far been getting about 12% of that – which means that we are already playing catch-up. This money should be used to repair the damage caused by extreme weather events, adapt to a warmer world, and build economies that don't make the situation worse.

The consensus is that Africa cannot afford to wait for rich countries to come to the rescue, because they won't. So any plan to raise this money will have to come from the African continent itself. But how?

New paradigms

Participants came at the \$277-billion-a-year figure with a dizzying array of ideas



Just do it: Climate activists march in Nairobi, urging delegates to the Africa Climate Summit to seek decisive action. Photo: Suleiman Mbatiah/AFP via Getty Images

on how to raise it – some of them better than others.

The meatier ideas often came from side events by experts and activists around the city, and not the predictable speeches by presidents, world leaders and big names on the main stages at the official venue, the Kenyatta International Conference Centre.

An expert panel convened by AfriCatalyst, a Dakar-based consulting firm, said that the big numbers can be broken down into two categories.

About 40% of the funds must deal with the loss and damage caused by climate change, as well as helping countries to adapt to new realities.

The remaining 60% is investment to pursue prosperity without relying entirely on fossil fuels – and, in so doing, avoiding a repeat of Europe's climate sins.

Vera Songwe, a Cameroonian

economist who was until last year the head of the Economic Commission for Africa, said the funding for loss, damage and adaptation – about \$1-trillion – should be met by the developed world which created this crisis, through grants from multilateral lenders like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

Songwe argued that Africa, and the rest of the developing world, should push the West to pump money into these lenders. The money exists: European countries found an extra \$40-trillion to inject into their economies in response to Covid-19 and the war in Ukraine. But a West that has refused to pay for its impact on the world seems unlikely to pay up.

More interesting were the ideas on how African countries can raise the money themselves.

The first step will be internal, in the form of higher taxes and mandatory



Team green: Kenyan President William Ruto, front and centre, with delegates and leaders at the Africa Climate Summit. Not pictured are the presidents of Nigeria, Uganda or South Africa. Because they didn't go. Photo: Luis Tato/AFP via Getty Images

savings goals, so governments can dip into the \$1-trillion reportedly held in African pension funds. People might also have to give up their own land for large-scale climate projects, such as solar farms.

The next will be external. Countries are going to have to take out loans from global lenders, at high rates that exacerbate debt; or enter into the public-private partnerships that tend to extract resources without meaningfully addressing problems.

And debt has already given African countries fewer tools to deal with the climate crisis. This year alone, Sub-Saharan African countries will pay at least \$22.5-billion on their debts, according to the American credit ratings agency Fitch.

In a session convened by Afrinomics Law, a Nairobi-based non-profit, a panel

of seven experts proposed an alternative path: What if African countries didn't pursue new money but rather relief from old debts? That \$22.5-billion is not the \$277-billion reportedly needed annually in climate finance, but keeping it here would be a start.

A little bit of all of these ideas were present in the summit's concluding Nairobi Declaration, which called for "a new financing architecture that is responsive to Africa's needs including debt restructuring and relief".

While the declaration is not binding, and key African leaders were absent – including the presidents of Nigeria, South Africa and Uganda – it is a starting point for further negotiations at the next global climate change conference, COP28, which will begin in Dubai in November. ■

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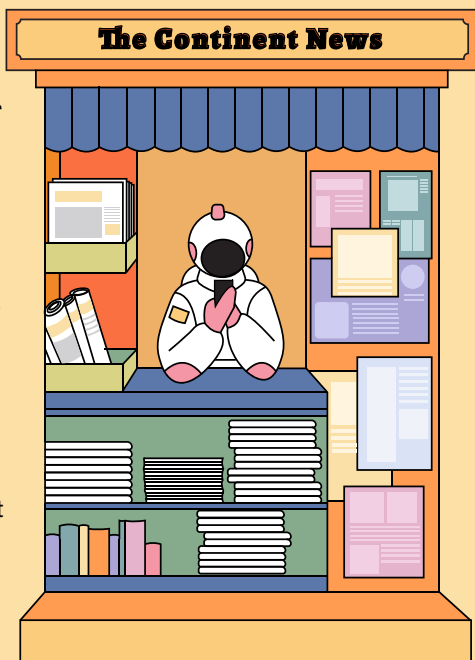
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Kenya

The green city in a fatal fog

Air pollution kills 8,000 people in Nairobi each year. Now the city's leaders are finally paying attention to the problem.

Dominic Kirui in Nairobi

Joseph Kang'ethe, a bus driver on Thika highway, has a theory: Nairobi commercial drivers don't stay in business long because the city's air would kill them. He reckons staying on the job long is "like you are trying to kill yourself".

He shares this theory with *The Continent* during the same week Nairobi is hosting the first-ever Africa Climate Summit. Billboards dotting traffic junctions tout the city as "the global environmental capital". A claim not without merit: Kenya's capital is home to the UN's global environment programme.

Kang'ethe, however, is not sold. "The guy I replaced today is in hospital with asthma. Even though he is also a smoker, I think the air he breathes here also is dirty," Kang'ethe says as he parks the bus in the CBD for passengers to alight.

His claim is also not without merit: it's

backed up by experts and data.

Air pollution kills 8,000 people in Nairobi alone every year, according to Wanjira Maathai of the World Resources Institute. That air was graded as "unhealthy" or "unhealthy for sensitive groups" 10% of the times it was gauged this year by AirNow, a monitoring group. And the city's air pollution is more than triple the level recommended as healthy by the World Health Organisation.

The poor quality frustrates Maathai on at least two personal levels. She is the daughter of Nobel prize-winning environmentalist Wangari Maathai, who fought to preserve Nairobi's green cover – and one of her daughters has asthma, which she attributes to air pollution.

"Most people have somebody around them who is asthmatic in this city." She



Daily breath: A delivery man pulls a cart through Nairobi's early morning smog.

Photo: Tobin Jones/AFP via Getty Images

is no different and says: “Shock on me, I had a cough and found out that I had a pollution-induced asthma.”

The good news is that Nairobi leaders seem to be waking up to the issue. At a ceremony on the sidelines of the Africa Climate Summit, city governor Johnson Sakaja promised a five-year strategic plan, and to “ensure” that a new air quality bill was passed through the county assembly.

Sakaja was unveiling a mural painted in honour of Ella Roberta Debra, a British child who died of air pollution. The family lived near a busy road in the east of London when Ella developed a rare and life threatening form of asthma that killed her in 2010, a few months before her seventh birthday. This wasn't initially reflected on her death certificate – something which drove her mother Rosamund to seek a court order to change the certificate. It was the first time in Britain that a death certificate had air pollution as a contributing cause to a death.

Now a global ambassador for the World Health Organisation's BreatheLife campaign, Debra came to the Africa Climate Summit to urge leaders to take air quality seriously. Air pollution kills some 6.7-million people globally every year. In Africa, it kills more than a million people each year, with the majority dying because of air pollution inside homes, thanks to the smoke coming from wood and other biomass in cookers and fires.

Debra appears to have convinced Nairobi's mayor, too.

“In the last few years, we have seen quite a sharp rise in pollutants and a decline in air quality. It's now showing up in our mortality, and especially that of our children,” Sakaja admitted at the unveiling of the mural. “Every single child who misses a day of school, or who has a chronic dry cough, or who has to go to a hospital because he or she has breathed in diesel smoke, should matter as deeply to us as she does to her family.” ■



A clear vision: A hopeful mural in Nairobi. Photo: Dominic Kirui

Ghana

**Net loss: Ghanaian
fishers are losing their
livelihoods.** Photo:
Ernest Ankomah/The
Continent



No more fish in the sea

Fishermen keep coming home with empty nets. Illegal competition from foreign vessels is part of the problem – but climate change is an even bigger threat.

Marian Ansah in Accra

From the shores of Jamestown Beach, on the Atlantic coast, *The Continent* watches anxious fishermen haul in their nets. Yet again, the catch falls short of expectations. “I came here early in the morning, but I couldn’t find any fish, so I am going home,” says Victoria NiiKwei Tagoe, a local fishmonger. “It’s worrying that the fishermen are struggling to find

enough fish in the sea.”

The immediate problem is that Ghanaian fishermen are no longer alone in their territorial waters. They are having to share the sea with a fleet of fishing vessels serving foreign interests – and dinner plates. These trawlers have been accused of devastating fish stocks through illegal fishing practices – known in the industry as IUU activities. IUU stands for illegal, unreported and unregulated – practices



All at sea: Illegal trawling leaves nothing for artisanal fishers to catch. Photo: Ernest Ankomah/The Continent

include the use of dynamite, cyanide, pesticides and bright lights. “I cannot deny that some artisanal fishermen are involved in illegal fishing,” says Nii Ayi Mensah, a 47-year-old fisherman. “But the major problem is caused by overseas companies.”

Ghanaian laws make it illegal for foreign entities to own industrial fishing vessels that sail under the Ghanaian flag. But international companies circumvent this regulation by creating Ghanaian front companies. A 2021 report by the Environmental Justice Foundation claims that corporations from China in particular own approximately 90% of industrial vessels involved in IUU activities in Ghana. Profits generated by these vessels are channelled out of the country.

Enforcement issues

While Ghana does have strict fishing regulations, these are not always enforced. Only 61 out of 477 recorded cases of IUU fishing between 2001 and 2021 have been resolved, according to Ghana’s Fisheries Commission. In 2020, the vessel *Lu Rong*

Yuan Yu 956 had its licence to fish in Ghana renewed despite failing to pay a \$1-million fine for illegal fishing.

In recent years, China’s vast overseas fishing fleet has expanded to keep up with a growing demand for fish at home, amid a precipitous decline in local fish stocks due to overfishing and climate change. In West Africa, these vessels catch an estimated 2.35-million tonnes of fish every year, worth \$5-billion.

The Chinese embassy in Ghana did not respond to a request for comment.

Climate change is expected to wreak further havoc on Ghana’s remaining fish stocks. As ocean temperatures rise, fish species will seek cooler waters – making traditional fishing grounds less productive. And frequent floods, droughts, and coastal erosion make it harder for fish to survive.

According to the World Bank, climate change alone could diminish Ghana’s potential catches by 25% or more by 2050 – posing a serious threat to both the country’s food security and coastal communities’ way of life. ■

Nigeria

Running on empty

A massive hike in petrol prices is leaving passengers stranded – and making everything else more expensive too

Abdullahi Jimoh in Ilorin

On a sunny August afternoon, in a car park outside the University of Ilorin in Nigeria's Kwara State, Abdul-Hakeem Isiaq reclines in the driver's seat of his eight-seater van. The 42-year-old taxi operator has no passengers, and he is not expecting any soon.

After President Bola Tinubu scrapped fuel subsidies in May, Isiaq has had to increase his fares – which is bad news for both him and his customers, many of whom are choosing to walk or arrange free lifts instead.

He needs five litres of fuel for one trip. Last year, that cost 1,050 naira (\$1.40). Today, it costs 3,000 naira. "Lately, I take home 200 (\$0.25) naira after daily expenses. What should my family eat?" he asks.

Isiaq has considered quitting but is wary of adding idleness to his problems.

Across Nigeria, high petrol prices are forcing people to change the way they live and work.

The impact is being felt in urban and rural areas alike. In Lagos, the country's largest city which is reputed to have the worst traffic in the world, streets have become quieter as people simply cannot afford to travel. Residents are hoping that the launch this week of the Blue Line, a new metro rail system, will keep the jams under control.

In Ilora, a rural community in Oyo State, teachers are unable to travel to work due to high transport costs. Olawuwo Sunkanmi, a 49-year-old high school teacher who commutes by motorcycle to Ilora from the state capital Ibadan, can only afford to go to work twice a week. "If we do not go to school, nobody will question us," he says.

The battle with oil marketers

Nigeria is Africa's largest oil producer. For decades, its government has subsidised petrol – even though the country refines almost none of its own fossil fuels, and must instead import refined petrol at global market rates. Historically, this cost has consumed much of the federal budget.

In January, for the first time since 1977, the government approved a budget that did not provide for these politically sensitive subsidies, which had grown to about \$10-billion a year. Nonetheless,



**Fare enough:
As the price
of petrol rose,
so did fares.
And passenger
numbers have
plummeted.**
Photo: John
Wessels/
AFP via Getty
Images

former president Muhammadu Buhari, who approved the budget, kept on paying them. It was left to his successor, Tinubu, to be the bad guy: on his very first day in office, he announced that they would be scrapped.

This has left Nigerians caught in a political battle between the federal government and powerful petroleum marketers – a handful of companies licensed to purchase wholesale petrol from the state petrol company – who stand to lose out massively.

The marketers immediately increased the petrol pump prices from 210 naira per litre to about 500 naira per litre. They are also hoarding petrol to create an artificial scarcity, according to the Nigeria Governors' Forum.

By early June, long queues were becoming the norm at petrol stations across the country. The price would rise further to 617 naira, with oil marketers blaming the naira's plummeting value

against the US dollar.

Tinubu has stuck to his guns, saying in a 31 July national broadcast that the subsidies were just a scam that benefitted powerful individuals. The oil marketers, meanwhile, have threatened more hikes.

The rising fuel price is pushing up inflation, which hit 24% in July. To combat this, the federal government has given more than \$6-million to each of Nigeria's 36 states to buy rice, maize and fertiliser. Some analysts fear that this creates the potential for corruption.

“The said money should be closely monitored by the federal government to curb embezzlement,” warns Bamgboye Adeniyi Emmanuel, a consultant at Empyrean Professional Services, a Lagos-based consultancy.

The opening of Africa's largest oil refinery on 22 May this year has yet to have any impact on domestic petrol prices, with petrol production yet to fully commence. ■

Most Africans reject military rule – in principle

Military coups – sometimes met with jubilation in the streets – have become shockingly frequent. Are Africans starting to like having military rulers?

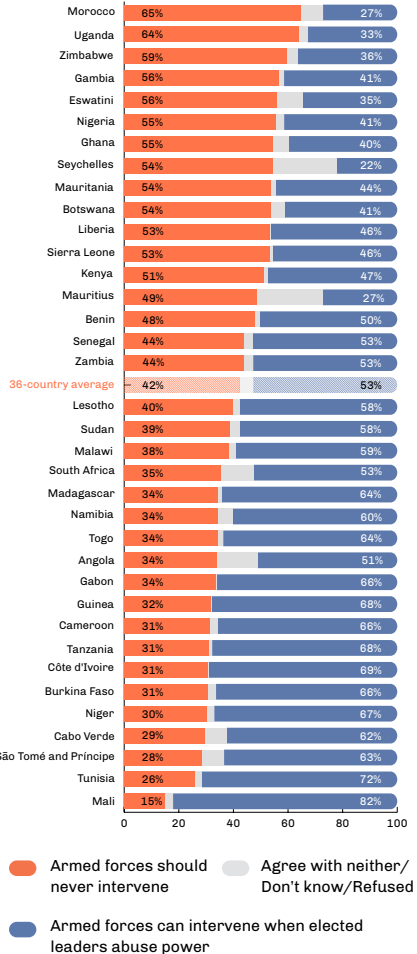
No, coups aren't back by popular demand. On average across 36 countries surveyed by Afrobarometer in 2021/2022, two thirds of Africans say they want democracy (66%) and disapprove of military rule (67%).

But a slim majority (53%) of Africans are willing to endorse military coups if elected leaders abuse their power. Acceptance of military intervention against illegitimate leaders is the majority view in 21 of the 36 countries, including Mali (82%), Guinea (68%), Burkina Faso (66%), Gabon (66%), and Sudan (58%) – all home to recent coups.

Youth are particularly open to military intervention: 56% of 18- to 35-year-olds, compared to 46% of those over age 55.

While “abusing power” means different things to different people, elected leaders engaged in corruption and self-dealing while their people suffer might consider these findings a red flag. So should activists committed to nurturing the next generation of African democracies. ■

Should the military intervene when elected leaders abuse power? | 36 African countries | 2021/2022



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



Up in the air: Namibia celebrate their first try in their 2015 World Cup match against New Zealand. Photo: Phil Walter/Getty Images

A World Cup that Africa could actually win

Only two African teams are playing in the men's Rugby World Cup this year. One has never won a game in the tournament. The other could win it for the fourth time, and become the most successful team of all time. And in Kenya and Uganda, interest in one of the world's most physical sports is gathering steam.

Luke Feltham

Twelve years ago, Namibian fullback Chrysander Botha stoically stared down the rampaging Tendai Mtawarira – a player at least 40kg heavier. Botha was trampled. But he clung on to bring “The Beast” with him to the ground.

That tackle is often heralded as the bravest in World Cup history. It also embodies the story of African rugby outside of its southern climes; a story underwritten by sporadic moments of celebration but lacking a coherent plot. Look no further than the final scoreline of that day in 2011: 87-0 to South Africa.

At the next World Cup, in 2015, Namibia performed the herculean task of putting a try past New Zealand, then the most successful men's sport team of all time. Progress perhaps, but progress that has yet to translate into a single win at the tournament. This year's edition, in France, is the seventh consecutive time of asking for Namibia.

The story on the rest of the continent doesn't read any better.

The divide in African rugby is stark: South Africa, winners of three of the last seven World Cups, on one end, and everybody else on the other. Besides Namibia, Zimbabwe and Côte d'Ivoire are the only other two nations to have participated in the tournament – and



Mine the gap:
Namibia nip past Kenya to win the Rugby Africa Cup in 2022. Photo: Alex Press/World Rugby

Jolly good, chapsicum:
Chile celebrate a try in their 2023 World Cup qualifier against Canada. Photo: Marcelo Hernandez/Getty Images

Numero Uno:
2022 Africa Cup
winners Namibia
face Italy this
weekend. Photo:
World Rugby



neither of those was able to earn that elusive victory.

But this World Cup, perhaps more than any other, has rich subplots, thanks to a shift in mindsets and a deliberate injection of time and resources into the sport in countries like Argentina and Chile.

Not long ago, Argentina's squads consisted primarily of students and part-timers. This weekend they open against England as the favourites, ranked sixth in the world. (England, which invented the sport, are just eighth). That radical transformation is the culmination of years of tiring but targeted grind.

Then there is the extraordinary tale behind the debut of Chile this year. The sport was first exported to South America's west coast by British salt miners in the 1800s.

For the next century it largely dwelt in irrelevance: the national side was

invariably thrashed whenever it took to the international field.

That all changed when former Uruguayan player Pablo Lemoine was appointed coach in 2018.

Under his vision, the Chileans set up the professional Santiago-based side Selknam, prioritised young, developing talent, and regularly faced up to higher levels of competition – the maxim “iron sharpens iron” is law in rugby. The result was two seemingly miraculous qualifying wins over Canada and the United States – and a ticket to France.

For countries like Kenya and Uganda, where interest in rugby is percolating, the roadmaps drawn by their counterparts in the global south should be of particular interest.

South Africa is peaking at just the right moment. The Springboks, the country's national side famed for their bullying



Top: Springbok captain Siya Kolisi lifts the trophy following South Africa's victory in the 2019 World Cup final. Photo: Christophe Simon/AFP via Getty Images

Below: The team has a realistic chance of returning home as heroes again.

Photo: Cameron Spencer/Getty Images

strength and aggression, are one of the favourites to go all the way. Doing so would set them clear of New Zealand's All Blacks as the first men's team to win the trophy four times.

Winning would also show the fruits of the Springboks' often slow transformation journey.

The rugby team carries immense pressure from a nation that has little to show in other team sports – the men's

football and cricket teams have yet to win at a global level.

The Springbok badge was reviled on international pitches during apartheid and often booed on the field.

Today, many South Africans would argue it is a symbol of the unifying powers of sport. At the last World Cup, Siya Kolisi, the national side's first black captain, triumphantly lifted the Webb Ellis Cup.

He is looking to do it again in France. ■



Shooting in the red zone

The making of *Sira*, a movie set in Mali's conflict zone, was almost as dramatic as the story itself.

Niren Tolsi speaks to director Apolline Traoré.

There is relief, exasperation, and a sense of hilarity that only hindsight allows, in director Apolline Traoré's laughter over the phone. Sitting in Kaya, a city in Burkina Faso about 100km northeast of the capital Ouagadougou, 47-year-old Traoré is describing why *Sira*, her most recent feature film, has been the "hardest of my life" to make.

Sira is set in the Sahel, the transnational region that includes parts of Mauritania, Nigeria, Niger, Mali, Benin and Burkina Faso, among other countries. It follows the experiences of a young Fulani woman, Sira, after the caravan she is travelling in is set upon by jihadists who murder all the men in her family before she is raped and left to die in the desert.

The film, which won the Panorama audience award at the Berlinale earlier this year, reflects the precarious reality that women experience in this part of Africa.

It was a rough shoot.

Traoré had initially planned to film in the "red-zoned" area around Dori in Burkina Faso. But with militants linked to al-Qaeda and Islamic State running amok in the area, the entire production was moved to Mauritania for the safety of cast and crew.

Costs ballooned. Crew travelled across Mali on a 24-hour bus trip to minimise expenditures – but increased their exposure to kidnapping by religious extremists. Once shooting started, the heat sometimes reached 55°C, causing

camera meltdowns. Then the rains descended – for the first time in several years – transforming the landscape and causing continuity problems with fauna and flora. “I didn’t realise the rain could cause entire hills of sand to disappear in a few minutes,” Traoré says.

Sira was a challenge to make, but also rewarding for Traoré, who was drawn to telling the story of the conflict in the northern part of her country after an entire village was massacred by extremists four years ago.

“This violent instability is there every day,” says Traoré. “People are being murdered and displaced, there is no food, entire zones in my country and others

are controlled by the terrorists. I asked myself what I could do as an artist to give courage to the communities living there and to the military fighting there.”

Traoré knew she wanted to make a film, but its substance only emerged when she started interviewing displaced women and children in refugee camps.

“I wanted to show how these people were living and somehow managing to survive in this violence,” she says. “I laugh when people tell me that *Sira* is such a hero. I tell them that she is much less than the women that I met whose villages had been attacked by the terrorists. There was one woman I interviewed whose husband and family were killed and she was left

Stills: *Sira*



Refocused: Apolline Traoré's lens finds home and community in a part of the world too often dismissed as inhospitable. Photo: Supplied

with her two children, who were three and seven years old. She had a bullet in her arm and still walked for five days to get her children to a refugee camp and safety.”

But it is not just war's horrors which emerge in Traoré's film. She was also eager to destroy stereotypes about what it takes, and means, to live in the Sahel – especially if one is part of the nomadic Fulani ethnic group that has traversed the area for centuries.

There are panoramic wide-angle landscape shots and scenes of stillness accompanied by the breathtaking silence of the desert.

Fulani women, especially, are depicted in brightly coloured clothing while engaging in routine and ritual. Such images reinforce the notion of home and community and refute the superficial glance's suggestion of an unforgiving and inhospitable world. She has also returned her film for screenings in towns and cities in the Sahel.

In her storytelling, Traoré's intention was “to break the cycle of violence” that has enveloped the northern part of her country. And is set to stain future generations – as if to underscore her point about political instability in the region, Mohamed Bazoum, the democratically elected president of Niger, was overthrown by a military coup soon after our interview.

Traoré's intention was “to break the cycle of violence” that has enveloped the northern part of her country.

If *Sira* is a feminist story about survival and shifting narratives then so too is Traoré's.

The daughter of a diplomat, Traoré realised she wanted to tell stories after being enchanted by Belgian comic-book journalist Tin Tin: “I felt like I was there with him on these adventures, and then started making up these stories for my family from a young age,” she says. “Later, I realised I wanted to tell my stories through film.” ■



Beastly burden:
Donkeys at a licensed
slaughterhouse
destined for dinner
plates and export.

Photo: Tony Karumba/
AFP via Getty Images

A safe space for donkeys

Donkey smuggling is a big business. Kenyan police have had some success in targeting the criminal gangs responsible. But for donkeys that are rescued from a brutal death, the story does not end there.

Njeri Kimani in Naivasha

In a field in the village of Karagita, just outside Naivasha town, more than 200 donkeys are grazing. Despite the presence of a police station nearby, at least 15 guard dogs are on the premises and security guards are on call. But for a multi-agency rescue operation, these animals would have ended up on someone's dinner plate, and their skins smuggled to China.

The donkeys' deaths would have been brutal – at the hands of a sophisticated

organised crime syndicate in Ndeiya, Kiambu County. Several law enforcement officials described to *The Continent* how the syndicate, which illegally slaughters hundreds of donkeys a year, works.

Donkeys are purchased in local markets and transported by lorry to a slaughterhouse in the bush where they are killed with blunt force (a metal pipe or hammer) and skinned – all in less than three minutes. A waiting boda boda will dash off with the meat for sale. The skins go to various middlemen who load them



Haven sent: Raphael Ngome of KSPCA comforts a donkey rescued from slaughter and smuggling. Photo: Gioia Forster/Picture Alliance via Getty Images

onto waiting boats on the Kenyan coast, or smuggle them through customs at one of the country's international airports.

The trade in donkeys is driven by the demand for collagen extracted from their hides, known in China as *ejiao*. This is believed to be a panacea for all kinds of ills, including anaemia, insomnia and infertility; and is said to enhance beauty, combat ageing and boost libido.

Some of this trade is legal but such is the demand that smuggling gangs began to emerge. In Kenya, while the commercial slaughter of donkeys was banned in 2020, a loophole in the law kept the export of their hides legal. Trafficking them remains a lucrative business.

Between eight and 10 million donkeys are killed annually to meet the worldwide demand for *ejiao*, according to the Pegasus

Foundation, an organisation that aids in rescuing and rehabilitating domestic and wild animals.

Stepping up for the beast of burden

Established by the Kenya Society for the Protection and Care of Animals (KSPCA), the Karagita sanctuary is one of several that have been created to protect donkeys that are rescued in police raids on smuggling gangs.

In just four months earlier this year, the KSPCA received 269 donkeys that were rescued from illegal butcheries, says Raphael Ngome who manages the organisation's Donkey Project.

At the sanctuary, rescued donkeys are medically examined, vaccinated for tetanus and rabies, and dewormed. "They also get dental, and hooves care as well as proper diet and water," said Ngome.

But sometimes, all that has to wait for their trauma to subside.

"Many do not even allow us to touch them until we form a bond with them over time," says Josephat Machinji, a KSPCA officer. It often takes a lot of convincing for the traumatised and skittish new arrivals to be reassured that these particular humans are for them, not against them.

Depending on their conditions, donkeys will stay in the safe house for anywhere between a week and several months, after which they are rehomed. Those that are too ill to recover are euthanised.

"They need all the love, care, and protection they can get, and I am just playing a small part in ensuring that they remain protected," says Machinji. ■

THE QUIZ

0-3

"I think I need to start reading more newspapers."

4-7

"I can't wait to explore more of this continent."

8-10

"For as long as it's still around, I can see the rainforest for the trees."



Photo: Simon Wohlfahrt/
AFP via Getty Images

- 1_** In which country was the Africa Climate Summit held this week?
- 2_** Name the two African countries participating in the Rugby World Cup.
- 3_** Conakry is which country's capital?
- 4_** How many colours are on Gabon's national flag?
- 5_** As of May 2023, Isaias Afwerki has been president of Eritrea for a) 20 years b) 30 years c) 27 years?
- 6_** In which year did Sudan split into two countries?
- 7_** What are Eswatini's two official languages?
- 8_** Jamestown and Usshertown are districts of which Ghanaian city?
- 9_** Cameroon is part of the Ecowas regional bloc. True or false?
- 10_** Nyungwe Forest (pictured) is one of Africa's oldest rainforests. In which country is it located?

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

The motorcycle ride-hailing business is a rough ride

SafeBoda billed itself as the Uber for motorcycle taxis. And in Uganda, where boda bodas are ubiquitous, the proposition seemed like a no-brainer. So where is the growth?



Photo: Katumba
Badru Sultan

Tom Courtright

In May 2023, Uganda's ride-hailing giant SafeBoda – the first motorcycle-taxi app in Africa – announced that its co-founders and chief executives, Maxime Dieudonne and Alastair Sussock, were stepping down from their roles. In their place, the chief financial officer Rob Sanford was promoted.

The company is focusing on profitability. Five months prior, it had

exited Nigeria to concentrate on its core Ugandan market and introduced SafeCar, presumably with bigger profit margins, and a premium service where passengers pay more to get an insured ride and the best drivers on the app.

But there is little evidence that the motorcycle ride-hailing business can be profitable in Africa – especially in a small, saturated market like Uganda. Uber itself has struggled to make profit consistently in its international markets, and closer to

home there is no public proof that similar startups like Yassir in Algeria, Gozem in Francophone Africa or SafeMotos in Rwanda ever entered profitability.

On paper, the ride-hailing opportunity in Kampala seemed enormous, with more than 150,000 boda bodas already on the streets in an anarchic coalition of chaos. Organising such a key industry looked like a safe bet. SafeBoda raised funding on the promise of safer, affordable rides, at the tap of a button. Nine years in, it boasts over 25,000 drivers. But – along with its competitors – SafeBoda has faced serious challenges that cast their model in doubt.

One of their biggest challenges is density. To ensure that a passenger pressing “request” and a rider pressing “accept” leads to a completed trip, both must be within a reasonable distance from one another. If a rider and a passenger are about 100 metres apart, more than 90% of ride requests are taken and completed; but at more than 600 metres, this drops to only 70%. Dropped trips frustrate both passenger and driver. To be successful, the app needs a high enough number of both passengers and riders to be active at the same time.

A survey in April found that only a quarter of app users in downtown Kampala (where there is a considerable density of both drivers and users) had left the app.

In the outskirts however three-quarters of users had returned to the offline world.

Relying on apps is itself a fundamental challenge. Ride-hailing companies can only serve tech-savvy, smartphone-owning customers in capital cities like

Kampala and Kigali, who represent 16% of the market at most. Vague ideas to use a USSD menu – SMS-like functionality that works with more rudimentary handsets – have not caught on.

In a city like Kampala, another fundamental challenge is map literacy. A driver who accepts a request usually calls the passenger to get directions, creating an additional inconvenience compared to either a rider directly in front of them on the road, or their regular boda rider who knows exactly where they live. In boda-crowded Kampala, the passenger usually has easy access to an offline rider just outside the door.

Finally, pandemic curfews devastated demand for ride-hailing apps, wiping out companies like SOT Boda, ORI Rides, Smart Cabs Uganda, and others. SafeBoda survived, but its attempts to enforce helmet-wearing could not withstand public anxiety around Covid-19, with passengers reluctant to share headgear.

Expansion for SafeBoda also looks bleak. But Sanford, the new chief executive, promises to find a way through. “For now, we will concentrate on Kampala, then expand to new markets as they make sense,” Sanford told *CEO East Africa*.

Instead, however, it may be recent police crackdowns in Kampala that allow SafeBoda to prove itself necessary in the eyes of both passengers and drivers, by requiring all the trappings of safety and formality that offline bodas neglect. ■

Tom Courtright is a transport and mobility researcher based in East Africa.

In praise of lipabi

Angela Ts'iamé

Lesotho has a vast range of traditional foods that make Basotho dishes unique. Lipabi – powder ground from roasted maize – is a staple food of the Basotho. Most dishes can be traced back to the founding of the nation by Morena (King) Moshoeshoe I, who is still celebrated today.

Lipabi is mostly used as a dish for traditional purposes and as a provision for long journeys as it can stay fresh for long periods of time. Every year people gather at Thaba-Bosiu to prepare different kinds of traditional food to celebrate and honour the founder of the Basotho.

Growing up in rural Lesotho in the early 1990s, I remember waking up before dawn, the sound of my grandmother's voice gently nudging me out of bed. As the sun crept over the horizon, her loving hands prepared lipabi for people who had come for letsema (working together in a group). As she cooked, she would share life lessons with me, her words as nourishing as the food she made. This is how it became my favourite food.

Lipabi is prepared using ground corn called khoahla (dried maize), which is a winter selection of corn. It is dried and

roasted until fully cooked then crushed into a very fine powder using a hand mill. Afterwards we add a pinch of salt and sugar for taste, and mix it well. It can be mixed with water or eaten with a fermented sorghum porridge we call motoho.

Looking back, I realise that my grandmother's insistence on teaching me how to make lipabi was more than just a culinary lesson. It was a lesson in perseverance, patience and determination. It taught me the value of hard work and the importance of passing traditions from one generation to the next. I still smile when I prepare lipabi. ■



Last week we tried out mrenda, a leafy green sauce from Kenya. This week we are sampling one of Lesotho's staples, lipabi. We want to hear about your favourite food and what makes it so special. Let us know at letters@thecontinent.org. \$100 for the winning letter.

Hasten the renewable energy revolution! If only because our social battery is in dire need of recharging thanks to all of the high-profile events on the continent this week. To be clear, we did not actually attend any, as such. After all, “why go hard when you can go home” is a philosophy we – and apparently noted Africa Climate Summit absentee Cyril Ramaphosa – live by. But just watching has been exhausting!

First up there was Gabon, and the latest episode of *Keeping Up With The Coupdashians*, where coup leader du jour General Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema was sworn in as the country’s interim president. Dressed in full ceremonial dress, he looked ravishing in red, with white shiny gloves and medals on show, reminding us once again that dictators come and go, but drip is forever.

After taking his oath, Nguema pledged to hand back power to civilians and to hold free and transparent elections, but in a tale as old as time, he did not give a timeline.

In the vicinity was none other than Faustin Touadéra, president of the Central African Republic. Still sporting that post-constitutional-referendum glow

– the kind that gives you extra terms in office – he was deployed by the Economic Community of Central African States to meet with Nguema so they could have a little chat about Gabon returning to constitutional rule. Which makes perfect sense considering what an expert on constitutional shenaniganising our favourite Faustian bargainer is by now.

For a few days this week we were a bit worried about ousted president Ali Bongo (while also dancing along to the various of remixes of his “make some noise” speech). But then the junta announced that Bongo has “freedom of movement” and was free to head abroad for some medical checks.

Or maybe he’ll be keen just to chill at one of his luxurious pads in Paris? Or along the Côte d’Azur? Perhaps one of the villas in Nice would be nicer?

While one fave is leaving, another remains firmly in place. This week a tribunal in Nigeria upheld the February 2023 presidential election result which saw Bola Tinubu declared winner. The opposition had asked for the election to be invalidated, citing irregularities in the polls. They must be quite put out by the

Climate and calamity



CONTINENTAL DRIFT

Samira Sawlani



Mellow in yellow: Kenya's President William Ruto arrives at the first Africa Climate Summit in Nairobi in an Autopax Air Yetu, touted as the country's first electric car. Photo: William Ruto

ruling, but Tinubu himself was clearly not too worried as he zooted off – not to Nairobi for the African Climate Summit, as you might have expected – but to India for the G20 summit.

We, however, *are* in Kenya. As we pen this missive to you, reader dearest, it is evening in Nairobi. The sun is going down and the taxes are going up. Just dreamy.

Frequent trips to this city – we misunderstood the phrase “I catch flights not feelings” and are now catching flights *because* we caught feelings – have led us to pick up a few Kiswahili sayings, one of which is “Kutoa vyombo za wageni”, which from contextual clues I have deduced must surely translate into English as, “Wine ‘em and dine ‘em!”

A sentiment clearly on display at the summit. Nothing but the finest cutlery was brought out for all the foreign dignitaries.

Gone were the fuel guzzling, noisy vehicles some leaders usually roll in. Instead, President William Ruto drove himself to the summit in the cutest little electric car.

Speeches were given, pledges to go green were made, desserts served, and suddenly it was over. Off flew the fancy foreigners, and gas guzzlers got the green light to grace Nairobi’s streets once again.

As the sun sets, reality returns.

Our thoughts turn to Sudan, where more than five million people have been displaced internally and abroad since April. With its healthcare sector decimated, and 20-million people facing acute food insecurity, it is a stark reminder that amid the swanky events, the courtroom dramas and the swearings-in, conflict and tragedy hang over us like smog on Nairobi’s evening streets.

And it’s getting hard to breathe. ■

Third term is not the only way to break a democracy

There is still much rubble to be cleared on Senegal's path to presidential elections next year.

Borso Tall

Senegal is six months away from presidential elections, and the build-up continues to send shockwaves through the political system. President Macky Sall was widely cheered for announcing that he would not seek an unconstitutional third term in office, but has since proved himself to be no champion of democracy.

The greatest unrest continues to surround controversial opposition candidate Ousmane Sonko. The leader has been the subject of a number of judicial processes, each of which has found him guilty, including an accusation of youth corruption punishable by two years in prison that Sonko is currently appealing.

In the latest incident – which sent him to prison on 29 July – he was accused of phone theft and assault after a woman filmed him without his consent. He responded by going on hunger strike.

While some Senegalese believe Sonko faces charges that deserve prosecution, there is a growing belief that he is being politically persecuted.

The government's own actions have done little to dispel these accusations, banning his Pastef Party and arresting over 700 people.

Partly as a result, there continue to be regular outbreaks of political violence – some deadly – in Dakar and the southern city of Ziguinchor, where Sonko is mayor.

The violence has been used by the government to justify an internet shutdown, which the communications minister has said is designed to stop the “dissemination of hateful and subversive messages on social networks”.

The danger with this strategy, however, is that it provides more evidence for Sonko supporters that the rule of law is being manipulated to discriminate against their leader. Negotiation and reconciliation are therefore desperately needed.

The good news is that an ongoing mediation initiative resulted in around 100 of his supporters being released and has led to Sonko ending his hunger strike.

If more concessions are made by both sides, Senegal may yet have the peaceful and credible election it needs to breathe life back into its flailing democracy. ■



Borso Tall is a freelance journalist based in Dakar. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa

THE BIG PICTURE

Don't mind the gap: The long-delayed Lagos Blue Line opened for business this week, just 12 years after it was meant to be finished. The new rail system promises to cut some daily commute times in the Nigerian megalopolis down from three hours to as little as half an hour or less.

Photo: Pius Utomi Ekpei/AFP via Getty Images



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