

with Mail & Guardian

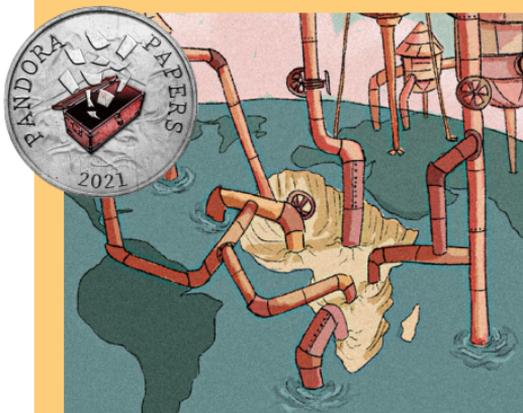
The Continent



The Great Looting Machine

How tax havens keep Africa poor

Illustration: Wynona Mutisi



COVER: The system is rigged.

The Pandora Papers is the biggest data leak in history. It took 150 newsrooms around the world – including *The Continent* – to sift through the nearly 12-million files obtained by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists. In this special edition, we look not just at the individuals implicated in the documents, but also what they tell us about the world the super wealthy built – and how they pick and choose the rules.

Inside:

- **10 out of 1,300 scientists** who led the most-cited climate research papers were African. (p7)
- The world has a **vaccine for malaria**, and it's coming to our continent. A quarter of a million under-fives die each year from malaria in sub-Saharan Africa. (p8)
- **Rwanda and Mozambique** are getting remarkably cosy. The Rwandan community that fled Kagame to Maputo is terrified at what this means for them. (p9)
- **Movies:** The *Swallow* that doesn't quite soar (p23)
- **Sex trafficking on Kenya's coast:** How rich European women lure African men to Europe as sex workers (p24)
- Pharmaceutical companies will likely **fail to deliver** the 465-million Covid-19 vaccines that were promised to poor countries. (p28)
- **Africa's development dilemma:** The continent's COP26 negotiators want us to keep using natural gas (p32)
- How drama therapy can heal us. A new piece from the **Mandela Rhodes Foundation**, for *The Continent* (p35)

We'll be back in November.

The Continent is run by a tiny team, and lots of coffee. To keep ourselves sane, we take regular publication breaks to allow ourselves (and our finances) to recover. This is the last edition of this season, but we'll be back with more great journalism from around the African continent and the world on November 13.

Do you have an opinion? Give it to us straight and win \$500



Together with Democracy in Africa, *The Continent* is proud to introduce the inaugural **Prize for Comment Writing**. Prizewinners receive \$500, and their work will be republished by media houses across Africa.

A well-written op-ed is a powerful thing. It has the power to shape thoughts and influence decisions. That's why we are looking for the next generation of opinion writers and analysts. Are you worried about an issue that is not getting enough attention? Do you think the prevailing wisdom is wrong? Have you got a burning hot take that needs a wider audience? We want to hear from you. This competition is open to anyone based on the African continent.

HERE'S HOW IT WORKS:

1. Pitch it to us. What argument do you want to make, and why is it important for a pan-African audience? Tell us in 100 words or fewer.

Pitches close on October 25

2. The short list. Our prize committee will go through the submissions and choose the eight most intriguing pitches. You will receive a \$200 honorarium if your pitch is short-listed (as long as you finish writing the piece). Short list announced on October 30

3. Editing and fact-checking. The editorial team at Democracy in Africa will work with you on your argument structure and your evidence base. The editorial team at *The Continent* will work with you on making your op-ed interesting and accessible.

4. Publication day. All the finalised op-eds will be published in a special edition of *The Continent* on **27 November**. The prize committee will choose the overall winner of the prize, and *The Continent* readers will get a chance to vote for their favourite too.

5. And the winners are: Winners will be announced on **4 December**. The winning op-eds will be placed in media outlets across Africa, and the winners will receive \$500 each. **To enter, visit:** <http://bit.ly/commentprize>



The Prize for Comment Writing is funded from a £10,000 prize that was awarded to Professor Nic Cheeseman and Dr Susan Dodsworth, University of Birmingham, Professor Gabrielle Lynch, University of Warwick, and Professor Justin Willis, University of Durham by the Economic and Social Research Council of the UK, to support excellence in research.

RELIGION

'Sorry we abused 330,000 children'

An investigation in France has shown how Catholic priests sexually abused 330,000 children since 1950. At least 3,000 members of the church were involved. A mountain of research shows that abuse in your childhood can destroy your whole life. Any other organisation would have been closed. The church continues, despite evidence that this sort of abuse has been systematic and global. The head of the church in France said in a press conference that: "My wish today is to ask forgiveness from each of you." The church continues to claim to be a moral compass.

TUNISIA

There once was a prez called Saied

A Tunisian journalist was arrested this week for reading a poem about authoritarian rulers. The president, Kais Saied, recently suspended parliament in a move his critics described as a coup, but which does appear to have public support in a country with high levels of corruption and low levels of service delivery. Saied's people clearly don't think journalists – or poets – should question his power, however, as other reporters have been intimidated or had their workplaces closed down.

LITERATURE

It's about time

Into the gulf: Abdulrazak Gurnah.

Photo: Simone Padovani/Getty Images

Novelist Abdulrazak Gurnah this week became the first black African writer in 35 years to win the Nobel prize for literature. Born in Zanzibar, he fled to England after a revolution in 1964. His first novel, *Memory of Departure*, about a young boy sent abroad by his family, was published in 1987. The Nobel committee awarded Gurnah the prize for his "uncompromising and compassionate penetration of the effects of colonialism and the fate of refugees in the gulf between cultures and continents".



Peace: Maria Ressa and Dmitry Muratov have been honoured for their work defending journalism

NOBEL PRIZE

Journalists win Nobel peace prize

Maria Ressa and Dmitry Muratov have won this year's Nobel peace prize "for their efforts to safeguard freedom of expression, which is a precondition of democracy and lasting peace". Ressa works in the Philippines and is a co-founder of *Rappler*, which has come under intense attack from that country's president. Muratov faces similar challenges in Russia, under a government that doesn't tolerate opposition or being questioned.

EMISSION ACCOMPLISHED

SA among world's worst polluters

South Africa is the 16th all-time highest emitter of carbon emissions, according to research that looks at the total emissions of countries over the past 160 years. The United States was first. By, like, a lot.

ETHIOPIA

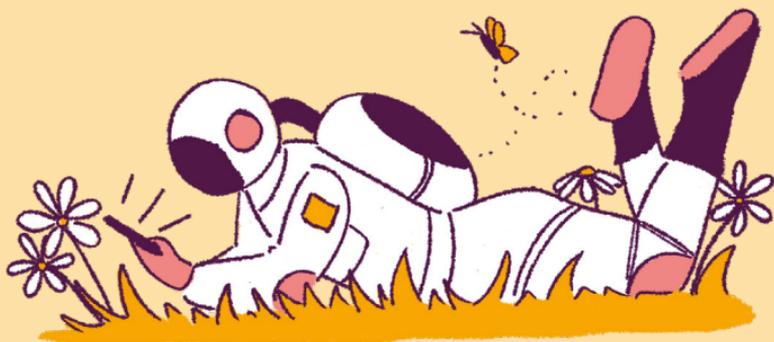
Guns must blaze, flowers won't fly

A CNN investigation found evidence that Ethiopian Airlines was used last year to transport weapons and supplies to Eritrea. In one case the report found a flight filled with flowers for export to Belgium was emptied and stocked with weapons instead, which the airline denies. The flight reportedly took place during Ethiopia's civil war in Tigray, which has led to multiple mass killings, famine and sustained violence.



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World

Most climate science is written by white men

In deciding how the world responds to the climate crisis, policymakers rely on research that tends to be written predominantly by men in the global north

In the past five years, just 10 African scientists worked on the 100 most highly cited climate research papers globally. Fewer than a quarter of the authors were women.

This is according to an analysis published this week by *Carbon Brief*. The UK-based website looked at research published in the five years between 2016 and 2020.

Of the 1,300 authors who worked on the 100 papers covered, almost 90% were from the global north.

European authors made up nearly 41%, those from North America 33%, Asia 7%, and Africa 0.7%.

Some 39% of all the authors were from the United States alone. Of the 10 African authors, eight were based in South Africa. None of the 100 papers had someone from Africa or South America as the lead author.

Gender representation is hardly better. In the 100 papers, just 12 had a woman as the lead author. Women made up 22% of the 1,300 authors.

Representation in global academia is a long-standing problem. In a world where the more visible you are – the more “famous” you are – the more funding you get, and this inevitably has a snowball effect.

Earlier this year, for example, Reuters published its “Hot List” of the thousand “most influential” climate scientists.

It based its metric not on the quality of their research or how much influence they had on governments, but on their relative fame. Only five African scientists made it onto the list and only 122 scientists were women.

While climate scientists might advise their own governments on policy, at a global level the bias in research means decisions that affect the way the entire world works are based on science informed by a specific worldview.

That worldview tends to be male and Western. ■

World

At last, a real shot at kicking malaria's ass

The World Health Organisation has issued its first-ever recommendation for a malaria vaccine to be administered to children in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The mosquito-borne disease kills over 400,000 people every year, most of them in Africa. Far more fall ill: the WHO estimates that as many as 229-million people contract malaria each year.

The RTS,S/AS01 vaccine – which also goes by the somewhat jauntier name of “Mosquirix”, acts against *P. falciparum* the deadliest and most prevalent malaria parasite on the continent.

Welcoming the news, the WHO's regional director for Africa, Dr Matshidiso Moeti, said: “For centuries, malaria has stalked sub-Saharan Africa, causing immense personal suffering ... [but the vaccine] provides a glimmer of hope for the continent and we expect many more African children to grow into healthy adults.”

The vaccine has travelled a long road. Its formulation was first conceived of in 1987 and continued to be developed until it was first approved for human use in 2015, which led to pilot programmes



Lifeline: A Kenyan healthworker preps a vaccine shot in the pilot programme.

in Ghana, Kenya and Malawi in 2019, led by those countries' ministries of health.

In these programmes vaccine was found to be safe, and to significantly reduce the severity of deadly cases of the disease.

Importantly, it is inexpensive to produce, and can be distributed widely with relative ease.

Kate O'Brien, the director of the WHO's department of immunization, vaccines and biologicals, said the next big step is to get funding for a serious roll-out programme.

Once that is done the health organisation will begin discussions with individual countries about whether to adopt the vaccine as part of their official malaria control strategies, and assist with finding the best way to do so. ■

Mozambique

Having fled Kigali, refugees fear Rwanda's military presence

Luis Nhachote

Every 25 September each year, Mozambique celebrates its armed forces. That's the date on which, in 1964, Frelimo's insurrection against Portuguese colonialism began, with the first shot fired at the village of Chai, in Macomia district in the province of Cabo Delgado.

This year, however, honours were shared with the armed forces of Rwanda – whose president, Paul Kagame, had been welcomed on a red carpet when he landed at Pemba, capital of Cabo Delgado, a day earlier. Cabo Delgado today is home to another armed insurrection, and the Rwanda Defence Force is helping Mozambique's Frelimo government to try to snuff it out.

Kagame sent 1,000 soldiers and police to fight the Islamist-inspired insurgency well before the SADC community managed to mobilise its own military mission to Mozambique.

So far, the Rwandan forces have seen great success – apparently turning the course of the war in favour of the Mozambican government.

But the celebratory mood is not shared by the 4,300-strong Rwandan refugee community in Mozambique, centred on the capital Maputo, some 2,440 km from Pemba. They view the rapprochement between Mozambique's President Filipe Nyusi and Kagame with suspicion.

Habiyaremye believes the rapprochement is fuelled by a deal under which Kagame helps stymie the insurrection, on the understanding that he can run operations targeting Rwandan refugees

The Rwandan Refugees Association's chairperson, Cléophas Habiyaremye, believes that the deepening of ties between Kigali and Maputo is fuelled by a shady deal under which Kagame helps quash the Cabo Delgado insurrection on the understanding that his "Kigali death squad" is given carte blanche to target Rwandan refugees in Mozambique unhindered. Already, members of the community have been killed and kidnapped without the Mozambican authorities ever solving the crimes.

A litany of violent crimes

On 13 September this year, Révoat Karemangingo was gunned down 50 metres from his house in Maputo by two unknown gunmen.

Karemangingo was a lieutenant in the Rwandan army that was overthrown by Kagame's forces in 1994, but had since become a businessman in Mozambique, and deputy chair of the Rwandan Refugees Association.

On 23 May, alleged Mozambican police officials kidnapped Rwandan journalist Ntamuhanga Cassien on the island of Inhaca, 38km off the Maputo coast.

They then reportedly took him to a police station in the neighbourhood of Chamanculo, before handing him over to the Rwandan High Commission in Maputo – even though there is no formal extradition treaty between Maputo and Kigali.

He has not been seen since then.

The high commission did not respond to a request for comment.

Cassien had been living in exile in Mozambique for four years, after escaping from a Rwandan prison where he was serving a sentence for allegedly plotting against President Kagame.

In October 2012, the body of Théogène Turatsinze, former head of the Rwandan Development Bank and at the time deputy vice-chancellor of the Mozambique Saint Thomas University (USTM), was found tied up and floating in the Maputo channel.

The last time he was seen alive was in the company of foreign investors at a

hotel where they were staying.

The crime remains unsolved.

Our crime? Being born in Rwanda

Speaking to *The Continent* at the weekend, Habiyaemye said that the sight of Kagame being received with full state honours has increased the fear within the Rwandan refugee community.

The two countries have historically not gotten along, but in 2019 Rwanda established a high commission in Mozambique. To the consternation of both refugees and international observers, the inaugural high commissioner was revealed to be Claude Nikobisanzwe.

Nikobisanzwe had previously been a diplomat in South Africa – but was expelled from that country on suspicion of involvement in the murder of Rwanda's former head of intelligence, Patrick Karegeya, in a Johannesburg hotel in 2014. Karegeya had turned against the regime in Kigali and became a prominent critic of Paul Kagame.

Habiyaemye said the Rwandan community in Mozambique cannot seek help from the High Commission because “we don't have any relationship with the embassy – it serves the regime and not the interests of the Rwandese citizens”.

Many Rwandan exiles in Mozambique have registered as Burundians or other citizens of other countries, Habiyaemye said. “There are officially 4,300 registered [Rwandan] refugees, but I believe there are around 10,000. They hide behind other nationalities because they are persecuted by the Kigali regime. Our sole crime is to have been born in Rwanda.” ■

We have the receipts.

The Pandora Papers investigation reveals more financial secrets of African politicians and influential business leaders than ever before.

Will Fitzgibbon

While we might not be especially surprised to learn that President Denis Sassou-Nguesso or a Zimbabwean general owned a shell company in a tax haven, the Pandora Papers investigation allows us to now state it as a fact.

Only with facts – especially those facts that powerful people pay enormous amounts of money to keep away from public view – can citizens engage in informed debate.

Only with facts can prosecutors and tax officials launch probes to determine what, if any, money has evaded a country's coffers.

What happens next in countries across Africa and worldwide is now in the hands of their citizens and their governments.

The Pandora Papers project is the largest collaboration of reporters from Africa in history. More than 50 journalists joined the project, sifting through leaked data for months while also conducting interviews, meeting sources, and obtaining legal records.

Many African reporters worked on the Pandora Papers with little financial support and at great personal risk to themselves. Before publication, prime

ministers, ministers and members of the business elite pressured journalists and editors to back down. Most reporters refused to do so, publishing anyway.

These brave and talented reporters have helped the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) pioneer a new kind of journalism – global journalism.

The Pandora Papers handed power to individual journalists from the Comoros to Botswana to Mauritania. Each journalist decided who to report on and the best way to tell a story. As Golden Matonga in Malawi said about the Pandora Papers: this is the opposite of “parachute” journalism.

The impact of the Pandora Papers may not be immediate. We know from experience that financial probes take time – and political will.

But if you are reading this edition of *The Continent* or if you find yourself talking with a friend over coffee about the Pandora Papers, our work has, at least in part, been worth it. ■

Will Fitzgibbon is a senior reporter at ICIJ. He coordinated the Africa investigations that were part of the Pandora Papers.

CONGRATULATIONS! YOU HAVE BECOME THE PRESIDENT OF YOUR COUNTRY, AND THE MONEY IS ROLLING IN.



BUT ALL THIS NEW-FOUND WEALTH PRESENTS ITS OWN PROBLEM...



AFTER ALL, YOUR MONTHLY SALARY CANNOT EXPLAIN THE SIZE OF YOUR BANK ACCOUNT.



AND YOU DON'T WANT VOTERS TO START ASKING DIFFICULT QUESTIONS.

FOR YOU, HERE IS...

THE CORRUPT PRESIDENT'S GUIDE TO HIDING STOLEN MONEY

1 YOU NEED TO FIND A "FRIEND", SOMEONE YOU REALLY TRUST... OR SOMEONE YOU CAN THREATEN.

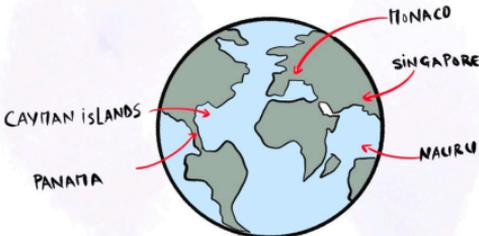


YOU GIVE THEM A CUT - 2% IS PRETTY STANDARD - AND IN RETURN THEY GO AND STASH THE MONEY.



NEVER DO THIS YOURSELF. IF IT EVER GETS OUT - SAY, IF A BUNCH OF ACCOUNT DETAILS ARE LEAKED TO PESKY JOURNALISTS - YOU NEED PLAUSIBLE DENIABILITY.

2 GOOD NEWS! THERE ARE PLENTY OF PLACES TO STASH YOUR CASH...



AND A WHOLE WORLD OF LAWYERS AND ACCOUNTANTS WHO WILL HELP YOU DO IT.

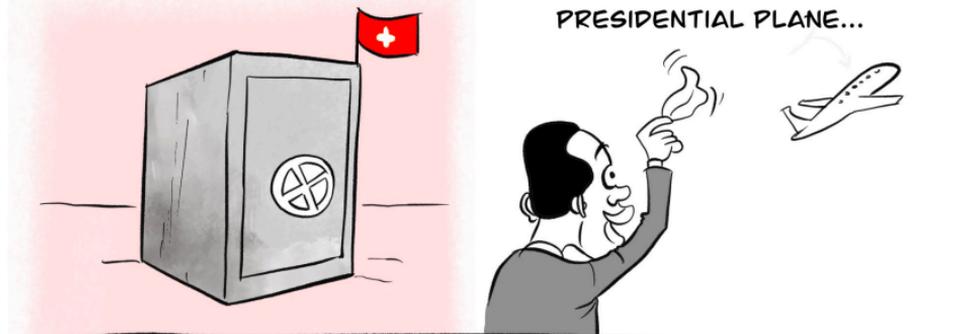


WITH THE HELP OF A NOT-SO-SCRUPULOUS INTERMEDIARY, YOUR FRIEND CAN SET UP A SHELL COMPANY IN A TAX HAVEN LIKE THE BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS.



THIS SHELL COMPANY DOES ONE THING ONLY: IT OWNS AN ACCOUNT AT A PRIVATE BANK IN SWITZERLAND.

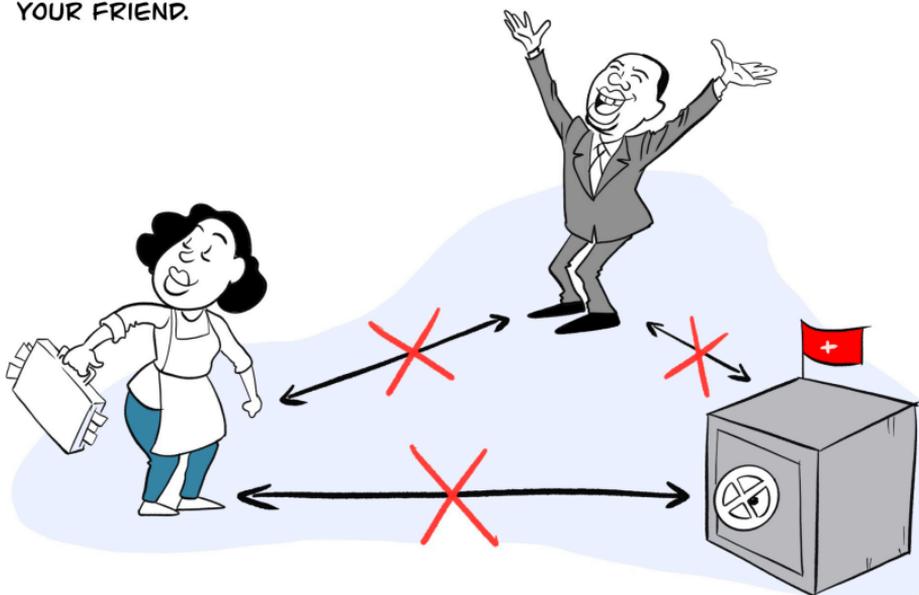
3 SEND YOUR FRIEND ON AN ALL-EXPENSES-PAID TRIP TO SWITZERLAND, TO DEPOSIT THE CASH. MAYBE GIVE HER THE PRESIDENTIAL PLANE...



...AND A DIPLOMATIC PASSPORT, JUST TO MAKE SURE NO ONE ASKS ANY AWKWARD QUESTIONS (NOT THAT SWISS BANKERS ARE KNOWN FOR ASKING AWKWARD QUESTIONS - IF THEY DID, THEIR VAULTS WOULD BE CONSIDERABLY EMPTIER).



NOW YOU'VE GOT A SWISS BANK ACCOUNT OWNED BY A SHELL COMPANY THAT HAS NO PUBLIC CONNECTION TO EITHER YOUR OR YOUR FRIEND.



YOU CAN SLEEP SOUNDLY, KNOWING THAT NO ONE WILL EVER KNOW WHERE YOU HAVE HIDDEN YOUR MONEY, OR HOW MUCH YOU STOLE.



Pandora Papers: The African highlights

Or is it lowlights? The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists brought together 53 African journalists from newsrooms across the continent to delve into the leaked documents. This is just a taste of what they found and the allegations that they have made this week. For more, visit the ICIJ's website, or read your local team's work.

Kenya

The family of President Uhuru Kenyatta is holding at least \$30-million in secret assets in 13 offshore companies. Kenyatta has previously called for politicians to be transparent about their wealth. – *Africa Uncensored and Finance Uncovered*

Republic of Congo

Inter African Investment Ltd, which controlled lucrative diamond mines in the country, is secretly owned by President Denis Sassou-Nguesso. It was incorporated in the British Virgin Islands in 1998. His spokesperson said: “[Sassou] reserves the right to prosecute anyone who reiterates these accusations.” – *ICIJ*

Nigeria

Peter Obi, an ex-governor who made his name as a beacon of transparency, set up a convoluted business structure running through Monaco, Panama and the British Virgin Islands – and then failed to declare it. – *Premium Times*

Côte d'Ivoire

Prime Minister Patrick Achi owned a company in the Bahamas from 1998 (when he was energy minister) to 2006,

obscured through a complex trust scheme. He denies this. – *Cenozo*

Uganda

Security Minister Jim Muhwezi had shares in shell companies in the British Virgin Islands and Cyprus. He denies it, but his signature is on the record. – *The Monitor*

Botswana

Retail mogul Ram Ottapathu registered a shell company, Covering Concepts Global Limited, in the British Virgin Islands in 2016. He denies any knowledge of this. – *INK Centre for Investigative Journalism*

Morocco

Princess Lalla Hasna is listed as owner of a shell company in the British Virgin Islands, and used it to buy an \$11-million house in Kensington, London. – *Le Desk*

...and more from *amaBhungane* (South Africa), *L'Express* (Mauritius), *Makanday Media Centre* (Zambia), *Inkyfada* (Tunisia), *Diario Rombe* (Equatorial Guinea), *Front Page Africa* (Liberia), *L'Economiste du Faso* (Burkina Faso), *Twala* (Algeria), *The Platform for Investigative Journalism* (Malawi), *The Standard* (Zimbabwe), *Impact.sn* (Senegal) and *L'Evenement* (Niger) ■



Paradise Lost: The British Virgin Islands are not so innocent

The Pandora Papers exposes how the system is rigged against us

A global investigation by 150 newsrooms, including *The Continent*, has once again exposed the secret world of tax loopholes and offshore accounts that rich people use to hide their money. What it also shows us is the mechanism by which Africa is kept poor – and why the developed world is so reluctant to change it.

Simon Allison and Siphso Kings

In June 2015, South African diplomats tried to change the world order. The setting was Addis Ababa, and the forum was the United Nations' Financing for

Development Conference, where world leaders were meeting to figure out how to fund the Sustainable Development Goals.

The main question on the agenda was how much aid rich countries should give to poor countries. Western leaders were

there, patting themselves on the back for committing to spend 0.7% of their national income on overseas development aid (a commitment that few have actually delivered on).

But this was entirely the wrong question. With the support of the G77, a group of developing world countries, South Africa proposed something entirely different. What if, instead of giving money to the developing world, rich countries stopped money from leaving the developing world in the first place?

Close the tax loopholes which allow multinational companies to pay little to no tax in the developing world countries in which they operate. Shut down the offshore havens where wealthy individuals hide their money from national revenue collection agencies. Make it impossible for people and businesses to hide their riches behind faceless, unaccountable shell companies.

Just months earlier, former South African President Thabo Mbeki – tasked by the African Union to investigate the issue – had estimated that the African continent alone was losing \$50-billion every year to these accounting tricks, known as illicit financial flows (in 2018, he said that figure had risen to \$80-billion. Overseas development aid to sub-Saharan Africa in 2018 was about \$42-billion).

South Africa argued that if all this tax was collected, rather than evaded and avoided, the developing world would not need any charity at all.

Western countries were not buying this argument – even though, on the face of it, they had billions of dollars to gain. The

United States and the United Kingdom, supported by other rich countries, strongly opposed South Africa's proposal, which was handily defeated.

South Africa argued that if all this tax was collected, rather than evaded and avoided, the developing world would not need any charity at all.

Thanks to the Pandora Papers – and the Panama Papers and Paradise Papers which preceded them – we know why this wealthy global elite fought so hard to maintain the status quo.

The biggest leak in history

A couple of years ago, 2.94 terabytes of confidential data was leaked to the New York-based International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ). We don't know exactly how the leak happened, or who leaked it: ICIJ is keeping details vague to protect their sources.

In the data dump were an astonishing 11.9-million files: a remarkable trove of confidential emails, images, Word documents, PDFs, spreadsheets, slides, and audio and video files. The documents came from 40 companies, located in 14 different countries, which specialise in setting up offshore companies and secret bank accounts.

Their business is, in effect, to help rich people keep their money secret.

It was far too much data for ICIJ to trawl through on their own. Instead, they partnered with 600 journalists from 150



Secret wealth: Kenya's President is connected to a secret Swiss bank account

media organisations around the world – including *The Continent* – to sift through the documents and look for anything that might raise alarm bells. “There were many, many early mornings,” recalled John-Allan Namu, the investigative journalist from Kenya who helped piece together the details of the secret bank account linked to Kenya’s President Uhuru Kenyatta.

Namu is one of 53 African reporters who worked on the leaks.

To search through the files, reporters search for keywords and phrases. They might have a local interest – in, say, the president of their country – or they heard something years ago that they want to check out in the documents. Journalists also have access to data from the previous leaks, like the Panama Papers, and use this to piece the puzzle together.

It is painstaking, complex, labour-

intensive work. And frustrating, too, because the puzzle is never quite complete: despite their volume, the Pandora Papers represent just a fraction of the wealth that is hidden in this secret, offshore world; they offer us the merest glimpse into the dark, lucrative underbelly of the international financial system.

Through them, we see how the King of Jordan has secretly amassed a \$100-million international real estate empire. We see how President Kenyatta’s family, despite championing financial transparency, keeps at least \$30-million in an untraceable Swiss Bank account. We see how members of Russian president Vladimir Putin’s inner circle – his childhood friend, his alleged lover – became giddily, unaccountably wealthy.

It’s not just heads of state. We see how Uganda’s state security minister set up shell companies in the British Virgin Islands and Cyprus, although we don’t know to what end (and he denies any involvement). We see how Nigerian businessmen snapped up hundreds of millions of pounds worth of high-end London property, far away from the prying eyes of the Federal Inland Revenue Service. We see how British businessmen hid their profits in unaccountable offshore corporate entities – and then donated lavishly to Britain’s ruling party.

And we see, in all these hidden bank accounts, in all this secret wealth, how there is no proof that anyone did anything wrong. Most of it is totally legal.

But that doesn’t make it right. A comment piece in the *Washington Post* this week summarised it this way: “What

**Capital crimes:
London is the
centre of a “murky
offshore world”**



high net-worth individuals buy in this system is the right to pick and choose the laws that govern them.”

A broken system

The secret dealings of some 336 politicians, officials and businessmen in 91 different countries and territories are unveiled in the Pandora Papers. All of these people have questions to answer. Namu sums it up: “Ownership need not be enveloped in secrecy, whether you are rich or poor.”

But to focus on these individual stories is to miss the point. “You can pick some individuals and make it a moral issue. Yes, it’s bad, but it’s more than that,” Carlos Lopes told *The Continent*.

Lopes is one of Africa’s highest-profile and most experienced economists. He helped Mbeki put together his report on illicit financial flows. As head of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, he was in the room in Addis Ababa when rich, western countries fought so hard to protect that system.

It’s a system skewed in favour of protecting rich people, rich companies, and rich countries. Which is why those same countries have no interest in changing it. “You have a lot of things in the Pandora Papers which are legal, because systemic issues are never addressed. Today’s capitalism requires offshoring... Tax avoidance is not necessarily promoted openly by rich countries, but it is more than tolerated,” he said.

In fact, some rich countries have made tax avoidance a foundation of their economies. As *The Guardian* observed: “The leaked records vividly illustrate the coordinating role London plays in the murky offshore world. The UK capital is home to wealth managers, law firms, company formation agents and accountants. All exist to serve their ultra-rich clients.”

The slow, slow pace of change

Since that fateful Addis Ababa conference, there have been some efforts to overhaul an international tax system that everyone



Not all that glitters is gold: Monaco is a favourite place to stash illicit cash

knows is broken. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, which represents some of the world's richest countries, has teamed up with the G20 – another group of mostly rich countries – to create a global tax plan.

The centrepiece of the plan, unveiled last year, is a 15% global corporate tax rate. This will apply to major multinational corporations: Facebook, for example, will no longer get away with earning \$27-billion but paying only \$34-million in tax, as it did in 2016 (that tax was paid in Ireland, whose tax-friendly laws made it an attractive location for Facebook's headquarters, despite Facebook's revenue being generated all over the world).

The plan also requires large companies – those with revenues of \$890-million or more – to pay tax in the place where this revenue is generated. This is good news for Africa: it means that mining companies will no longer be able to extract minerals

from, say, the Democratic Republic of Congo, without paying tax there.

With 140 countries signed up to the new global tax plan, it is due to take effect in 2023.

It's a start, but a slow one. That 15% tax rate is still very low (individuals in most countries pay about 23%). And the new global rules won't apply to individuals – nor will they lift the veil of secrecy which allows so much of this wealth to go undetected in the first place.

Don't expect the Pandora Papers to change any of this. History tells us that the investigation will cause widespread outrage and lead to relatively minor reforms.

The Panama Papers, published in 2016, toppled the governments of Iceland and Pakistan, and some 80 countries announced investigations into the revelations.

But few of those investigations led anywhere; and the system, designed to benefit a wealthy, powerful few, did not change.

Nor will it this time.

Not immediately, anyway.

This means that, for now, the rich will keep using shell corporations, private banks and offshore tax havens to hide their money and disguise their true wealth.

And the reason they have to hide it is because, all too often, it's actually *our* money that is sloshing around these vast, sprawling secret networks, lubricating the lifestyles of the global elite – and, as Thabo Mbeki proved, helping to keep an entire continent in poverty. ■

The solutions

The Tax Justice Network has suggested six very big steps that could end the grift:

- **Automatic information sharing**

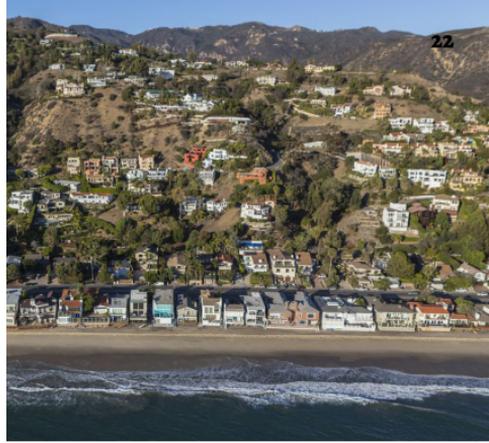
Corrupt and dubious individuals succeed because tax authorities are focused on their own countries and might not have access to data on what those same people are doing in other countries. Automatic sharing of information would go a long way to stopping this.

- **Invest in your tax authorities**

Tax systems need resources. In South Africa, under former president Jacob Zuma, the tax authority was stripped of its capacity to the point where the corrupt could do what they wanted. This led to big holes in the national budget. Fixing this requires an investment in capacity. This is especially true for small, resource rich countries where companies extract and siphon off profits.

- **Say who really owns what:**

One of the services tax consultants provide, through tax havens, is creating what are essentially fake companies where you don't know who owns them. As the Panama Papers showed, thanks to documents from Mossack Fonseca, a company that facilitated this sort of thing, one person or firm can be a front for thousands of companies. This means authorities don't know who really owns a business and ought to be paying tax.



- **Country by country reporting**

Corporations like Facebook and Google pay very little tax, despite controlling some of the most valuable commodities on earth. They do this by registering offices in tax havens, like Ireland, where tax rates are low and telling other countries that their tax is in Ireland. Local tax authorities then struggle to know their income and loss in their country, which could be changed by forcing companies and individuals to declare this in each jurisdiction.

- **Tax where the work is done**

A big one for resource-rich African states is making companies pay tax where their work is done, and not where they declare their tax.

- **Pass a UN treaty:**

Thanks to endless lobbying, tax at a global level continues to fall under the jurisdiction of the OECD, which doesn't include all countries. A UN treaty could set a baseline for all countries so no one country can become a tax haven at the cost of others. ■

Why is Kunle Afolayan's faithful take so hard to swallow?

Turning a beloved book into a good movie needs a little more imagination

Dika Ofoma

S*wallow* tells the story of Tolani Ajao (played by Eniola Akinbo), a young woman in 1980s Lagos. She is not happy with her job as a bank secretary, and a series of unfortunate events plunges her into hard times. Away from the loving shield of her mother in rural Makoku, Tolani and her friend Rose (a charismatic turn from Ijeoma Grace Agu) face dangerous pressures and temptations.

The movie gets its title from “swallowing” – the technique used by drug mules that involves swallowing balloons filled with drugs. It is based on the novel of the same name by Sefi Atta, and was directed by Nigerian filmmaker Kunle Afolayan. This is the first of a three-film deal that he signed with Netflix.

Atta's novel is a modern classic, and the film remains fairly faithful to the source material. Maybe too faithful.



Instead of capturing the essence of what made the book so compelling, Afolayan reproduces scene after scene with little to no modification for the big screen. This slows the narrative, making the film feel mundane and even boring in parts. It doesn't help that, despite the title, the world of drug smuggling does not actually get a whole lot of screentime.

Where *Swallow* shines, however, is in its depiction of 1980s Lagos – and as a reminder of how little has changed. The similarities with today's Lagos are striking. Muhammadu Buhari is in charge (then as head of a military regime, now as a civilian president). The Naira is depreciating. There are constant power cuts. If not for the costumes and props, you could almost forget that this is a period piece. ■



Dangerous waters:
Kenya's coast may
look idyllic – but not
to everyone

How 'beach boys' are falling victim to sex trafficking

Sex tourism on Kenya's coast is fuelling a wave of abuse and exploitation

It never occurred to Mohammed that he was about to become a victim of human trafficking. “I thought I had found real love,” he said, “and I could now send enough cash for my family in Diani, where my siblings stay. [Instead] I found myself giving out my body sexually to women in a foreign land.”

Mohammed, whose name we have changed to protect his identity, was a “beach boy”, one of many young men in informal work on the Kenyan coast, selling wares ranging from locally made jewellery to madafu, a popular coconut milk. The beach boys also find themselves drawn into sex tourism, which is prevalent in Kenya's Coast province.

Aged 23, Mohammed found himself

entangled in a sexual and economic relationship with a 63-year-old Italian woman, who lavished him with gifts including valuables and cash. “When she proposed I move with her to Italy, I did not object.”

She helped him through the process of acquiring a passport and a visa to relocate. But when he arrived in Italy, he was forced into sex work, with the woman acting as his pimp. “I craved to go home. I was eventually deported due to the lack of proper papers. It was the best thing that happened to me,” he said.

Mohammed's story is not unique. Kenya is witnessing a wave of beach boys travelling from the coastal regions to live with so-called “sponsors”, often much

older, mainly European women who have travelled to Kenya as tourists. Many of the beach boys, mostly aged between 16 and 25, are persuaded by the prospect of a lavish lifestyle or good education to leave with them when they return. But once out of the country, these young men can find themselves in a precarious position, exploited and coerced into sex work.

Economic inequalities

The Kenyan coast – from Mombasa to resort towns like Malindi and Diani – has long been known as a hotspot for sex tourism. Notoriously, this has included the exploitation of children, particularly young girls. In 2006, a joint study by UNICEF and the government of Kenya estimated that a third of all girls aged between 12 and 18 years old in four coastal districts were involved in trading casual sex for cash. In 2018, Trace Kenya, a local NGO that works to end child trafficking, estimated that as many as 100,000 children – girls and boys – were being exploited for sex work in Mombasa.

The trafficking of beach boys overseas is therefore one aspect of the larger phenomenon of sexual exploitation of local youth by tourists, driven by the inequity between local communities' poverty and the tourists' relative wealth.

Robin Omeka from Anika Initiative – an initiative that uses art to campaign on social issues – said that the lack of access to opportunities both in the formal and informal sectors makes them susceptible to being trafficked. The trend has even become culturally accepted: families are sending their sons to the beach, he said,

in order to become attached to someone from abroad and bring money home.

In an interview, a beach boy who doubles up as an agent, helping with paperwork, flight bookings and hotels (in his own words, he “links up his colleagues to rich white women”) argued that they choose to travel abroad voluntarily, especially those who are the only breadwinners for their family. “In most cases, they come to me for help. I am only trying to save them from a lifetime of poverty through connecting them to rich individuals,” he claimed.

It is difficult to know how many beach boys have been trafficked. The Kenyan government reported identifying 383 victims of human trafficking nationwide in 2020, of which 155 were men or boys. In 2019, 227 male victims were identified. This is likely to be a significant underestimate. Teen Watch Organization, an NGO based in Ukunda, has rescued 230 beach boys who were trafficking victims in the past two years alone. Many cases also go unreported due to the stigma around the issue.

The beach boy “agent” claims he alone has “helped” more than 60 boys last year to find hook-ups, most ending with a “stable” source of income in Germany and Switzerland. ■

This article was produced by the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime. It has been edited for length. The Global Initiative is a network of more than 500 experts on organised crime drawn from law enforcement, academia, conservation, technology, media, the private sector and development agencies.

Hide & Seek



Continental Drift

Samira Sawlani

Reader, we experienced a difficult few hours this week, triggering the kind of complex emotions that perhaps only a longstanding leader recently relieved of his presidential powers through a military coup might understand.

Phones the world over were stricken with silence. Where were the pings from the family WhatsApp groups? No more! Gone were the mysterious missives from aunties confiding in you the secrets of how to concoct an elixir to cure your every ailment, made of the blood of a unicorn, a letter from the ancestors, some ginger, garlic and plants from the garden of Eden. (Note: Peer review still pending.)

With no notifications appearing, the realisation dawned that instead of sharing a well-lit, only slightly vignettted picture of your dinner with the world, you would have to – in the words of ichael ackson – just *eat* it?

More horrifying still was when the compulsion took root inside of you to venture outside, and knock on your neighbour's door, just so you could tell them your relationship status has gone from "single" to "it's complicated". Which

is the same as single, only with no access to social media. But while WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram may have been cataclysmic for you, me, the Zuck, and purveyors of unicorn haemoglobin, it also provided the perfect cover for anyone thinking of slipping off the world stage, wanting to get away from paparazzi, the public, or the law.

It was certainly an opportunity for a huge game of hide-and-peek at the African Union HQ. Although, judging by recent revelations, a few presidents are starting to realise that they aren't quite as good at hiding as they had imagined – peekaboo, Uhuru, we see you huddled with Ali Bongo and Denis Sassou-Nguesso behind the begonias.

These three are of course among those mentioned in the Pandora Papers investigations, which uncovered financial secrets some of the worlds most powerful people would rather have stayed hidden.

Apparently Mr Kenyatta and his family have "for decades shielded wealth from public scrutiny through foundations and companies in tax havens, with assets worth more than \$30-million".

Mr Kenyatta has said he will respond "comprehensively" and that "these reports will go a long way in enhancing the financial transparency and openness that we require in Kenya and the globe."

See, now that's how you blag your way out of a tight spot. Well played.



Facebook: Mark Zuckerberg plays a jig on his invisible accordion. Photo: AFP

Unlike poor old Denis, who couldn't blag his way out of a carton of sour milk: the Congolese president has denied he's been found out, and is threatening to prosecute anyone who says that he owns offshore company in the British Virgin Islands. Unless they can prove it, he says.

Shame, he's like the kid who puts a blanket over his head and thinks that if he can't see you ... then that must mean that you can't see him either, and then as soon as you find him he goes crying to his mom and telling her that you cheated somehow.

Macron? Polo!

We're sure Emmanuel Macron would have loved to join in, but he seems to be playing another game altogether which apparently involves making as many people cross with him as possible.

This week saw Mali's minister of foreign affairs, Abdoulaye Diop, summon the French ambassador in order to express "indignation" after the French president questioned the legitimacy of the Malian regime headed by Colonel Assimi Goita.

Macron also told a radio station that it was not France's job to do the work not being done by the Malian state. Mali's

government branded the comments "regrettable" and said they were likely to harm the development of friendly relations between both countries.

This comes on the heels of the continued fallout with Algeria which has now seen Algiers recall its ambassador from Paris and close its airspace to French military planes, a matter which Macron says he hopes to see "calm down". But if he's suggesting that Algeria and Mali count to 100, it's probably just so that he can go hide.

Seek and ye shall find

During these difficult times it can sometimes feel like good news – unlike our Pandorable presidents – is hard to find. But stop the count, dear reader, for we have found some for you.

The World Health Organization has approved the world's first malaria vaccine for general use among children in sub-Saharan Africa and other regions with moderate to high rates of the disease.

According to the WHO more than a quarter of a million African children under the age of five die from malaria annually, leading WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus to describe the move to approve a widespread vaccine rollout as a "breakthrough for science, child health and malaria control."

And finally, if ever again you find your socials well and truly zucked, and you're tempted to read an honest-to-goodness actual book again, we recommend simply everything by Abdulrazak Gurnah, the Zanzibar-born novelist, who has just won the Nobel Prize for Literature. ■

The grand plan to get vaccines to the developing world is failing

The Covax Initiative was supposed to ensure that poorer countries got access to Covid-19 vaccines. But unless pharmaceutical firms become more transparent about how they fill orders, Covax is doomed to fail

Laura López González

Pharmaceutical companies will likely fail to deliver at least 465-million Covid-19 vaccine doses promised to the Covax initiative this year, the world's only real plan to get jabs to poor countries.

And when these doses will arrive remains, in part, a guessing game.

Gavi – the global public-private partnership which leads Covax – recently announced that Covax had about 25% fewer Covid-19 vaccine doses to distribute in 2021 than originally planned. The vaccine distribution scheme expects to have 1.4 billion doses available for delivery in 2021 – only enough to fully vaccinate about 20% of people in 91 of the world's poorest countries, Gavi CEO Seth Berkely announced.

Of these 1.4-billion doses, about 470-million will have gone to African Union countries by the end of the year. That's only enough to protect almost two out of 10 adults on the continent.

Currently, the number of people on the entire continent who have been vaccinated with at least one dose of a Covid-19 vaccine is roughly the same number as in Japan. By March, the number of vaccine doses delivered through Covax to African Union countries is supposed to almost double. And increasing numbers of countries seem keen to donate doses.

Of these 1.4-billion doses, about 470-million will have gone to African Union countries by the end of the year. That's only enough to protect almost two out of 10 adults on the continent

There is just one problem: Covax isn't exactly sure when these doses will arrive – or whether its orders are being prioritised ahead of countries that have already received their fair share of jabs

The tens of millions of vaccines that were promised to Covax - but never delivered

Johnson & Johnson	90-million
AstraZeneca	25-million
AstraZeneca, produced by the Serum Institute of India	75-million
Novavax, produced by the Serum Institute of India*	130-million
Novavax*	100-million
Clover*	45-million

*Vaccines had not yet been approved for use by the World Health Organisation at the time of writing. WHO approval is needed before a vaccine can be distributed via Covax. Source: Covax

through largely secretive and impossible-to-track bilateral deals.

Berkely warned last month that manufacturers need to “make their supply schedules transparent” so countries know when they might get vaccines. “Countries [should] also give up their place in the manufacturers’ queues if they’ve already achieved high levels of coverage.”

Where did Covax’s doses go?

Countries such as the United Kingdom, Japan and the United States have pledged more than a billion doses to poorer countries. Still, less than 15% of promised doses had been delivered as of early September, according to research by UK analytics firm Airfinity.

A July analysis published in *Think Global Health* found that although some public information was available on large donations from 11 countries to Covax, the majority included no public commitments on when doses would be delivered to Covax.

About half of Covax’s recently announced “missing doses” for the year are made up of two vaccines – the Novavax and Clover jabs – that have not yet received the World Health Organisation approval needed to allow Covax to distribute them even if supplies were available.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Covax invested heavily in the Serum Institute of India to ensure the company

would be a designated Covax producer of Novavax and AstraZeneca jabs. But India has not released doses to Covax since March 2020 due to exports bans, Berkely revealed in September.

Although he said he was confident exports would resume in the next three months, current Covax projections assume India's vaccine export ban will drag on until 2022.

Timing and transparency

AstraZeneca vaccines are also produced in the United Kingdom for Covax. Covax says technical issues there have also delayed shipments. Earlier this year, batches of AstraZeneca vaccines arrived so late in some African nations that jabs were set to expire before countries could roll them out. Thousands of doses were wasted.

Sources close to Covax have told *The Continent* that Covax is still receiving shipments of AstraZeneca vaccines with anywhere from just a few weeks to one month of shelf life left before doses expire – too late to let countries plan and execute vaccination drives. Covax is now pushing for AstraZeneca to guarantee that all doses supplied have at least 2.5 months of shelf life left when delivered. AstraZeneca did not respond to requests for comment.

Johnson & Johnson is expected to share with Covax 90-million doses of its coveted one-dose Covid-19 vaccine. According to Covax, J&J's production is still recovering after contamination at a United States factory that produced vaccine material led to millions of vaccine doses being destroyed in the US.

The Continent can confirm that South Africa's Aspen Pharmacare was subsequently forced to bin at least 20-million J&J doses that had been finished and packaged at its Gqeberha plant in the country's Eastern Cape after receiving the contaminated material. Aspen referred *The Continent's* queries to J&J, which did not reply to repeated requests for comment.

Aspen now receives J&J vaccine material from European producers. J&J has had to make up for lost time, including filling past-due orders placed by richer countries, which meant that Covax deliveries suffered, the vaccine mechanism explained in a recent supply update.

Dr Ayode Olatunbosun-Alakija is a member of the Africa Union's African Vaccine Delivery Alliance. She has questioned why the doses destroyed by Aspen were never made public: "Transparency is not just for Covax. [African countries] need to know not that, for example, vaccines are coming next week, but how many vaccines are coming and when ... so that we can prepare."

The availability of J&J doses is expected to increase in the coming months.

As Covax prepares to head into 2022, there is expected to be a relative deluge of doses for poorer countries. But if timing, expiry dates and supply remain opaque, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has warned, it could compromise national rollouts.

"I may sound like a broken record – I don't care. I will continue to call for vaccine equity until we get it." ■

THE QUIZ

0-3

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

4-7

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

8-10

"There should be a Nobel prize for winning this quiz. Gimme."



Photo: Amir Makar / AFP

- 1_ Who was the first president of Botswana?
- 2_ In which country is the lilangeni currency used?
- 3_ Nollywood refers to which country's film industry?
- 4_ Which South African Nobel Peace Prize winner turned 90 this week?
- 5_ Writer Abdulrazak Gurnah was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature this week. Where is he from?
- 6_ True or false: Morocco's Mohammed VI has ruled since 1999.
- 7_ True or false: Somalia is bordered by Kenya.
- 8_ The Great Pyramid of Khufu (Cheops) and the Pyramid of Khafra (Chephren) [pictured] are located in which country?
- 9_ Which country is George Weah from?
- 10_ Which two countries are home to the Maasai people?

HOW DID I DO?

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

Would you like to send us some quiz questions or even curate your own quiz? Let us know at letters@thecontinent.org



100% unfair?
The developed
world used fossil
fuels to get ahead.
Photo: Reuters

Why Africa wants to exploit its natural gas

Yes, there's a climate crisis – but does this mean that developing countries should be prevented from using the fossil fuels they need to develop? This will be a major point of contention at the upcoming climate summit in Glasgow.

Sophie Mbugua in Nairobi

Much of the focus from rich countries at the upcoming 26th UN climate summit – COP26 – will be about getting to net zero emissions by 2050.

But the African negotiating position could be a little different. The African bloc wants its members to be able to increase its carbon emissions – mostly through using gas to generate electricity – and only

reduce them to zero by 2100.

Nearly 600-million people in sub-Saharan Africa do not have access to electricity. Nine hundred million still cook using firewood, biomass, and charcoal. This is partly why, in total, Africa and its over a billion people account for less than 4% of global emissions.

Developed countries burnt fossil fuels to get where they are – they are overwhelmingly responsible for causing

the climate crisis. African states argue that they haven't had that opportunity, and will use gas instead of coal to develop. Large environmental NGOs have called for an immediate end to fossil fuel use for global heating to be kept below 1.5°C above what they were prior to the Industrial Revolution.

Jean-Paul Adam, the director for technology, climate change and natural resources at the UN's Economic Commission for Africa, told *The Continent* that emissions for the entire continent would rise by 1% if electricity generation is doubled.

James Murombedzi, a senior climate change policy and governance expert at the UN, told *The Continent* that: "For Africa, climate justice means first development." The continent was already having its development impeded by climate change, despite not being responsible for much polluting, he said.

The African position is shaped by its natural resources. Almost half of its 54 countries have proven natural gas reserves representing 7.3% of the world's reserves. Africa is also home to 7.2% of the world's oil reserves and is rich in renewable energy sources, including hydro, geothermal, sun and wind.

The difficulty for the continent's countries is that they need to grow their economies to develop people's lives, in an age where doing this fast can add to carbon emissions.

Despite the vast potential for renewable energy, a lack of regional grids and infrastructure makes it hard to create a stable and mixed grid. This is an

advantage of scale that Europe has.

Murombedzi said African countries need to resolve their energy crises to meet their sustainable development goals. "A just energy transition in Africa needs to be shaped around the continent's right to develop sustainably."

The UN economic commission's Adam said the COP26 proposal allows Africa to replace coal power generation with gas power generation. This then provides a constant energy supply, which can also quickly turn on and off, to work alongside a grid of mixed renewable energy sources.

Petrochemical giant BP – which lobbies for gas to not be treated as a fossil fuel – predicts that the production of natural gas in the continent will expand by 80% by 2035.

Countries like Mozambique – the third-largest holder of natural gas reserves in Africa after Nigeria and Algeria – are already producing and exporting natural gas.

For Africa to develop this way, Murombedzi said high polluting countries must do the work of significantly reducing emissions. This will ensure the carbon concentration in the atmosphere is not compounded by developed nations continuing actions.

All of this will still cost money, though. And it is becoming increasingly harder to raise funds for power plants fueled by fossil fuels. Adam said the argument had to be that investing in gas in Africa would allow for more renewables.

This will help countries go to the investment market and sell bonds so that they can start building, he said. ■

Why does Malawi need gender quotas?

Lingalireni Mihowa

Two weeks ago, world leaders at the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly discussed some of the most important issues facing humanity. But only 18 out of those 191 leaders were women – and at current rates of progress, it is estimated that gender equality in the highest positions of power will not be reached for another 130 years.

That is far, far, too long.

Every policy, law, and voice must be mobilised to fast track this process. When it comes to Malawi, that means introducing parliamentary gender quotas as part of the current electoral law reform process. Since the reintroduction of multipartyism in 1994, Malawi has made *some* progress towards closing its gender democratic deficit, but not enough.

From 5% in 1994 we achieved 23% in 2019, but this still lags behind the SADC gender declaration that committed the country to the “achievement of at least 30% target of women in political and decision making structures”.

Malawi is also a signatory to the SADC gender protocol of 2008, which aimed for

women to occupy 50% of the leading roles in the public and private sector. Despite this, it remains one of only six out of 16 SADC countries that have failed to introduce gender quotas, despite all the evidence that women face greater barriers to men to enter the National Assembly, including limited finance, gender based violence, and a public that for too long has been told men make better leaders.

Every policy, law and voice must be mobilised to fast track this process.

We can and must do better. The Malawian constitution has many progressive provisions that favour gender equality, and the law commission has already recommended that quota seats be introduced.

The president, Lazarus Chakwera, has also committed himself to promoting gender equality, and has now taken over as chairperson of SADC – so there is no better time for Malawi to live up to its growing reputation as a democratic light in the region by taking a leading position on gender equality. ■

Lingalireni Mihowa is Head of Oxfam in Malawi and Gender Justice Lead for Oxfam in Southern Africa. She served as Commissioner on the Special Law Commission for the

Development of Malawi's Gender Equality Act (2013).

This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa



In therapy, acting can speak louder than words

Through improvisation
and movement, we can
work through trauma and
help to heal ourselves

Jessica Mayson

Drama, story, ritual, music and movement have been embedded in healing practices in Africa for generations – from protest theatre and *iintsomi* to rites-of-passage rituals. Drama therapy honours this knowledge and understands that the creative process itself is the therapy. In South Africa, drama therapists are both artists and registered clinicians with the Health Professions Council.

How it works (and why it works)

Playing through improvisation, movement or role play enables us to explore our internal struggles in creative ways, practicing or rehearsing new ways of being. Pain or trauma can be explored from a distance – through symbol, metaphor or character – without making clients feel psychologically unsafe.

Crucially, drama therapy does not rely on words. Research shows that trauma's

impact on the brain and body restricts verbal processing. Creative, non-verbal methods allow healing to begin before words are ready.

New ways of being

Within a space of creativity, clients are given permission to safely destroy and rebuild, to be both strong and vulnerable. In the dramatic reality, old worlds can be reimagined, new ones created and multiple perspectives explored. Imagine: several women who have experienced abuse are in the therapy space and feel safe enough to dance freely together. They sit in a circle and create a collective story about their communal strength.

Challenging western models

Mental healthcare systems in South Africa often espouse the Western medical model. Drama therapists within these systems challenge these Western biases and assumptions: they encourage new thinking around therapy in postcolonial settings.

Finally, drama therapy is humanist: it focuses on connection and our shared humanity. This in itself can be reparative for the collective trauma so present in South Africa.

It is a powerful healing force. ■

This piece was published in partnership with the Mandela Rhodes Foundation. Jessica Mayson is a Mandela Rhodes Scholar and a drama therapist living and working in Cape Town, South Africa.

THE BIG PICTURE

Hot hike : Competitors take part in stage four of the 35th edition of the Marathon des Sables between Jebel El Mraier and Boulchrhal, in the southern Moroccan Sahara desert. The six-day, 250km ultramarathon sees competitors trekking through a formidable landscape, in one of the world's most inhospitable climates. Photo: Jean-Philippe Ksiazek/AFP



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