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The Continent

Moscow's war propaganda – and the newsrooms publishing it



PHOTO: ALABUGA



COVER: Russia's war on Ukraine needs people. With 500,000 dead, the country's deceptive recruitment of African men to fight on the front line is well documented. This week, our investigation reveals a parallel campaign aimed at recruiting African women to work in drone factories in Russia. Internal emails show women aged 18 to 22 were targeted because they are considered easier to control. Recruits describe exploitative contracts and dangerous working conditions. But articles promoting the programme appeared in 21 countries, often presented as independent journalism. Several outlets, including in Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda deleted the articles after questions from *The Continent* (p13).

Inside

7 **Gambia:** Citizens want action, not empty political promises

8 **Afcon:** Senegal wins. But Morocco is still playing off the pitch

11 **Health:** Private hospitals aren't working out

21 **Comoros:** Life on the picture-perfect island isn't always idyllic

29 **Data:** We need to talk about the challenges women face daily

30 **Film:** The Afrikaner psyche during Apartheid's dying days



The Big Annual Survey™

Filling out our survey is the single most impactful thing you can do to help *The Continent* today.

THE WEEK IN BRIEF

GHANA

Flights of fancy

President John Dramani Mahama has handed over three newly acquired aircraft to the Ghana Air Force, saying the purchase aims to improve the country's defence capabilities. Mahama added there were plans to acquire two more aircraft to further expand the Air Force's fleet, *Modern Ghana* reports. Last week, the president was criticised, particularly by opposition legislators, for acquiring a brand-new presidential jet, which he claimed was to replace an ageing one. At least the president isn't hogging all the planes for himself.



Runway models: *Spending on aircraft is in fashion in Ghana's top government circles.*

ZAMBIA

Opposition leader charged with treason

Brian Mundubile, who ran against Hakainde Hichilema in Zambia's August elections, has been charged with treason, *Reuters* reports. Mundubile alleged electoral malpractice and claimed he won the poll, which was marred by violent protests. He was arrested with running mate Makebi Zulu. They will stand trial next year for allegedly planning to overthrow the government. Rights groups have called for the case to be thrown out.

SENEGAL

Faye bares his teeth as Sonko bites back

The National Assembly has denounced President Bassirou Diomaye Faye's decision to implement a revised budget bill for 2026 that legislators previously rejected, *Reuters* reports. Faye vowed to implement the changes by decree, bypassing parliament. The ongoing standoff with his former prime minister Ousmane Sonko, now head of the National Assembly, threatens to derail a new $2.2-billion support programme from the International Monetary Fund.



African countries continue to bear the burden of extravagant heads of state prioritising presidential jets. These most recent shiny upgrade is the Ghanaian Falcon 6X, worth $60-million.

DIPLOMACY

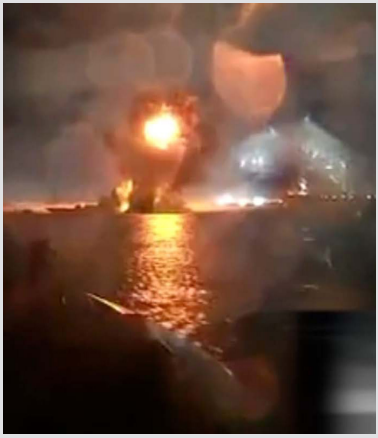
Buddies again

Kenya's President William Ruto and Congolese President Félix Tshisekedi, have agreed to restore diplomatic relations after a two-year freeze, *RFI* reports. At a Monday summit hosted by the Republic of Congo's President Denis Sassou Nguesso and mediated by Togo's Faure Gnassingbé, the duo agreed to re-establish embassies and appoint ambassadors. Their relationship broke down after a political-military coalition, including the March 23 Movement rebel group, was publicly launched in Kenya. It deteriorated further after Nairobi nominated a consul-general to Goma.

KENYA

Stop the build!

A Kenyan court has ordered a halt to the construction of a United States-backed Ebola facility in Laikipia, in central Kenya. In the ruling on Thursday, the judge said the facility had violated the Constitution for failing to disclose critical project documents, *The Standard* reports. The government also neglected to seek public input before signing the agreement with Washington, thus denying Laikipia County residents meaningful participation. The construction of the facility sparked protests in early June that resulted in two people dying.



Coast clearing: *A Ukrainian drone attacks Russian ships in Libyan waters.*

LIBYA

Not in our backyard

Two Libyan soldiers died after a Ukrainian drone struck Russian vessels off Benghazi on Sunday, prompting a diplomatic backlash. Authorities in Benghazi condemned the attack, opened a joint probe with Russia, threatened retaliation, and asked the United Nations to investigate. Since Bashar al-Assad's fall in late 2024 cost Moscow its Syrian bases, Russia relies on eastern Libya for logistics, air bases, and port calls in the region. Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy claimed responsibility, saying Ukraine was acting in self-defence but still respects Libya's sovereignty.

EGYPT

Dozens killed in fuel-truck inferno

More than 30 people have been confirmed dead after a fire on Cairo's Ring Road on Wednesday. A truck loaded with fuel overturned on the crowded highway and burst into flames, which then engulfed nearby vehicles. The 21-year-old driver of the car that hit the truck was arrested and ordered to undergo drug tests. The driver admitted he was overtaking when the crash happened, *Al Jazeera* reports. A cabinet minister said 10-million Egyptian pounds (about $182-million) has been donated to the victims' families.

HEALTH

Lenacapavir roll-out picks up pace

The first shipment of the HIV-prevention drug lenacapavir arrived in Zambia on Wednesday. Uganda is set to receive a shipment of its own next week, the *BBC* reports. The drug is already available in South Africa and Zimbabwe. The groundbreaking treatment costs $28,000 a year, although a cheaper version was created for developing countries. The World Health Organisation recommended it for HIV prevention last year after a clinical trial in which none of the 5,000 subjects contracted HIV after receiving the injection.

ETHIOPIA

Amnesty declares war crimes in Tigray

Ethiopia's military and a pro-government militia have been accused by Amnesty International of committing war crimes. The reason is their indiscriminate artillery strikes on densely populated urban areas in the northern Tigray region in September. The human-rights group also claimed the rebel Tigray People's Liberation Front endangered the lives of civilians by placing fighters in residential areas before renewed fighting. The TPLF denies these allegations. After reviewing photo, video, and satellite-imagery evidence, Amnesty confirmed the death of 14 civilians and said many more were injured.



PHOTO: AFP

Triggered: *Ethiopian Federal Police patrol the streets of Mekelle aboard a pickup truck after resuming operations in Tigray in October.*

JOINING *the* DOTS



CHRISTINE MUNGAI

Kenyan writer Marcus Olang's video essay, "What does it actually mean to write 'like a human'", published by *The New York Times*, connects the historical injustices that leave Global South writers disproportionately accused of AI cheating. First, colonialism demanded its subjects master the Queen's English to be taken seriously; Silicon Valley then hired underpaid data workers to teach large language models how to write well. We'd add one more chapter to Olang's indictment: Before ChatGPT, Western students were outsourcing university essays to Kenyan "shadow scholars" (*The Continent*, Issue #185) – buying up the formal prose their institutions now police. As everyday Western language has grown casual, that sets an informal baseline against which disciplined African prose looks synthetic. The irony is vicious: after demanding this fluency in colonial classrooms, buying it through ghostwriting mills, and extracting it to train algorithms, the West now stigmatises African literacy as robotic.

NEWS

GAMBIA

‘We need a president who will improve our lives’

Candidates are promising reform, development and stability ahead of next week’s election, but voters want more than empty words.

YERO S. BAH IN BANJUL

GAMBIANS go to the polls next Saturday in a presidential election experts see as a test of the democratic transition that followed Yahya Jammeh’s 22-year rule.

President Adama Barrow is seeking a third term, after first being elected in 2016. His critics say he has not fixed Gambia’s energy and water crisis, high cost of living, and irregular migration – or implemented security and governance reforms. Last month, police used tear gas to disperse a protest against power cuts.

Among nine candidates, Barrow’s main challengers are former ally Ousainou Darboe and former Kanifing mayor Talib Bensouda. Darboe has pledged to serve one term and reintroduce the 2020 draft constitution, aimed at curbing executive power. Bensouda is running on a platform of job creation and boosting local agriculture and industry.

Barrow’s campaign, meanwhile, has promised continuity: development in infrastructure, electricity, water, and agriculture, as well as constitutional reform.

Marr Nyang, executive director of Gambia Participates, said a divided opposition could help Barrow to win and that undecided voters may determine the outcome.

Meanwhile, political analyst Biran Gai warned political intimidation and declining confidence in electoral institutions could threaten the country’s stability.

Candidates have struggled to convince voters that promises will translate into change. Many voters have expressed frustration at politicians’ unmet promises and economic hardship.

“All they do is promise, and after the election you don’t hear from them again,” said Isatou Ceesay. “We are tired of their endless promises.”

Vegetable seller Fatoumatta Jawara told *The Continent* rising prices made it difficult to support her family. “We need a president who will improve our lives for the better,” she said. ■

FOOTBALL



PHOTO: NICOLAS REMENE/AFP

Bussin': *Senegal's national football side greet supporters during a parade in Dakar on 20 January.*

Senegal wins again, kinda sorta

YUSUF OMOTAYO

SENEGAL are the African football champions again – this time thanks to the Court of Arbitration for Sport. On Wednesday, the court overturned an earlier Confederation of African Football (CAF) decision to strip Senegal of their 2025 African Cup of Nations title.

The dispute began when some of the Senegalese players walked off in protest after Morocco was awarded a penalty in the final. They returned, Morocco missed the penalty, and Senegal scored a late winner. Morocco argued the walk-off amounted to abandoning the match – and CAF agreed.

But the court has now ruled referee Jean-Jacques Ndala alone had the authority to stop or restart play, making his decision final. Ndala had continued the match, so Senegal's win was valid, the ruling said.

CAF has agreed to formally reinstate Senegal as the winners, but Morocco is still playing off the pitch, saying it will "pursue all available legal avenues to challenge the decision". ■

CLIMATE

All COPs are bastards, but this one takes the cake

The big event is over, but Africa is still left footing the bill for the environmental havoc wrought by industrial nations.

ABIODUN JAMIU

THE LONGEST session in history of the United Nations climate-change conference (COP31) ended on Sunday with no concrete agreement on financing, leaving Africa to bear the brunt of a crisis to which it has contributed little.

Despite running two days over schedule, the conference concluded with a draft that was not adopted, leaving discussions to resume next year at COP32 in Ethiopia.

The initial Antalya draft proposed an annual adaptation-finance target of $120-billion by 2035. By the second and third drafts, the figure had been removed, despite objections from African negotiators.

Although the text reaffirmed the goal to triple funding, there is no concrete figure for the pledged funds. Many African countries are dealing with the effects of ongoing El Niño-influenced weather patterns – which are themselves escalated by global warming.

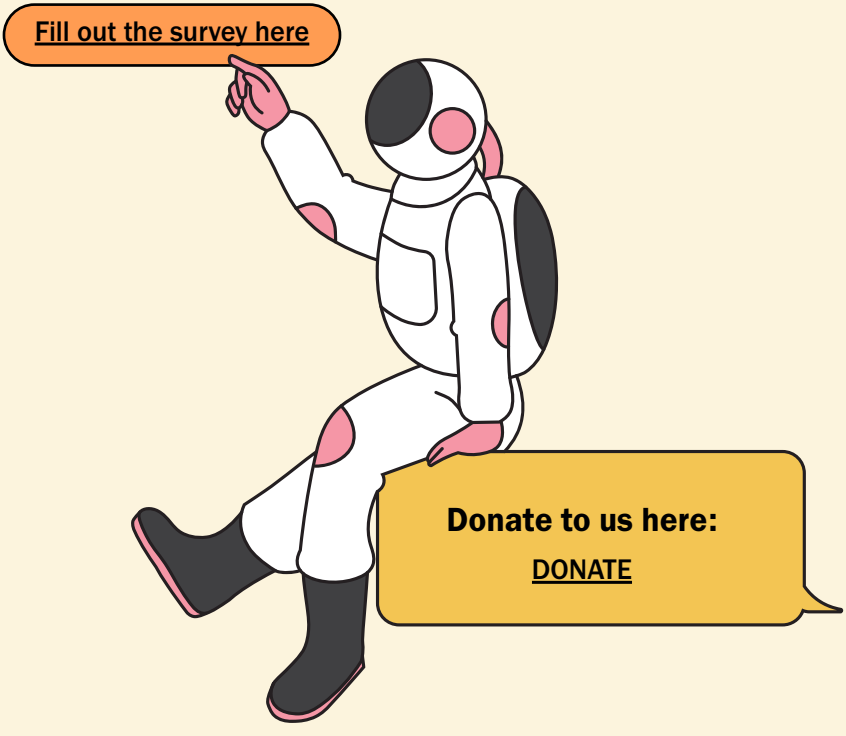
The failure to come to an agreement is a setback for the continent, said climate activist Azeez Salawu. He argues it threatens the lives of millions of people whose livelihoods are increasingly affected by climate-related disasters.

Africa contributes less than 4% of the greenhouse-gas emissions that drive rising temperatures globally. But the continent is among the most vulnerable to climate impacts, from deadly landslides to floods and severe droughts. This leads to food insecurity, conflict, and displacement.

Many African countries are dealing with the effects of ongoing El Niño-influenced weather patterns.

Climate expert Chizoba Nzeakor said Africa has shown “great ambition” in renewable-energy projects and climate-smart agriculture, as well as in restoring ecosystems. “But if there is no funding to implement these ambitions, then they can easily turn into a paperwork exercise,” she told *The Continent*. ■

The Big Annual Survey™



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FEATURE

Private healthcare, persistent problems

International development money poured into an investment firm targeting private African hospitals, promising better healthcare for patients and profits for the investors. But things haven't gone so well.

SOITA KHATONDI WEPUKHULU

WHEN his wife, Sheena, became critically ill, Emmanuel Okurut arranged for an ambulance to take her to the International Hospital Kampala. He knew the bill would be high. It is one of Uganda's top private hospitals. The nearest public hospital had no beds.

After 24 hours at the hospital, Sheena's health insurance cover of 13-million Ugandan shillings ($3,500) had been exhausted. Unable to move her to a cheaper hospital, Okurut sold family property and sought small loans from friends and family.

Okurut, a customs clearance officer earning about $270 a month, did all he could to save his wife. But Sheena died in March, aged just 41.

He said the hospital refused to release Sheena's body until the family settled half the outstanding balance.

The hospital denied imposing that condition. His wife was eventually buried, but the hospital continues to demand payment.

Two weeks in intensive care came to 108-million shillings ($25,000). "I have sold everything," Okurut told *The Continent*. "I have taken a work loan of more than a year's pay."

The International Hospital Kampala is one of many African health facilities backed by the Netherlands-based Investment Fund for Health in Africa.

The fund, founded by Dutch entrepreneurs Onno Schellekens and Max Coppoolse, invested in private hospitals, insurance companies, and pharmaceutical distribution networks, which they believed would improve healthcare infrastructure across the continent.

In total, the fund raised $200-million from the World Bank, European Investment Bank, African Development Bank, Dutch development bank FMO, and a government-backed Dutch investment programme, among others.

Yet, investor returns appear limited. In 2015, Dutch fund Achmea invested €8.7-million (about $9.5-million) in the fund. By 2024, it had lost more than half its value.

Data from another investor, the Social

Investor Foundation for Africa, indicates annual returns have been almost zero.

The fund itself admitted that "investment has not been very successful financially", blaming macroeconomics, exchange-rate fluctuations, and Covid.

Its partners have also concluded that this investment approach, characterised by short-term horizons and a focus on financial returns, does not align well with their objectives.

"We actually want to be involved for the long term," fund partner Eline Blaauboer told *The Continent*.



Aid and abetting: *An international investment fund meant to support healthcare across Africa has been haemorrhaging money and goodwill.*

Under pressure

Meanwhile, staff allege they were pressured to generate revenue through "unnecessary" medical tests or referrals.

"We have to encourage patients to undergo tests just to meet the monthly target," said a midwife employed at a C-Care clinic in Uganda.

She also alleged that on one occasion 30,000 shillings was deducted from her salary after a patient was discharged without settling the uninsured portion of their treatment.

A former intensive-care physician at the International Hospital Kampala told *The Continent* that hospital management offered him financial incentives tied to in-patient admissions, which he refused. "My job is to treat patients," he told management.

C-Care said it categorically refutes allegations that it deducts employees' salaries to recover outstanding patient bills; requires medical professionals to recommend investigations to meet commercial targets; or offers financial incentives for patient referrals.

Staff have also raised concerns about working conditions at Nakasero Hospital. Former nurse Ronald Okello says he now has chronic back pain after suffering a spinal injury at work.

Another former employee, Margaret Nakibuuka, alleges she was dismissed while heavily pregnant and denied access to a gynaecologist unless she signed her termination letter, which she eventually did while experiencing contractions.

The hospital said both Okello and Nakibuuka's employment ended during a "staff rationalisation exercise" unrelated to health or pregnancy.

The fund has categorically denied all allegations, saying it condemns using targets and it would not support any policy requiring staff members to cover patients' unpaid hospital bills. ■

This story was reported in partnership with *Finance Uncovered*.

INVESTIGATION

How Russian recruitment pitches ran as news in African media

With its war dragging on, Russia is hiring people from across the world. The men die on the frontline. The women go to drone factories. *The Continent* has tracked the media campaign helping recruit Africans to at least 100 outlets, where its work often masquerades as independent journalism.



Allure: *Newly recruited young women attend a welcome session at Alabuga Start.* PHOTO: ALABUGA START

ZECHARIAS ZELALEM

SINCE 2023, more than 100 media organisations have published articles promoting Alabuga Start, a Russian recruitment programme that lured young women to work in factories assembling drones for the war against Ukraine. Former recruits say they were misled about the jobs and felt trapped after arriving in Russia.

An investigation by *The Continent* found media outlets across the world published promotional material, passed off as independent journalism, helping to promote the recruitment drive.

We analysed 276 articles published in 40 countries, at least 21 of which were African. More than 200 stories drew on at least 25 templates written in 10 languages, including English and French, for African audiences.

Most appeared in 2024 and 2025, although the campaign appears to be ongoing – the latest promotional articles were published in October 2026.

Alabuga Start targets women aged 18 to 22, particularly from Africa, Latin America, and former Soviet countries, to work in Russia's Tatarstan region.

According to the Institute for Science and International Security, the programme has been used to address labour shortages since Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

Recruits were put to work assembling Iranian-designed Shahed drones. *The Wall Street Journal* later estimated that about 1,000 young women, mostly from East Africa, had been recruited.

The focus on African women was deliberate. Internal company emails obtained by an anonymous hacking group in 2024 and examined in a *Reuters* investigation showed recruiters discussing their preference for young African women. They believed African men would be "too aggressive" and African women easier to control.

The programme's leaders have since been sanctioned by the United Kingdom for migrant exploitation and supporting Russia's war in Ukraine. Yet recruitment efforts have continued. Last year, one of the leaders, Konstantin Trifonov, visited Ethiopia to sign an agreement with the government.

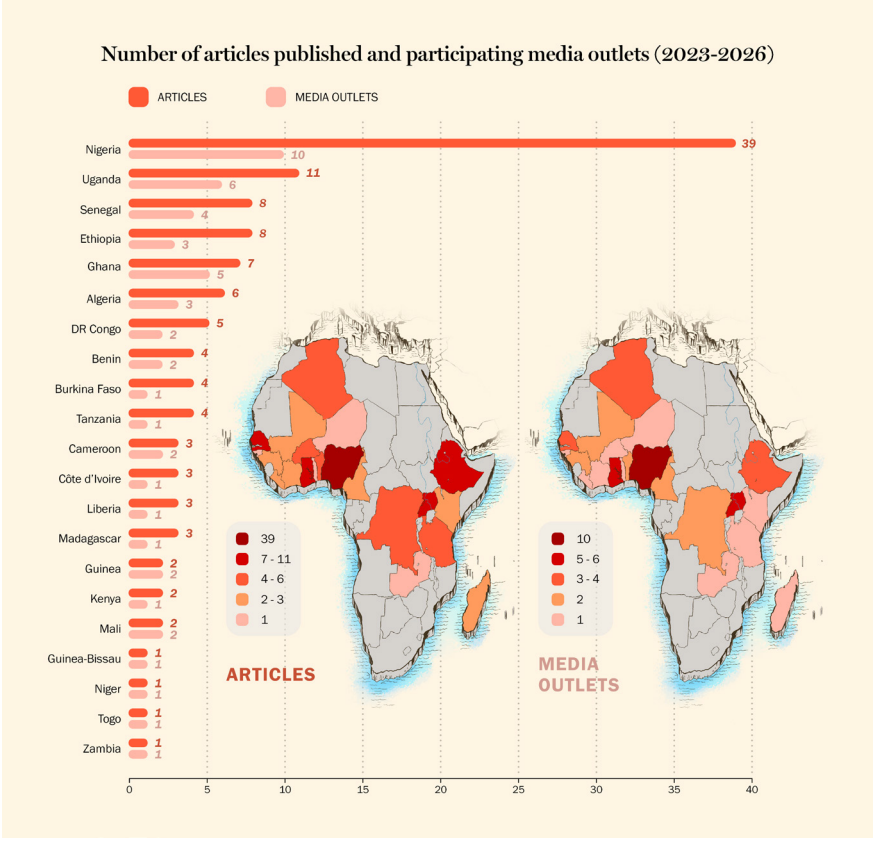
Repeatedly targeted

Former recruits have told journalists they were hired under false pretences. The factory where they were sent has repeatedly been targeted by Ukrainian airstrikes.

The articles we analysed didn't flag these risks or provide context of working conditions in Russia. Instead, they highlighted high salaries, favourable working conditions – apparently including furnished apartments – and the chance to build a life abroad.

Many stories included photographs of smiling recruits in uniforms or playing sports. One described the starting salary of $580 as "more than enticing", even adding that it was "easy to find love" at Alabuga. "There's a good chance to find a wealthy husband among the single top managers and settle down with him."

Sixty percent of the stories *The*



INFOGRAPHIC: YEMSRACH YETNEBERK

Continent analysed included a link to Alabuga Start's official recruitment channel on Telegram. More than 90% of the stories presented the material as original reporting, without disclosing its source. The remaining stories were labelled as "featured content" or "announcements".

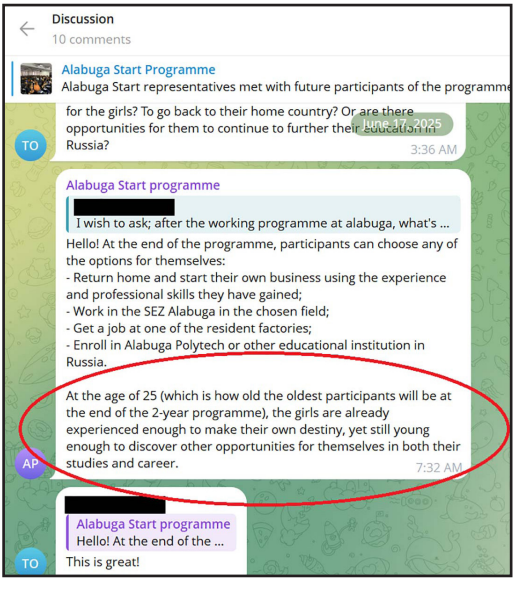
The top publishers were Nigerian media outlets, including The *Nigerian Tribune*, *The Independent*, and *This Day* newspapers. Uganda and Ethiopia were second and third.

One story was published at least 30 times, mostly by African outlets. It first appeared on 31 May 2024, across three sites with similar names: *Journal de Tchad*, *Journal de Mali*, and *Journal de Brazza*. Other outlets later republished the article, sometimes changing the headline or rearranging paragraphs while leaving the core text intact.

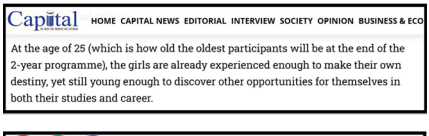
One version described Alabuga Start as "now very popular among young women worldwide".

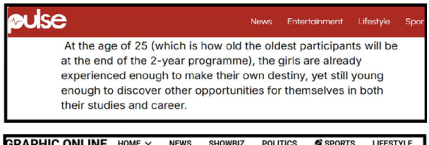
Another article featuring an Ethiopian recruit appeared 17 times across 14 African media platforms, with some publishing it more than once in English and French. None of the publications – including *Burkina 24*, *Capital* newspaper, *Daily Post Nigeria*, the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (*KBC*), Ghana's *Daily Graphic*, *Liberian Observer* and *Pulse Uganda* – credited an author.

Our investigation found this article was almost certainly written by Alabuga Start's staff. We traced a 49-word passage in the article to the programme's official Telegram channel, where it first appeared on 17 June 2025. That same passage was published verbatim by the news outlets a week later. It remained online at *Capital*, *KBC*, *Pulse Uganda*, and Ghana's *Daily Graphic*. Editors at these media outlets



Copypasta: *The exact paragraph posted on Alabuga Start's Telegram channel (left) appeared in numerous media outlets one week later (below).*









did not respond to questions.

Other evidence points to Alabuga Start's direct role in writing the articles. *Info Cañuelas*, a small Argentine news site, published two articles under the byline of Alabuga Start itself. Those stories then appeared across dozens of outlets, including *Zambian Eye*, *Sene News*, and *Algerie 360*, without attribution.

In yet another article, editors were instructed to present an interview with a Ugandan recruit as an exclusive by inserting their outlet's name into the copy. *Burkina 24* appears to have missed the instruction. Its published story still contained the prompt to insert "Media Name."

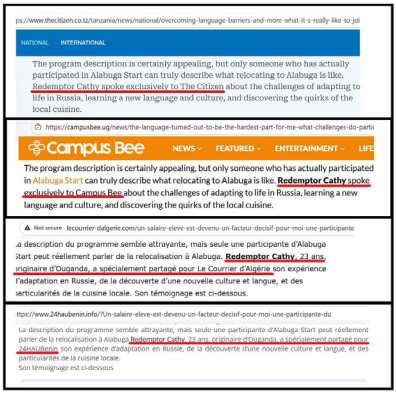
We also identified seven promotional articles across *Pulse*'s Ugandan, Ivorian, Ghanaian, and Senegalese affiliates, which are owned by Swiss media firm Ringier. Ringier did not respond to our questions on the origin of the articles.

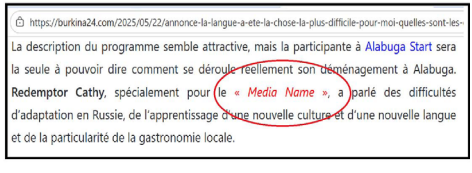
One outlet admitted to receiving payment to carry the articles. *The Continent* contacted Abidjan-based Weblogy Corporation, which owns several African news sites that published the articles. A company representative said it received 200,000 Central African francs (about $335) for one article.

A company representative said it received 200,000 Central African francs (about $335) for one article.

He declined to answer whether the company had independently reviewed the material or simply published it. We could not establish whether other outlets were paid or knowingly participated in a wider campaign.

Salem Solomon, an editor and journalist who has covered Alabuga Start for *Voice Of America*, said running the material without scrutiny raises





Some media, such as Tanzania's The Citizen, *plugged the media name gap in the script, but* Burkina 24 *appeared to forget to insert its name. They deleted the prompt after questions from The Continent*

questions about editorial responsibility.

"A newsroom's responsibility is not to simply publish someone's story. It is to establish whether publishing that story, in that particular context, serves the public interest," she told *The Continent*.

Solomon argues that presenting recruitment material as independent journalism, while omitting information that could warn young women about the risks, compromises that responsibility.

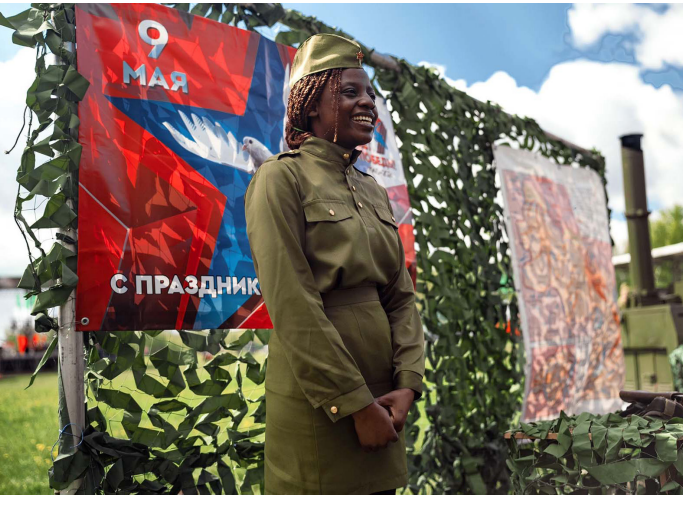
"The campaign is a potential case of editorial laundering of a recruitment campaign," she added.

The programme has been previously implicated in using social-media influencers to push the glowing narratives. South African influencer Cyan Boujee apologised in August 2025 for travelling to Russia to promote the programme. TikTok later banned accounts belonging to influencers who promoted it.

But the promotional articles remain on news websites in our dataset, many of which are trusted digital and even legacy publications.

After reviewing *The Continent*'s findings, Nigerian anti-trafficking activist Adeyinka Titilayo said the publications had abused the public's trust. "We travel to schools and homes across Nigeria to raise awareness about the dangers of human trafficking, but that work is being undone by these outlets. They must be held to account."

The findings echo an earlier investigation by *The Continent*, based on leaked files from former Wagner Group operatives, which found Russian government narratives had been placed in African media outlets, sometimes in exchange for payments and without scrutiny. At least a dozen outlets named in those files later published Alabuga Start promotional material. ■



Think twice: *Alabuga Start's recruitment programme has been a serious source of concern for activists involved in monitoring and fighting human-trafficking in Africa.*

PHOTO: ALABUGA.RU

FEATURE

ZAMBIA

Slower inflation doesn't mean faster relief

Prices are not rising as fast as they were before, but what solace does that bring if people couldn't afford them to begin with?

BARNABAS ZULU IN LUSAKA

AT NEW Soweto Market in Lusaka, Phillip Banda's customers now buy less food than they used to. Food prices are unattainable and families struggle to put meals on the table.

Even as a trader, Banda struggles to feed his family.

"The cost of living has kept rising. The price of mealie meal is so high. At least in 2021, it was cheaper, but now it is high," he said.

Banda's experience reflects a wider problem in Zambia. Although inflation has fallen, many households are still struggling to afford basic necessities.

Daniel Mutale, executive director of the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection, which tracks the cost of living, said lower inflation does not necessarily mean families can afford basic foods.

"Inflation tells us how fast prices are rising. It does not tell us whether a family could afford them in the first place," he said.

Zambia's inflation rate has fallen from nearly 15% in 2024 to 6.3% in 2026. Nevertheless, the cost of feeding a family remains high.



Fuel circle: *Zambians buy charcoal at a busy market in Lusaka.* PHOTO: TSVANGIRAYI MUKWAZHI/AP

According to the centre, the monthly cost of basic food and other necessities for a family of five in Lusaka rose by 854 kwacha ($41) in October alone, reaching 12,254 kwacha.

Banda said some families had cut their meals to twice a day and others were skipping dinner to make their food last longer.

Mealie meal, a staple food that low-income households have traditionally relied on, shows how difficult things remain. A 25kg bag cost 286 kwacha in December 2023 before falling to 236 kwacha in October 2026.

Even at the lower price, many families are struggling to afford it.

Other food prices have continued to rise. Chicken increased from about 147 kwacha in July 2025 to 171 kwacha in April 2026.

Jane Phiri, who has run a restaurant in Lusaka since 2015, said customers were buying less, forcing her to purchase smaller portions, commonly sold as half chickens. At home, she has switched to cheaper fish.

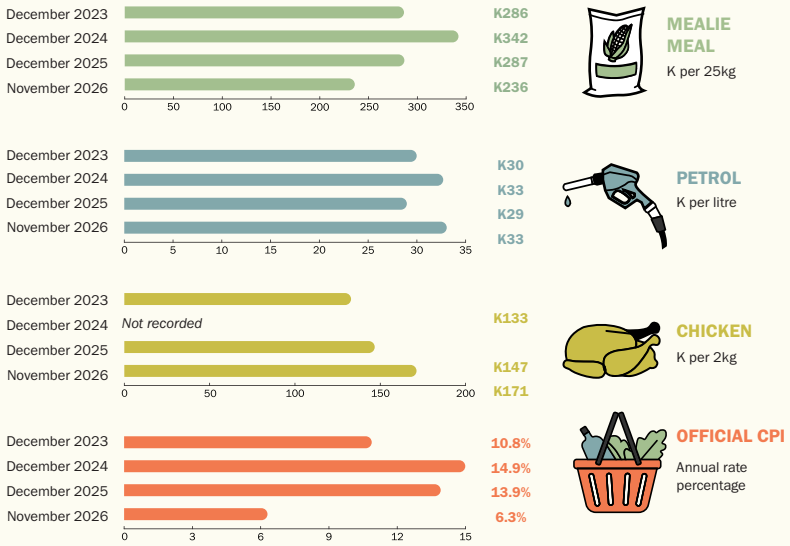
Transport is another burden. Petrol has risen from about 30 kwacha a litre in November 2023 to 33 kwacha in November 2026, pushing up travel costs.

Moses Mambwe, who works at a mobile-money centre in Lusaka, said his salary remained unchanged, despite rising bus fares. He spent less than 100 kwacha on daily transport in 2023, which has risen to more than 150 kwacha today.

To save money, Mambwe now walks part of the journey before sharing taxis with other passengers, sometimes in overloaded vehicles.

"We hoped for a reduction, but the price keeps going up," he said. ■

Zambia: Cost of living comparison 2023-2026



COMOROS

Island life isn't such a breeze

Without much land for farming, Comoros must import most of its food, leaving the archipelagic nation at the mercy of global price fluctuations.

FAÏZA SOULÉ YOUSSOUF IN MORONI

LAST Monday, Farouata Mohamed shopped at Volo Volo, the largest market in Comoros. Ordinarily, she would have bought mabawa (chicken wings), but they cost 1,488 Comorian francs ($3.30) a kilogram now, up from 1,350 francs last year.

So she went for tuna, haggling with fish vendors and moving between stalls, until she got a favourable deal. "Today, tuna is cheaper: it costs 1,250 francs per kilo," she tells *The Continent*.

The limited arable land available is used to grow cash crops for export, so the country imports most of its key staples – rice and chicken – which are susceptible to price fluctuations. When global prices, shipping costs, or local supply chains shift, domestic market prices react quickly.

Mohamed works as a cleaner, for which she is paid 60,000 francs a month. She combines the job with selling coconut rice cakes on the streets to make ends meet.

"Since the death of my husband two years ago, who was a driver, managing daily life has become even more complicated," she says.



PHOTO: OLYMPIA DE MAISMONT/AFP

Pain au tuna: *A vendor sells fish at Volo Volo market in Moroni, where food prices are rocketing.*

When Mohamed receives her salary, she buys a 25kg bag of rice, which lasts about a month. She and her children eat leftover lunch as dinner. "Otherwise, we eat bread soaked in ginger tea."

A kilo of rice cost 550 francs in 2023 but rose to 695 francs in 2024. The price remained the same in 2025 before falling slightly, to 650 francs.

The price of kerosene also eats into her budget. Although the official price is 350 francs a litre, it is sold for 500 francs when it becomes scarce – which is often.

"It's difficult to get hold of, so they deliver 20 litres to me for 10,000 francs," she says.

Moroni, the capital of Comoros, has at least 100,000 inhabitants, many of

whom lack access to clean water, owing to ageing infrastructure and high energy costs to desalinate water. Some people have cisterns and hire trucks for 65,000 francs per 12m³; others rely on water delivery services using jerrycans.

"Two years ago, my supplier delivered sixteen 20-litre containers of water per week. That cost me 4,000 francs a week," says Moroni resident Abdallah Said.

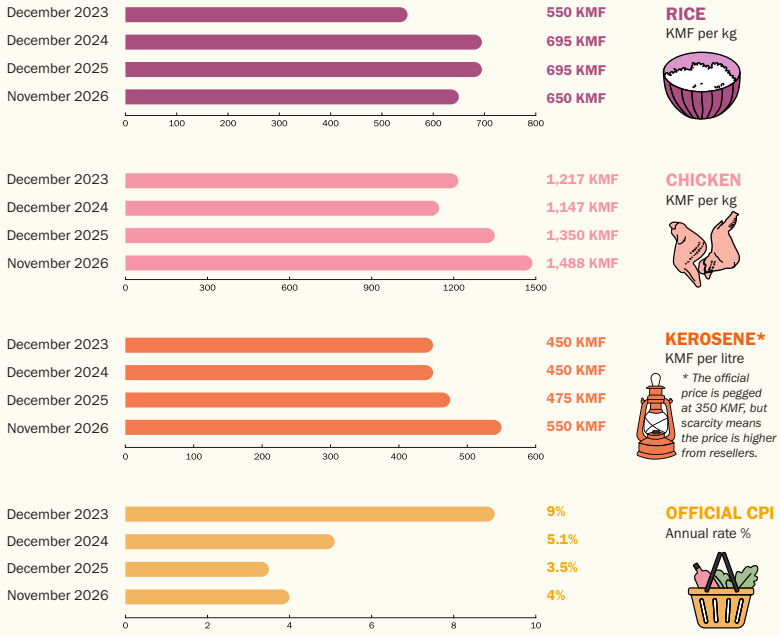
He then moved to another house that had a gutter for collecting rainwater, which eased the cost – although only temporarily.

Recent droughts have seen him return to buying water. "We have to rely on street vendors again, often without much success."

Comoros' currency is pegged to the euro owing to its historical relationship with France. This has prevented rapid currency devaluation, which most import-dependent countries face. Since 2023, its inflation rate has steadily fallen: from 9% in 2023 to 5.1% in 2024 and down to 3.5% in 2025.

Economist Mohamed Soilihi Fahar-eldine says the decrease in inflation doesn't necessarily translate into goods becoming cheaper. "In concrete terms, prices continue to rise, but at a slower pace than before." ■

Comoros: Cost of living comparison 2023-2026



NIGERIA

Unfair and unsquare: inflation sows grassroots division

In northern Nigeria, traditional savings circles based on trust are under pressure as members struggle to keep up with payments – and relationships turn sour.

ABDULAZIZ BAGWAI IN KANO

WHEN Hauwa Yusuf, a healthcare worker in Tsanyawa, Kano State, joined an Adashe club five years ago, she viewed it as a reliable way to manage large expenses that her salary couldn't cover upfront. In one case, she used the lump sum she received to purchase kitchen utensils for her two daughters when they got married.

Adashe is a traditional rotating savings system in northern Nigeria. Similar schemes exist in other African countries, called by different names. All of them rely on community trust to operate. Members contribute a fixed amount of money, usually monthly. One person then takes the pooled fund each month until everyone has received their share.

Yusuf's group has 20 members, mostly schoolteachers, healthcare workers, and local government employees. They each contribute 20,000 naira (about $15) a month. At the end of the month, one person in the group receives 400,000 naira.

But the worsening cost-of-living crisis in Nigeria means members of Yusuf's group have been defaulting on their contributions. When it was her turn to receive the lump sum, her payment was delayed.

Given the choice of waiting for the outstanding contributions or taking a reduced payout, Yusuf opted for the latter. For months, she didn't receive the rest of her money – until she reported it to the police.

Amina Abdullahi, a primary schoolteacher, had a similar experience. She received half of her payment when it was her turn, despite having contributed faithfully herself.

"The group leader apologised and assured me that I'd get my balance shortly," she said. "I eventually did, but I wish I got it all together in one payment."

Relationships on the line

Adashe is an informal savings system with no legal framework, which communities adapt to suit their needs. Some cycles can last for as long as three years, depending on how many people are involved.



PHOTO: OLYMPIA DE MAISMONT/AFP

Stalled economy: *Nigeria's fuel price increases have led to a sharp increase in the cost of living.*

Bilkisu Sani, the leader of one savings group, told *The Continent* people who defaulted on their payment always blamed the high cost of living.

"The rising prices of goods, transport, and medicines have consumed their salaries," she said, adding that she has considered disbanding the group. She really doesn't "want it to reach a point where our personal relationships will break".

After President Bola Tinubu removed the fuel subsidy and floated the naira in 2023, headline inflation rose to nearly 29%. It has since dropped, to 14% in October 2026. But the cost of food and fuel remains high, leaving people with little disposable income.

Financial analyst Ibrahim Musa agreed that challenges facing informal saving systems are linked to macroeconomic conditions.

"Even when headline rates decline, the overall price level remains elevated," he said. "A teacher or healthcare worker finds that the same salary buys far less."

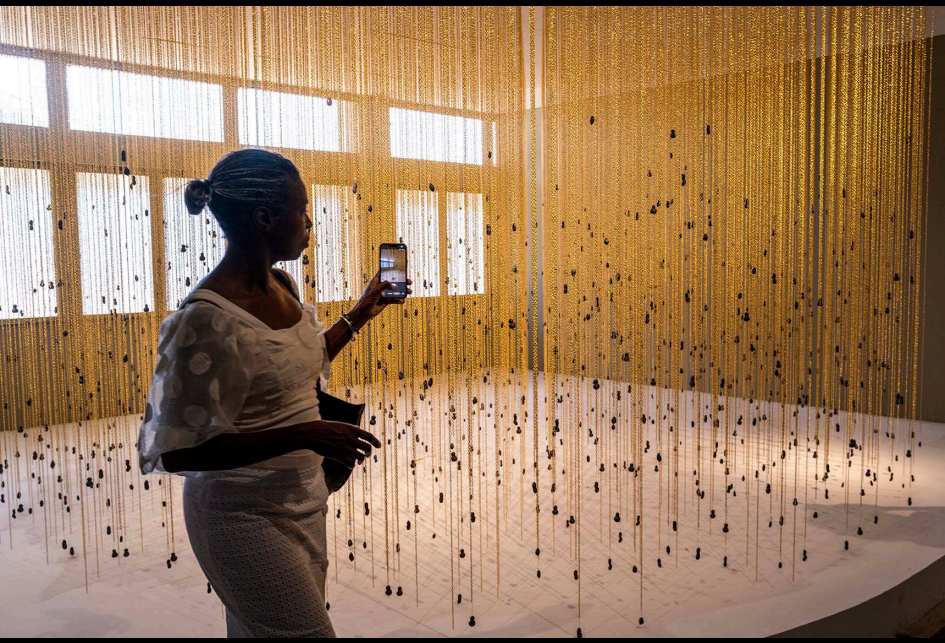
Semi-discretionary bills, such as Adashe contributions, are often the first to be cut back in that context.

Musa encouraged Adashe groups to partner with formal co-operative societies that can offer dispute-resolution support while preserving flexibility. These societies can also improve financial literacy and offer tips for budgeting in an inflationary environment. ■

PHOTO ESSAY

Reframing in justice

PHOTOS: SYLVAIN CHERKAOUI



DAKAR'S former Palais de Justice in Cap Manuel was once a place of judgment and justice that then had to confront its own fragility. The grand courthouse, opened in 1958, witnessed some of Senegal's most consequential legal and political proceedings. But it was forced to close in 1992, for fear the building would collapse from years of dilapidation.

The courthouse lay abandoned for almost a quarter of a century, before it found new life in 2016 as an exhibition space for the Dakar Biennale. It is a fitting home for this year's 16th edition of the biennale, also known as Dak'Art.

The show, curated by Morad Montazami, runs until 19 December with the theme "(Anti)fragility: Arts of Repair and Rebound Strategies". The works on display focus on resilience, healing and

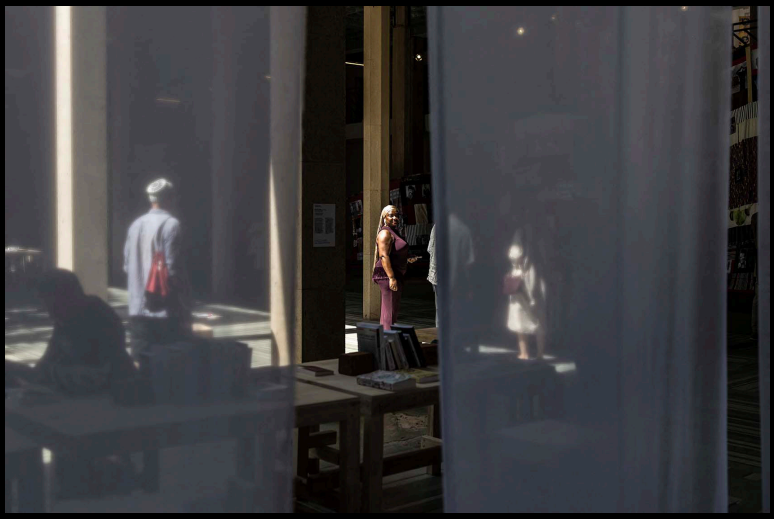
harnessing vulnerability as a creative strength.

The first edition of the biennale in 1990 focused on literature, before shifting to visual arts two years later.

A sprawling fringe circuit is one of its main attractions: this year, about 450 performances, exhibitions, and open studio events will take place across Dakar and other Senegalese cities. ■



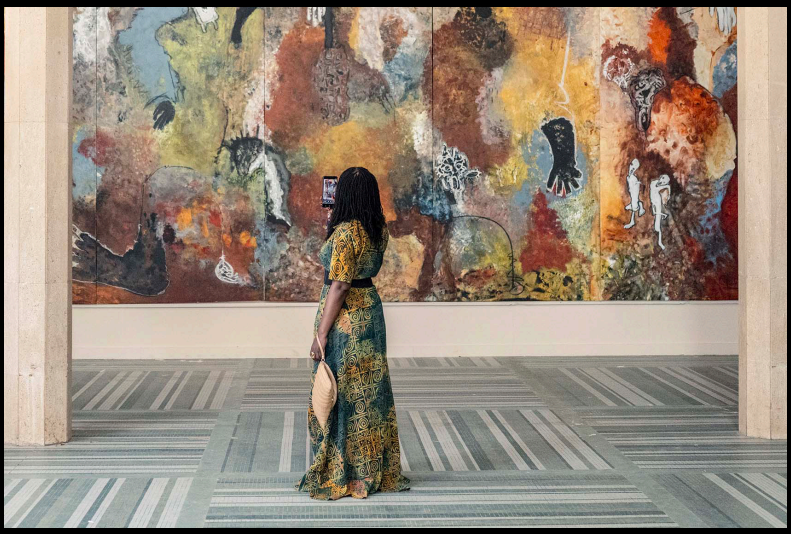














DATA

Just not good enough

THIS past Wednesday, 25 November, marked the start of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence campaign. It's an important time to spotlight the challenges women face every day.

As we detailed in Issue 227, more than one in four Africans (28%) say women and girls are frequently subjected to sexual harassment.

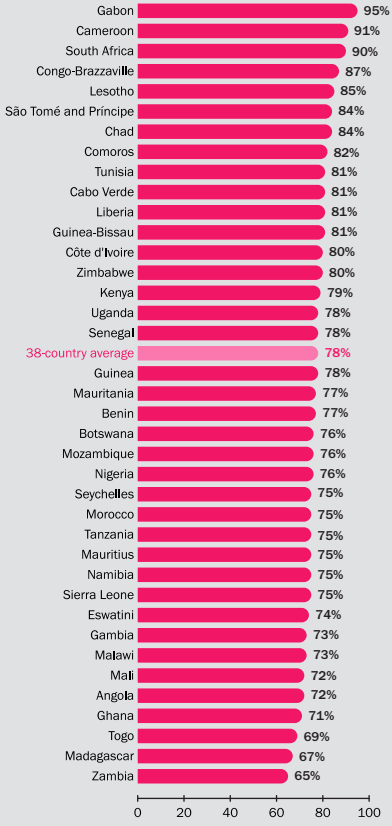
We also asked people whether the police and courts in their country are doing enough to protect women and girls from discrimination and harassment in public places such as schools and workplaces.

Their responses are telling. On average, across 38 countries half (50%) of Africans say authorities need to do "much more". Another 28% say they must do "somewhat more". Only 19% think they are doing enough.

At least nine in 10 respondents find official efforts lacking in Gabon (95%), Cameroon (91%), and South Africa (90%). Even in countries where dissatisfaction is lowest, a clear majority share this view, including Togo (69%), Madagascar (67%) and Zambia (65%).

Remarkably, men are about as likely as women to demand more from law enforcement (77% vs 79%). ■

Police and courts need to do more to protect women and girls from harassment | 38 African countries | 2024/2025



AFRO BAROMETER Let the people have a say

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



FILM REVIEW

BY WILFRED OKICHE



FILM STILLS: *BIRDIE*

Rotting in the sun

There's masculinity. There's whiteness. There's apartheid. And then there's what happens when you combine all three.

THERE is something rotting at the core of *The Smell of Apples*, the new provocation co-written and directed by acclaimed South African filmmaker John Trengove. And it isn't just the titular fruits on the dining table of a posh suburban home.

The story, adapted from the Mark Behr's 1993 debut novel (first published in Afrikaans as *Die Reuk van Appels*), details the Afrikaner psyche during apartheid South Africa, seen through the eyes of 11-year-old Marnus.

Trengove narrows the time period to one blistering summer week in 1974 when Marnus (Dawian van der Westhuizen), the son of a South African army general, begins to acknowledge the legacy of violence and oppression that supports his privileged upbringing.

"For me, as a white South African, this is something I wanted to get into, this idea of whiteness. And what it takes for one community to dominate another," Trengove tells *The Continent* from Cape Town. "You have to adopt a naivety or ignorance about the atrocities that are happening on your doorstep and in your name to perpetuate a system like apartheid."

This personal connection to the material was crucial. Like his characters, Trengove attended an all-white school and received a Christian nationalist education.

The film delves into the psyches of the men who designed such a stark monument to inequality and teases out the psychological and physical cost of keeping apartheid going.

"We think of apartheid as something that happened to Black people and that is what it was. But the book was one of the first, post-apartheid, that described the particular ways in which white men were fucked up," Trengove says.

"There is a generation of white men that came up after democracy that did not have a way of speaking about what

was done to them in the military, in school, or at home. So, the book landed with tremendous impact."

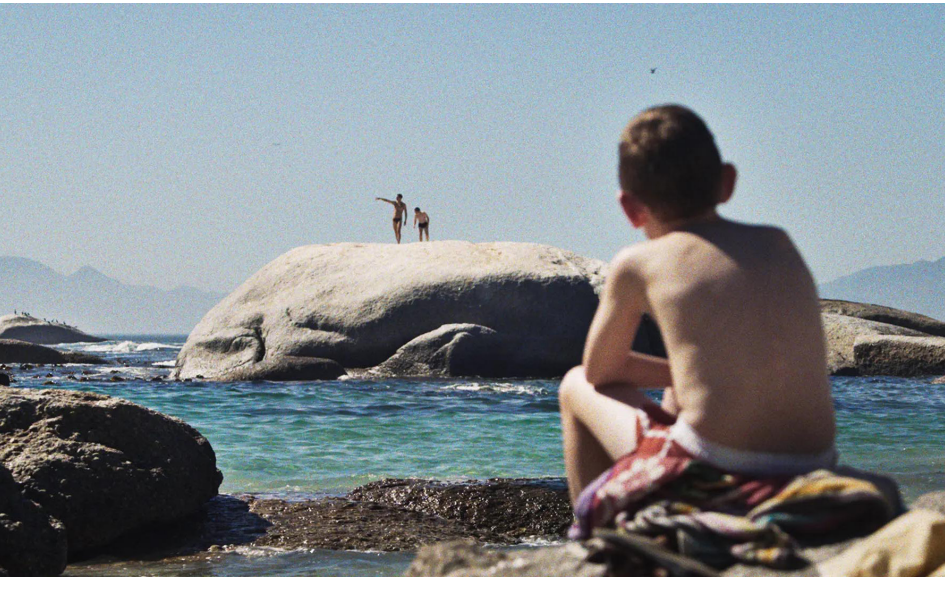
The uncertain realities of the film business meant Trengove ended up making his magnum opus *Inxeba (The Wound)* before *The Smell of Apples.* Active development began in about 2018 but was delayed by Covid. Production was fast-tracked over the past two years, mostly because they had found the perfect young actor to play Marnus in van der Westhuizen.

"When you meet a special kid like that, the clock is ticking because they grow so fast," Trengove says.

The Smell of Apples builds on themes of masculinity and its performance that Trengove has tackled in his earlier work. But the director doesn't see himself as a bard of masculinity and its toxicities. He says if there is a thread running through his work, it's an interest in peeking into closed communities that operate with very specific organising rules.

Trengove understands his film will land in a turbulent world that is constantly renegotiating its relationship with history and the sins of the fathers. He feels the shame of his cultural history, but understands the journey to resolving the tensions is as personal as it is collective.

"I am not here to tell people they are guilty," he says. "I am here to speak from a very complicated cultural heritage and to say that this is what we did to our kids." ■



The Quiz

1. Which country, as of this week's CAS ruling, won this year's Afcon?
2. Which two countries use the kwacha as a currency?
3. What is the demonym for people from the Comoros?
4. Johannesburg is South Africa's capital. True or false?
5. Who is Nigeria's president?
6. In which country is the Maluti mountain range (pictured)?
7. Which country's men's national football team is known as the Harambee Stars?
8. Name the African country whose official languages are Spanish, French and Portuguese.
9. Cleopatra was queen of which present-day country?
10. Who is the Malian musician who released *Africa* in 1995?



HOW DID I DO?

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

0-3

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

4-7

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

8-10

"I had never considered visiting the mountain kingdom – consider my interest peaked."

PHOTO: PAUL BOTES/THE CONTINENT

Big Pic

Sew on, sew forth: Odia Mitamba, 23, poses at Kituku market wearing a wedding dress she made while training in sewing and design, during a fashion parade through the streets of Goma in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

PHOTO: JOSPIN MWISHA/AFP



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