

with Mail & Guardian

The Continent

**Saving the natural world
- at Africa's expense**



Inside:

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IT'S NEARLY THE END OF THE YEAR!

This is the last regularly-scheduled edition of *The Continent* for 2022. But don't worry, we are not going to leave you all on your own just yet. Don't miss next week's Africans of the Year edition in which we celebrate the very best of this wonderful continent.

Thanks for sticking with us this year. To help us keep doing this, please consider filling out our [end-of-year survey](#). You can also [donate](#) and get your friends and family to subscribe.



Cover: A million plant and animal species will likely go extinct in the next few decades. Rich countries have wiped out their own stocks of life in the pursuit of making (some) people rich. Their lobbyists and NGOs have proposed a solution – turn 30% of the world's surface into protected areas. As it stands, these gated zones won't be fairly distributed. Instead, large chunks of Africa and South America will be locked away for wealthy tourists and the 'greater benefit' of humanity. Locals, who have kept this extraordinary mix of life alive, will be relocated. As ever, those who didn't do the damage will pay the price. So (some) African countries are saying no. (p12)



EMPIRE

British colonialism killed 50-million Indians in 40 years

The British colonial government's policies in India increased the death rate from 37 in 1,000 to 44 in 1,000, causing at least an extra 50-million deaths between 1880 and 1920, according to new research in the journal *World Development*. The policies increased poverty among Indians as Britain stripped away their wealth to grow itself and white colonies like Australia. Britain, now among the world's richest countries, has yet to reckon with its colonial past, which its political and media class still speak about in glowing terms.

QATAR

'Part of life': World Cup boss waves off migrant deaths

This week, Qatar and Fifa confirmed that another migrant worker had died at a location connected to the World Cup tournament – a Filipino national at the resort hosting the Saudi Arabian team. In November, a Qatari official said that between 400 and 500 workers died while working on projects related to the tournament. The unofficial number is much higher. Asked about the latest death, Nasser al-Khater, the chief executive of Qatar's World Cup organising body said: "Death is a natural part of life – whether it is at work or in your sleep."

ENERGY**Renewables boom creating fossil fools**

The world will add as much renewable energy in the next five years as it did in the past 20 years, according to the International Energy Agency. The

agency says the energy crisis created by Russia's invasion of Ukraine pushed countries to dramatically cut their reliance on fossil fuel imports. This shift does not bode well for several African countries that are going ahead with or cutting new deals for oil and gas projects, even as energy consumption moves in the opposite direction.



Photo: International Energy Agency

SÃO TOMÉ & PRÍNCIPE**Key witnesses to failed coup killed**

The government of São Tomé and Príncipe confirmed on Wednesday that a coup had been attempted in the country on 24 November. Prime Minister Patrice Trovoada told the Portuguese news agency *Lusa*: “We had, from our point of view, an attempted coup.” He said there were “extrajudicial killings” of witnesses to the coup. A report will be released later this month, with the assistance of Portugal, the former colonial power in the islands.

NIGERIA**No cash, please, you're Nigerian**

From now on, Nigerian ATMs will disburse no more than 20,000 naira (\$45) per customer per day, following a directive from the central bank. This is supposedly designed to prevent counterfeiting and make it harder to pay ransoms to kidnappers. The restrictions come a week ahead of the introduction of new banknotes that are meant to be harder to forge. Nigerians will have until the end of January to swap out their old notes for the new ones.

Photo: African
Development Bank



ECONOMY

AFDB raises billions in funding bonanza

The African Development Bank has raised \$8.9-billion for its African Development Fund in its latest financing cycle – the biggest sum in the fund’s 50-year history. According to the bank, money will be used to help African countries tackle development and climate-related challenges, such as connecting 20-million people to electricity and improving sanitation for 32-million people. Algeria and Morocco contributed to the Fund for the first time this year, joining Angola, Egypt, and South Africa on the list of contributing African countries.

CAMEROON

Trash-talking Eto’o still down to frown

Samuel Eto’o, the president of the Cameroonian Football Federation, has issued a public apology after a video of him attacking a YouTuber went viral on social media. “I pledge to continue to resist the relentless provocation and daily harassment of some Algerian supporters,” Eto’o said. Cameroon beat Algeria earlier this year to qualify for the men’s World Cup. Eto’o added: “I wish that they find peace and overcome the disappointment of painful defeat, now behind us.”

SOMALIA

When it doesn’t rain, it doesn’t pour

The end of Somalia’s drought-induced humanitarian crisis “is nowhere in sight” warned Adam Abdelmoula, the United Nations human rights coordinator for the country. Nearly half of the country’s 7.8-million population have been affected by the ongoing drought. Since January, nearly 1.3-million people have been displaced and the number living in famine or pre-famine conditions increased five-fold, after the rainy season failed for the fifth time in a row. The UN expects 6.7-million Somalis to face high levels of food security in the coming year.

SENEGAL

Manhunt for violent misogynist MPs

Senegalese authorities are searching for two members of Parliament in connection with an assault on a fellow lawmaker last week. During a budget vote in the country's national assembly, Amy Niang, who is pregnant, was slapped by Massata Samb, and then kicked in the stomach by Mamadou Niang. Samb and Niang have since fled and remain on the run. "They went into hiding as soon as they found out that a case had been triggered against them," a source told AFP.

CORRUPTION

Pocket change buys Glencore absolution

Commodities giant Glencore will pay \$180-million to the Democratic Republic of Congo. The payment will settle "all present and future claims arising from any alleged acts of corruption," the company said. The Anglo-Swiss company previously made payments totalling \$1.5-billion to the United States, Britain and Brazil to settle corruption claims. The payments are unlikely to hurt the company: its allegedly corrupt activities helped it to record a profit of \$18.9-billion in the first half of 2022.



Photo: HQNigerianArmy

NIGERIA

Army 'terminated 10,000 pregnancies'

A new *Reuters* investigation has revealed a "secret, systematic and illegal programme" in which the Nigerian Army terminated at least 10,000 pregnancies in the country's

northeast, often without seeking the consent of the pregnant women and girls, who had been kidnapped and raped by Islamist militants. Soldiers familiar with the programme told *Reuters* reporters the goal was to "destroy insurgent fighters before they could be born". Nigeria's army has dismissed the report as "fictitious" and motivated by "wickedness".

East Africa

M23 rebels 'arbitrarily execute' at least 131 civilians

**Meanwhile, peace talks
stalled because someone
forgot to pay per diems**

Mwangi Maina in Nairobi

At least 102 men, 17 women and 12 children, all civilians, were “arbitrarily executed” by the M23 rebel group in November, according to a United Nations investigation. The atrocity took place in Kishishe and Bambo villages in the Democratic Republic of Congo’s North Kivu Province “as part of reprisals against the civilian population”.

The rebel group denied the massacre, which comes against the backdrop of rising tensions between the DRC and Rwanda. The DRC accuses Rwanda of backing the M23 rebels – and the UN agrees. On Sunday, Congolese President Felix Tshisekedi accused his Rwandan counterpart Paul Kagame of being a

“warmonger” and “an enemy of peace”.

Tshisekedi’s comments came in response to a belligerent speech by Kagame in which he accused Tshisekedi of exploiting the crisis to postpone elections.

Eddy Mbona, a security analyst who has worked extensively on peacekeeping in central Africa, said that Kagame needs to “cool down”, and that the international community views Rwanda as the primary driver of the conflict. French and American diplomats have urged Rwanda to stop supporting M23, but the rhetoric from Kigali and Kinshasa is not helping.

“War cannot bring a solution,” said Mbona. “This is a sociopolitical problem. People need to rebuild confidence and trust between the Congolese and Rwandese people. The hatred and suspicion are fueling everything.”

Peace talks facilitated by former Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta were delayed on Monday after various armed groups – not including M23, who boycotted the talks – walked out because they had not received a promised \$50 per diem. A visibly angry Kenyatta blamed this on “poor planning”, and the talks were concluded without meaningful progress.

If the talks fail, Kenya has promised to “enforce peace” at the vanguard of a regional military intervention. Kenyan troops are already on the ground on the DRC in preparation for an escalation. ■

Mozambique

'Trial of the century' reaches dramatic conclusion

Former president's son sentenced to 12 years in prison

Luis Nhachote in Maputo

For seven months, Maputo's city court convened in a tent in the grounds of a prison on the outskirts of the capital. For this trial, the normal courtroom was not nearly big enough. In the dock were 19 men, some of the country's most powerful and politically connected figures, charged in connection with their alleged role in the "hidden debt scandal" – one of the biggest fraud cases in African history.

Under former president Armando Guebuza, the government secretly borrowed \$2-billion from international banks, circumventing the usual checks and balances. The money was intended to refurbish the country's fishing and military patrol boats, with the debt guaranteed by the state. Most of the money disappeared.

This fraud was knowingly facilitated by Credit Suisse, the Swiss bank, which has been fined by regulators for its criminality (notably, no Credit Suisse executives have faced criminal prosecution, despite the company admitting liability).

This week, the court reached its verdict. It took five days for Judge Efigénio Baptista to read out the 1,388 pages of findings. Twelve of the 19 were found guilty, including Armando Ndambi Guebuza, the eldest son of the former president.

Guebuza junior was found to have received \$33-million to "move influence" with his father, and was sentenced to 12 years in prison. He intends to appeal. There is no word yet on whether former president Guebuza will also be charged.

Current president Filipe Nyusi was minister of defence when the hidden debt scandal occurred. ■



Convicted: Armando Guebuza junior stands as the verdict against him is delivered. Photo: Alfredo Zuniga/AFP

Health

Zimbabwe, South Africa take global lead with HIV shot

New injection could drop new cases by a third in sub-Saharan Africa and save 75,000 lives a year, if it is rolled out rapidly, widely and cheaply enough

Laura López González

South Africa has approved the use of the HIV prevention shot, following a similar decision in Zimbabwe in October. The every-other-month injection uses a long-acting antiretroviral called cabotegravir to ward off HIV infection. In clinical trials, people who took it were about 80% less likely to contract HIV than those on the HIV prevention pill, commonly known by its brand name Truvada. The injection likely outperformed the pill largely because it's easier to take than daily medication, the World Health Organization said in July.

Small projects are expected to begin piloting the shot in public clinics and private pharmacies in Zimbabwe and South Africa in coming months. These are slated to offer the injection alongside other forms of HIV prevention, namely the pill and a new vaginal silicon ring laden with a slow-release antiretroviral dapivirine. Inserted at home, the monthly ring has been shown to reduce a woman's

risk of contracting HIV by between 27% and 50%. Pilots are also slated for Kenya, Lesotho and Uganda, pending approval.

If the injection is rapidly rolled out in sub-Saharan Africa, it could slash new HIV cases by nearly 30% in the next five decades, according to unpublished modelling presented at the International AIDS Conference this year. The study, which has not been peer-reviewed but has been submitted to *The Lancet*, reveals widespread access to the shot could save about 75,000 lives a year by 2070.

But it remains unclear if countries can afford it. In the United States, the injection officially sells for US\$22,000 per patient per year. In July, drugmaker ViiV Healthcare said it would grant licenses to allow at least three companies to produce affordable, generic versions for the world's poorest countries and sub-Saharan Africa.

Still, generic versions will only likely be available in three to five years. Until then, ViiV committed to a reduced price for these countries but has declined to make the final price tag public yet. ■

Environment

Trash fire: Africa's \$8-billion missed opportunity

African countries could be making \$8-billion a year by recycling garbage. Instead, poor waste management is contributing to 1.1-million premature deaths a year

Justina Asishana in Minna

Garbage trucks are few and far between in Nigeria's Niger state. Refuse often sits uncollected for days at designated sites, leading people to dump by roadsides, within markets and elsewhere.

At Kure Ultramodern market in the state capital, Minna, for instance, parking spaces have been colonised by rubbish overflowing from a skip that is rarely emptied. "We are tired of complaining, so now, we just look on," says Mohammed Dangana, whose stall faces the mess.

Waste is a problem that many urban Africans live with in similar resignation. Only about 11% of the waste generated in sub-Saharan Africa is disposed of in "properly designed and managed landfills," says a report published earlier this year by Professor Desta Mebratu and Dr Andriannah Mbandi, who lead a United Nations initiative on waste management in Africa.

Some 80% of municipal solid waste generated in African cities is recyclable

and could generate up to \$8-billion a year, according to a 2018 report by the UN's environmental agency.

Citizen initiatives recycle about 11% of the waste, the report by Mebratu and Mbandi says. But that is far short of the African Union's target to recycle 50% of waste by 2023.

Citizen initiatives recycle about 11% of the waste... but that is far short of the AU's target

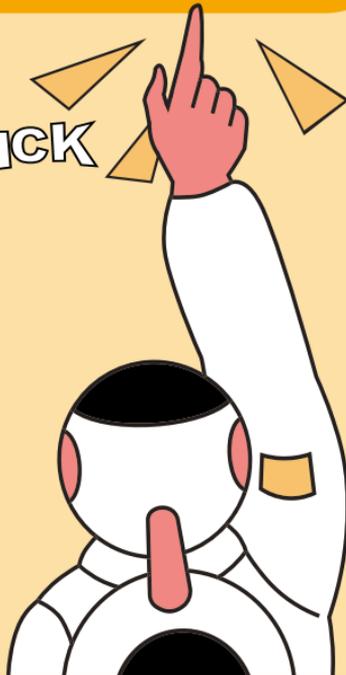
Much of the unrecycled waste litters the land much as it does at Kure: driving people away from trade and public spaces, emitting methane gas which contributes to climate change, and polluting the air – which causes premature deaths.

Air pollution, which the waste sector contributes about 29% to globally, was responsible for 1.1-million deaths across Africa in 2019, according to a study published by nine scientists in the *Lancet Planetary Health* journal. ■

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Life

The developed world is outsourcing its biodiversity crisis to Africa

When it comes to protecting nature, Africans are being made to pay a disproportionate cost, with decisions being made on behalf of the people on this continent.

Simon Allison
NEWS ANALYSIS

How do we keep living things alive? That is the overarching goal of the United Nations Biodiversity Conference, which began in Montreal this week.

So far this century, the statistics are grim. Human activity has had a catastrophic impact on the living world, with an estimated one million animal and plant species at risk of extinction within the next few decades. Globally, wildlife populations have declined by 69% since 1970, and climate change caused by humans is accelerating this process.

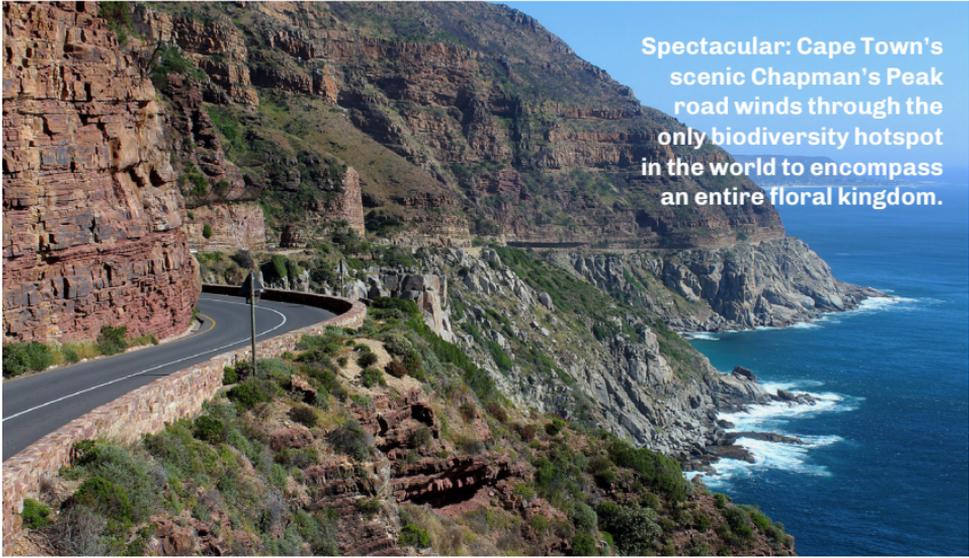
There is a plan to stop, or at least slow, the decimation of the living world. It is called the Global Biodiversity Framework, and its central pitch – the 30x30 proposal – is deceptively simple: to designate 30% of the world's surface as protected areas for nature by 2030. This would ring-fence vast areas of land for the sole use of plants

and animals, and severely curtail the ability of humans to live in or otherwise exploit it. It is based on the principle that nature thrives in the absence of humans.

Currently, 14.6% of the world's surface is considered to be protected (including national parks, nature reserves, marine protected areas and conservancies).

The 30x30 proposal, conceived by the United Nations, has received support from some of the world's most powerful countries. So far, that list includes Armenia, Australia, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, the Czech Republic, Denmark, the European Union, France, India, Israel, Japan, Luxembourg, Monaco, Norway, Peru, Portugal, Rwanda, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States. It has also been backed by major western conservation NGOs, such as the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).

But major details of the plan are still unclear. What exactly does a protected area look like? What happens to the



Spectacular: Cape Town's scenic Chapman's Peak road winds through the only biodiversity hotspot in the world to encompass an entire floral kingdom.

people who will be affected? Perhaps most significant is the thorny issue of where exactly these protected areas will be. Will each country fence off 30% of its own territory, or will only the most biodiverse regions be protected?

Currently, the draft text supports the latter. As the WWF observed, new protected areas will make a far greater impact if they “are located in those places that are globally most relevant for biodiversity”.

It just so happens that most of those places are in Africa and the developing world.

Colonial overtones

South America is the most biodiverse continent, closely followed by Africa.

According to a recent article in *Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution*, a scientific journal, Africa is home to approximately one quarter of all the

world's mammal and bird species.

“These animals occur in a great diversity of habitats, from deserts to rainforests, from the glaciers on tops of mountains to Lake Assal, 156m below sea level,” the authors observed, and include “flagship” species for conservation – like gorillas, lions, rhino and elephant.

This is largely because Africa already does a much better job of protecting nature than most of the rest of the inhabited world. There are 7,800 terrestrial protected areas on the continent that cover 5.3-million square kilometres, which works out to about 17% of its land mass – above the global average. Proportionally, African governments already spend more of their budgets on conservation than wealthier countries.

But this apparent commitment to conservation has a controversial past – which might help to explain why its future is contested too.

Many of Africa's nature reserves and protected areas were set up by colonial authorities, who sought to "protect" a vision of a wild, unspoiled Africa that never really existed. Land that once supported both humans and animals was dedicated instead to just animals. People who had lived on that land for generations were excluded from it – often at gunpoint – and often found themselves trapped in poverty as a result.

These colonial overtones continue into the present day. The largest manager of protected areas in Africa, for example, is a European NGO called African Parks. Its 19 parks in 11 African countries cover 14.8-million hectares – that's bigger than countries like Eritrea, Malawi or Sierra Leone – and are protected by well-armed rangers that answer to the park authorities.

Those rangers are there to protect animals and the tourists that pay to see them, not locals.

The president of African Parks is none other than Prince Harry, the fifth in line to the British throne, and its senior management is 93% white, according to its website.

"The British royal family, Prince William and Prince Harry, they have zero influence in Africa, until you get to the issue of conservation. Then suddenly they are there," Mordecai Ogada, a Kenyan ecologist and author of *The Big Conservation Lie*, told *The Continent*.

Last year, African Parks received \$108-million – "one of the largest single gifts ever made to the conservation of protected areas in Africa" – from the Wyss

Foundation, a charitable organisation based in the United States. The investment was specifically earmarked to help Africa meet the 30x30 proposal, even though only one African country has so far expressed support.

"This 30x30 thing is illogical," Ogada concluded. "There is the industrialised world who built their riches and power on the exploitation of their environment, often in unsustainable ways. With the depletion of resources in the north, they need the south."

The campaign group Survival International puts it in blunter terms: "The 30x30 plan will be the biggest land grab in history."

A western paradigm

It is not just Africa, of course. Alejandro Argumedo is an indigenous rights campaigner from Peru, and he is just as worried about what will happen to the Amazon – another of the world's great biodiversity hotspots. "How it's working right now is a militarised form of conservation," he said in an interview with website *Mongabay*. "You have guards with guns, people imposing fines, building fences and kicking people out of their traditional lands. And if communities react in defence they are perceived as anti-conservation."

"This paradigm has been dominated and created, funded, and lobbied for by conservation organisations in the global north, and the danger here is that the majority of the land acreage for conservation will result in large land grabbing and dispossession of Indigenous



Harmony: Hyenas in Harar, Ethiopia have a symbiotic relationship with residents. Photo: BBC/Paul Thompson

peoples,” Argumedo said.

Supporters of the 30x30 initiative insist that the rights of indigenous peoples and others affected people will be guaranteed in any final deal.

This is usually done through a set of policies known as conservation through development, in which people affected by protected areas are offered jobs in the tourist industry, and given access to new schools and clinics.

But these policies have not been especially effective, as the authors of the recent report in the journal *Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution* note: “Extreme poverty and biodiversity hotspots are often geographically coincident.” And research consistently points to indigenous communities being better at conservation of their own territory than anyone else.

In Africa it is also an issue of economic development – land that is protected for conservation cannot be used for anything else like industry of commercial agriculture. In 2014, for example, the Tanzanian government – under enormous international pressure – was prevented from building a major highway to link the country from east to

west because it would have interfered with animal migration routes.

Like with climate change, the global biodiversity crisis is one for which Africans are minimally responsible. Yet, as it stands, it is Africans who are going to be made to pay the greatest price to solve it – unless the continent’s leaders can do something about it.

In Montreal, at the biodiversity conference, the global north will not have it all its own way. South Africa, a diplomatic leader of the developing world, has already signalled its opposition to the 30x30 proposal. And late last month, countries from the Southern African Development Community threatened to pull out of CITES – the global body that regulates the trade in endangered animals and plant species.

The regional body said that decisions taken at the body were not based on science, or the experience of countries with biodiversity, and were instead based on the “domination of protectionist ideology over science decision-making”.

It pointed a finger in particular at powerful lobbying from NGOs based in wealthy countries. ■

PHOTO ESSAY

Winning the World Cup (off the pitch, anyway)

There is only one African team left at the Men's football World Cup in Qatar. Yalla Morocco! But regardless of who wins the actual trophy, we know that the real test of success is how much fun we had along the way (oh, and beating Brazil – thanks Cameroon). And on that metric, there can be no doubt that African fans are already the world champions.



Photo : Fadel
Senna/AFP



Left: Tunisia supporters try to catch midfielder #17 Ellyes Skhiri's shoe at the Group D match against France at the Education City Stadium in Al-Rayyan, west of Doha on November 30. Photo: Miguel Medina/AFP



(Left) A supporter wrapped in national colours and wracked with national grief exercises his right to facepalm during the Round of 16 showdown with England that sent Senegal home on December 4. Photo: John Wessels/AFP

(Right) A Cameroon fan realises she left the gas on at home ahead of the national side's match against Switzerland on November 24. Photo: Issouf Sanogo/AFP



'Negal': Supporters of Senegal, blitheley unaware of the impending doom their side is about to face against England, of all people, ahead of their match that the latter would go on to win by an intensely annoying 3-0. Photo: Jack Guez/AFP



Yes oui Cam! Fans cheer on Cameroon ahead of their match against Brazil on December 2. Cameroon raised a single digit to Brazil, who couldn't come up with a decent retort. Bit awkward, really, but play on. Photo: Issouf Sanogo/AFP



A fan who got their nails did rates Ghana's fate against South Korea. Photo: Khaled Desouki / AFP



Supporters cheer on the Black Stars, who edged out South Korea in the 3-2 nailbiter. Photo: Kirill Kudryavtsev / AFP

A photograph showing two women wading in a shallow, muddy river. They are using large metal pans to sift through the water, a traditional method of artisanal gold mining. The water is turbulent and brown with sediment. The woman in the foreground is wearing a black cap and a black sleeveless top, while the woman behind her is wearing a pink shirt. The scene is set in a natural, outdoor environment.

Pan to mine: Artisanal miners sift for gold particles in Zimbabwe.
Photo: Tafadzwa Ufumeli/Getty Images

The Globe and Phoenix gold rush

Long after the formal mine was shut down, makorokoza are still coming to find their fortunes – with a devastating impact on the local community

Irene Kalulu in Kwekwe

Armed with hammers and pinch bars, they walk around in threadbare clothes, their faces caked with mud. In their wake, they leave heaps of mine dust, uprooted trees and open pits that sometimes stretch into roads, schools and people's backyards. They are artisanal miners, makorokoza in the local lingo, the gold panners of Globe and Phoenix.

Globe and Phoenix, located in the Midlands province of Zimbabwe, is a mining area that was, in its heyday, the second-largest producer of gold in the country. A formal mine was established in the late 1800s by white colonialists, over ancient gold works. That mine produced more than 4.2-million ounces of gold before the Zimbabwean government suspended its operations in 2007 due to political and economic instability.

In the shadow of that shuttered mine, modern versions of the ancient gold workers are rising – and wreaking havoc on local communities.

“We hear them at night digging around our houses. You pray that they don’t find signs of gold near your house because they won’t hesitate to dig under it,” a resident who spoke on condition of anonymity told *The Continent*. “They don’t care if they dig up our water pipes leaving us without water for days or that our roads are inaccessible and critical services like ambulances cannot reach us.”

Incidents of violence have also left local residents scared to confront makorokoza.

The growing number of artisanal miners is “a culmination of two decades of deindustrialisation and the decline of agriculture which used to be the backbone of our economy,” according to Farai Maguwu, head of the Centre for National Resource Governance. It has serious environmental and safety consequences.

Poverty and high levels of unemployment have led young men and women to pan for gold – considered “easy” work as it does not require any formal training and, for the lucky ones, it is a quick avenue to instant money.

The panners separate gold particles from dirt using a technique called gravity concentration. It requires water – a lot of it, and they use any source they come upon, including streams that residents rely on for clean water. “We no longer use communal showers because the gold panners use them as their bases,” says local resident Tatenda Mpofo.

They also use mercury to extract the

ore and exposure to this heavy metal can be fatal. It’s already reported to have contaminated parts of the Sebakwe river.

The miners’ tunnels also threaten the structural integrity of buildings in Kwekwe, the city which grew around the Globe and Phoenix. In 2020, the government evacuated some of its Kwekwe buildings that it feared to be on the verge of collapse. Maguwu says that buildings experience tremors in neighbouring Kadoma, too.

Priscilla Mashinge, one of a few women involved in the artisanal mining, offers what might be a partial solution. She recognises that those who depend on farming are affected when their fields are turned into deep ravines. Yet, “it’s harder digging up those pits than it is filling them up. We dug them up; we should come together and fill them up,” she says.

Richard Makombe, 30, is an unemployed graduate who turned to gold panning to survive. “I never thought I would find myself panning for gold but I was left with no other option. At first I was embarrassed for my peers to see me dirty coming from the pits. But now I don’t care, as long as I’m able to take care of my family,” he said.

He said that while there is some infighting within the community of goldpanners, their dangerous image is misleading. “It doesn’t mean that every person you see caked with mud is violent. Yes, you have to maintain a certain persona so that others don’t take advantage of you, but most of us are just ordinary guys trying to make a living in a hard economic environment.” ■

The beginning of the end for Cyril's ANC

Ramaphosa may or may not survive his Buffalo couch scandal. But the damage to South Africa's ruling party is irreversible

Andile Zulu

On Friday 16 December, President Cyril Ramaphosa will go into his party's 55th national conference looking for re-election as party president. This is despite last week's dramatic revelation that an independent panel found that he may have violated the Constitution and abused the powers of his office.

Ramaphosa may well get re-elected, but with each passing day it is becoming clearer that South Africa is witnessing the drastic decline and decay of its liberation party, the African National Congress.

For 28 post-apartheid years, the ANC has held executive authority in South Africa. It has been a mixed bag: from Nelson Mandela's hallowed days to Thabo Mbeki's Aids-denying regime; from Jacob Zuma's corruption-ridden decade to Ramaphosa's reign. Still incumbent, the latter's legacy has yet to be cemented.

When the billionaire and former

unionist was elected president by South Africa's Parliament, upon the resignation of Jacob Zuma in 2018, Ramaphosa faced an immense task: reforming the economy and rebuilding state capacity. A decade of kleptocratic rule had cost the state billions of dollars and severely eroded its capacity to respond to national issues, intensifying numerous national crises including mass unemployment and poverty.

Four years later, the economy is stagnant, inequality has continued unabated and destitution has increased: unemployment is at 44.1% and an estimated 30.3-million people are living in poverty, dimming prospects of curtailing violent crime. The country has endured months of loadshedding – rolling blackouts – thanks to an energy crisis the government seems incapable of solving.

Ramaphosa's moderate attempts to hold allegedly corrupt ANC members accountable have intensified party infighting. Now he faces his own corruption scandal – and the prospect of impeachment.

In June, Arthur Fraser – head of South Africa's State Security Agency under Jacob Zuma – lodged a criminal complaint against the president. Fraser alleged that Ramaphosa had stashed \$4-million in cash in the furniture at his Phala Phala game farm in Limpopo. On 9 February 2020, this foreign cash was stolen. Fraser further alleged that Ramaphosa did not report this crime because the millions of dollars had not been declared to the Reserve Bank. A crucial aspect of Fraser's



Couch potato:
President Cyril
Ramaphosa. Photo:
Delwyn Verasamy

criminal complaint is the claim that the robbery suspects had been kidnapped, interrogated and paid for their silence.

The scandal opened up avenues for Ramaphosa's power to be challenged by his opponents. Opposition parties, such as the Democratic Alliance and Economic Freedom Fighters, have demanded he step down while investigations unfold. ANC members discontented with Ramaphosa's anti-corruption reforms are also exploiting the scandal.

The president does not deny the robbery but denies accusations of money laundering and other criminal conduct, claiming the money came from selling game animals.

An independent panel formed to conduct a preliminary inquiry released its report at the end of November, concluding that he may have violated the constitution and the presidential office in both the underlying transaction that fetched the money and how he handled the thieves.

Ramaphosa has decided to legally challenge the panel's report. The ANC's highest decision-making body, the National Executive Committee, resolved

to keep him as president, fearing that removing him without a credible successor would intensify internal conflict and hasten the party's demise.

The ANC is riven with increasingly violent internal divisions. Fearing the destructive kleptocratic ANC alternatives to Ramaphosa, South Africa's business community – which often approves of his questionable economic policies – has thrown support behind the president.

Ramaphosa may well have enough backing to win next week's re-election battle, but the party is not winning the war: its share of the national vote has declined in the past decade and each new crisis makes it look increasingly incapable of progressive governance, regardless of who leads it.

In the 2024 national elections, the ANC might lose the outright majority with which it has held on to executive rule for the past 28 years, opening a new, uncertain chapter in the country's politics.



Andile Zulu is a South African political essayist who runs the Born Free Blues blog

In Covid fight, did they lead or loot?

Overall, Africans think their governments did a pretty good job of dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic: Across 20 countries that Afrobarometer has surveyed in 2021/2022, two thirds (65%) give their leaders a passing grade.

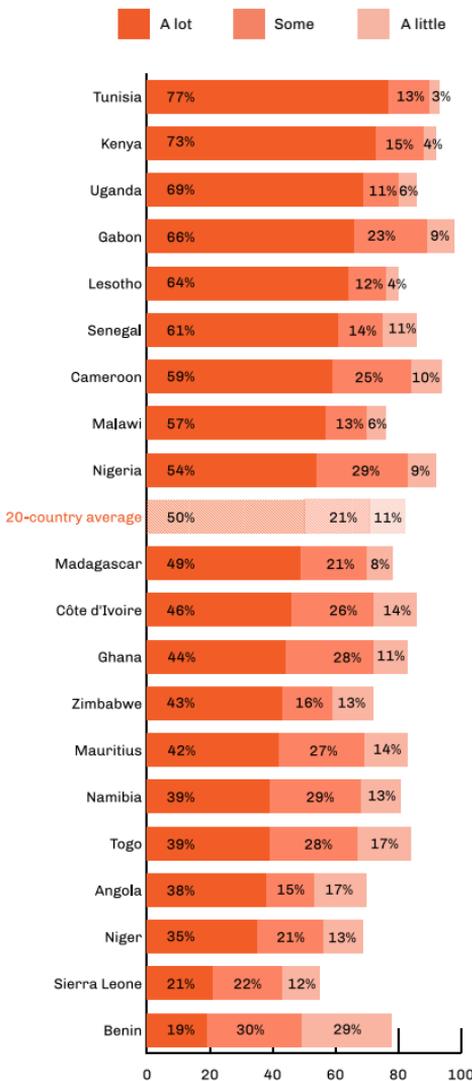
But citizens also think corruption claimed a chunk of the money their governments could have used to do better.

Fully half (50%) of citizens think “a lot” of their country’s Covid-19 resources were lost to corruption, and another 21% say “some” of these funds were stolen. One in 10 (11%) see “a little” corruption, while only 7% think there was none.

In countries where relatively few people think Covid-19 corruption was rampant, such as Benin (19%) and Sierra Leone (21%), they also give their governments high marks on managing the pandemic. But so do citizens in countries with the highest perceived levels of “a lot” of Covid-19 corruption – Tunisia (77%), Kenya (73%), and Uganda (69%).

Is that because corruption is more or less expected, so citizens don’t hold it against their governments? Imagine how impressed they would be if they could also say, “And they didn’t steal any of the money!”

Covid-19 resources lost to corruption | 20 African countries | 2021/2022



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

Sad boy blues

Ghanaian artist Black Sherif has released a cracking record, banging out hard beats for stories of a hardscrabble life



Wilfred Okiche

The rise of Ghana's Black Sherif (born Mohammed Ismail Sharrif) has been one of the genuine highlights of the year. From freestyling in underground spaces, he achieved superstar status this year when his breakthrough anthem *Kwaku the Traveler* exploded to such an extent that it was (for a spell) the most Shazamed song in the world.

Famous for his instantly iconic, big-voiced delivery, Black Sherif wears

his emotions on his sleeve, penning melancholic tunes that reflect on his mortality. This embrace of small fates and spirituality makes Black Sherif sound wiser than his 20 years on Earth would suggest. *Kwaku the Traveler* for instance is a rapid-fire narration that embraces the folly of youth but validates the struggles of anyone who ever had to leave home.

His debut album, *The Villain I Never Was*, does a stellar job of putting all Black Sherif's instinctive darkness into sleek pop packaging, characterised by heavy beats and up to date production values. Released in October, the album switches between English, Twi and Pidgin.

The Ghanaian's storytelling instincts detail a life that has been through its fair share of pain. There isn't a false note on the record as he sings with a mournful clarity that makes it clear he has earned every tear that he puts in the music.

The record literally opens with a song about homelessness and on tunes like *Oh Paradise*, *Wasteman* and *Konongo Zongo*, Black Sherif details his hardscrabble life prior to fame and fortune. Even when he is more upbeat, as in the pseudo spiritual declaration *Oil in my head* or the chest thumping swagger of *45*, he appears to be warding off impending misfortune.

This isn't to say that *The Villain I Never Was* is a dour affair. On the contrary actually, the record is as exuberant as any hip hop record, with Sherif embracing buoyant trap and drill beats and melding them with a more forward-facing pop and R&B sheen. Totally recommend. ■

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

"I'd also be willing to stick my neck out if I was a Rothschild's."



1_ Name the town that was the first colonial capital of Côte d'Ivoire (pictured).

2_ What is São Tomé and Príncipe's capital city?

3_ Morocco is one of four African countries to reach the quarterfinals of the men's World Cup – Ghana in 2010, Senegal in 2002 and Cameroon in which year?

4_ Which country uses the ouguiya currency?

5_ Kordofan, Luangwa, reticulated and Rothschild's are each the

names of four subspecies of which animal?

6_ Sokoto State is a state in which country?

7_ The "Atlas Lions" played in this men's World Cup. Which country are they from?

8_ The "Lions of Teranga" also played. Which country are they from?

9_ The "Indomitable Lions" also played. Which country are they from?

10_ Along with French and Arabic, what is Comoros' other official language?

HOW DID I DO?

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

Peter Obi emerges as ‘third force’ in Nigerian politics

Still a ways away from a decisive victory, he already represents a shift from the two-party status quo

Tunde Oseni & Damilola Adeniyi

The emergence of Peter Obi, the 61-year-old former governor of Anambra State, as the Labour Party candidate for the 2023 presidential election has reconfigured the Nigerian political scene.

Some opinion polls have even put him in the lead, and most agree he is a serious contender. This means we might be about to see an end to the two-party system – with the ruling All Progressives Congress and the opposition People’s Democratic Party – which has dominated the last two elections. What does this mean for the future of politics in Nigeria?

Obi’s supporters, known as “Obidients”, believe he is the best candidate because he represents a different kind of leader – someone who will pay more attention to issues than to patronage politics. This is partly related to his past achievements as governor, and his promises of accountability and frugality. It is also related to the fact he is not standing for one of the two main parties, and so cuts a more independent figure.

Against a backdrop of mounting insecurity, economic collapse and

corruption, some Nigerians believe that Obi is the only candidate that has the potential to deliver change. Partly as a result, the Obidients appear to be the most fervent support base of any candidate, fuelling his campaign with a wave of social media support.

This does not mean Obi will win, however. Nigerian election campaigns are long and hard and victory depends as much on funding and networks as it does on a candidate’s personal appeal. The Labour Party lacks the formal and informal structures of its rivals, and is not even fielding candidates in some parts of the country. It is also unclear whether Obi has enough funds to mobilise support and turn out the vote in February.

But even if he doesn’t win, his candidacy has demonstrated that many Nigerian voters are tired of the “same old same old”. Whoever forms the next government will have to take note. ■

Tunde Oseni is an associate professor at Lead City University, Ibadan and UK Global

Talent. Damilola Adeniyi is a researcher in Nigeria. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa.



THE AGENDA

◆ The Committee to Protect Journalists is set to release its **annual census of journalists imprisoned** worldwide on 14 December, revealing which governments are the worst jailers of journalists.

◆ If you're keen to celebrate the New Year in a new way, consider **Beneath the Baobabs Festival** in Kilifi, Kenya. Tickets are \$60-\$100, depending on nationality and residency status.

◆ Three DJs are playing at the same time tonight (Saturday) at **Silent Disco at Clifton 3rd Beach, Cape Town:** Siyasibaca (South African house), Shylo (daytime downtempo deep and nighttime techno) and Duane (old-school hip-hop and singalongs).

◆ The **Kigali-Kampala Fashion Week**, happening in Kampala this year, starts this Thursday with a runway show at the Pearl of Africa hotel.

◆ The **International Khoikhoi Film Festival** in Cape Town ends today, 10 December. Best get there quick.

◆ US President Joe Biden will be hosting African leaders for the **US-Africa Summit** on 13-15 December. You can watch live streams of the public sessions on a dedicated page of the US State Department.

◆ After a two-year pandemic closure, the **Cape Town Rugby Sevens** are back. Twenty eight rugby teams from around the world are competing in the tournament which started on Friday afternoon at the DHL stadium. The finale kicks off at 18:56 on Sunday.

◆ Take your young ones, or yourself if you are young at heart, to the Imagination Theatre, an outdoor space at the National Children's Theatre in Parktown, Johannesburg, for the Seussical Jr production. Performances are on till 22 December.

◆ Port Louis in Mauritius this weekend plays host to the annual **African Economic Conference**. It's jointly hosted by the Economic Commission for Africa, African Development Bank and the United Nations Development Program.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Please tell us if you or your organisation has something cool coming up (an event, a report, a product launch) that our audience should know about on agenda@thecontinent.org

The Big Picture

Photo: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP

Pas de deux: Catherine Abilla, 15, and George Okoth, 18, wait in the wings for their next cue during a performance of *The Nutcracker*. The ballet, traditionally staged around Christmas, will be performed in Nairobi this year by the Dance Centre Kenya – featuring more than 150 dance students – with the Nairobi Philharmonic Orchestra.



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