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The Continent



The Kenyans paying for Ruto's hustle

Illustration: Wynona Mutisi



THIS WEEK'S COVER STORY:

President William Ruto, Kenya's self-anointed hustler-in-chief, hasn't been slow in shaking things up in the country. Elected on promises of creating opportunities for ordinary people, Ruto seems to be working for himself, going out of his way (most recently to Italy – p8) to make Kenya a neoliberal paradise (p12). And it's Kenyans who are paying the price, from traders unable to make a living in Nairobi (p14) to women marching against femicide (p7), and people being kicked out of their homes so forests can be sold off to rich polluters (p17).

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- **Italy:** Take the oil. And keep Africans in Africa (p8)
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SOUTH AFRICA**Disgraced former president commits copyright theft (allegedly)**

Kleptocrat ex-president Jacob Zuma has been suspended from the ruling African National Congress, just weeks after he launched a new political party, uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK). Except MK was the name of the ANC's armed wing, formed in opposition to the apartheid regime, and so that party owns the trademark. Now the ANC wants to sue to have Zuma's new home booted off South Africa's register of



Mkay: Jacob Zuma was released from prison because he was dying. Now he's formed a new political party. Photo: AFP

political parties, which would bar it from elections later this year.

ETHIOPIA**Second Amhara MP arrested as regional war persists**

MP Dessalegn Chanie was arrested on Wednesday evening, his family said. Ethiopian authorities have since searched his home and impounded his devices but not given an official explanation for this arrest. Dessalegn is the second parliamentarian from the National Movement for Amhara to be arrested. Christian Tadele was arrested last August and remains in prison, as Prime Minister Ahmed Abiy maintains a months-long state of emergency in Amhara, the latest region in the country to take up armed rebellion.

NIGERIA**Suspect nabbed in high-profile kidnapping case**

The Nigerian police have arrested one of the suspected kidnapers in a case that has roiled the country in recent weeks. The 28-year-old man reportedly admitted involvement in the killing of Nabeeha Al-Kadriyar, a university student who was abducted with six of her siblings in Abuja on 2 January. Police say he was found with money, suspected to have come from ransom payments. More than 550 kidnappings happen in Nigeria annually with kidnapers earning up to \$387,000 in ransom payments.

CAPITALISM

UK firm sues Burkinabé strikers

London-registered Endeavour Mining has sued its Burkinabé workers, who put their tools down last week, in an attempt to force them back on the job. The firm extracts minerals from Burkina Faso, Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire. It says the strike was unplanned and illegal. It has *not* sued its ex-CEO, whose sacking – for allegedly selling off assets irregularly, caused a 23% fall in its share price.

MOROCCO

One consequence of sexism bursts open

Authorities in Morocco's cultural capital, Fes, arrested 30 people, including doctors, nurses and law enforcement agents, for working with unwed mothers to "traffic" their babies to families that want to adopt them. Terminating an unwanted pregnancy is illegal in Morocco but women who give birth outside marriage are stigmatised for it, leaving unwed mothers in a bind.



Photo: Mohammed Abed/AFP

UNITED NATIONS

Security Council gazes at its navel as more Palestinians die

The United Nations Security Council met this week to discuss last Friday's ICJ

ruling that Israel's war actions in Gaza are plausibly genocidal. As usual, the countries walked the company line: the United States and France called for a "two-state solution" (which Israel's leadership now says isn't an option). Meanwhile, Israel continued its studious work to make life all-but impossible for people in Gaza.



Blast site: A resident surveys the aftermath of a gas truck explosion that injured hundreds of people in Kenya's capital, Nairobi. Photo: Luis Tato/AFP

KENYA

Hundreds injured as gas hauler explodes in Nairobi

At least 300 people were injured when a lorry carrying gas exploded on Thursday night in Nairobi. By Friday afternoon, 39 of them were hospitalised as critically ill, with three confirmed dead. Several other trucks were burnt down in the parking lot of a gas plant where the explosion happened. The tragedy added to the atmosphere of grief in the Kenyan capital, where thousands of women had marched in protest over the weekend, following a recent surge in reported cases of women murdered.

BURKINA FASO

More weapons, more war crimes

Three army drone strikes last year hit crowded markets and a funeral, killing at least 60 civilians, according to Human Rights Watch, which interviewed 23 witnesses to the attacks. Much of Burkina Faso's north is controlled by militants who claim affiliation to, or are linked with, terror groups like the Islamic State. The military junta – which overthrew a civilian government promising to solve this insecurity – bought high-precision drones from Türkiye to help its fight, but it does not appear to be very precise in using them.

LIBYA

Cost of burning our planet is incalculable

Last September's flooding along the eastern coast of Libya resulted in losses and damages of \$1.65-billion, says a report recently published by a partnership of the European Union, UN and World Bank. The country would need \$1.8-billion to rebuild the 20 municipalities, where homes, cultural sites, the environment and water and transport infrastructure were devastated. At least 18,500 houses were destroyed in these areas (7% of the housing stock) displacing nearly 45,000 people.

UKRAINE-RUSSIA**ICJ rules against Kyiv in cases against Russia, with caveats**

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) dismissed Kyiv's accusation that Russia funded terrorism by supplying the rocket which shot down Malaysia Airlines plane MH17 in eastern Ukraine in 2014. Ukraine took the case to the ICJ in 2017. The court did however rule that Russia violated both an international anti-terrorism treaty when it failed to investigate allegations that some of its citizens were funding terrorism abroad, and an anti-racism treaty when it didn't ensure the Ukrainian language continued



In memoriam: Flowers left at Schiphol Airport in remembrance of the victims of the MH17 plane crash. Photo: Robin Van Lonkhuijsen/ANP/AFP

to be taught in Crimea, after annexing it in 2014. Six other Ukraine claims or pleas were dismissed in the Wednesday ruling.

SIERRA LEONE**Parents, elders held for FGM deaths**

Police in Sierra Leone arrested several parents and soweis – senior women who are central to the initiation ceremonies of the Bondo people – after three girls died, reportedly from traditional genital cutting. Adamsay Sesay, Salamatu Jalloh and Kadiatu Bangura died last month in the North West province. They were 12, 13 and 17 years old. Despite campaigns to end the practice of female genital mutilation in the country, the most recent estimates say that 85% of Sierra Leonean women have been subjected to it, often secretly.

SAHEL**Rough start for Ecowas dropouts**

The military rulers of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger announced over the weekend that they are leaving Ecowas, the West African bloc that sanctioned them after their coups. It's been a rough start for Burkina Faso, which had to cancel a \$58-million bond auction on Thursday due to low interest from spooked investors. Undaunted, authorities in Ouagadougou say they will consider leaving another bloc: the West African Economic and Monetary Union, which manages the region's common currency, the CFA franc.

Kenya

Leaders flail as women rage in battle for their lives

Tens of thousands of Kenyans marched for women's safety over the weekend. But some of the country's leaders missed the point entirely.

Lydia Namubiru

In Kenya's largest-ever protest against gender-based violence, thousands of women and their allies marched the streets of Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu, Eldoret, Kilifi and other towns on Saturday. The protests followed a surge in cases of femicide – the killing of women – in the country. Media reported 14 cases of women murdered in January alone.

Estimates of the depth of Kenya's femicide crisis vary widely but all indicate that hundreds of women are killed each year – 725 were murdered in 2022, according to a report by the United Nations' office on drugs and crime.

At the Saturday protests, frustration with political failure on the issue was palpable. In the capital, Esther Passaris, the parliamentary representative of women in Nairobi County, was booed when she attempted to address the protesters.

Passaris is allied with President William Ruto and often embraces his “everything is an opportunity” governance style. Some of the protesters who booed her also engaged her on X to explain that they booed because they associate her with his regime and saw her presence at the protests as political expediency.

For the country's 2022 survey on health and demographics, researchers asked women and men if they had experienced physical violence since turning 15. Of the women surveyed, 34% said they had (compared with 27% of men) and 16% said it had happened in the 12 months before the survey.

Also common are attitudes that justify violence against women. In the same survey, 43% of women and 35% of men said they believed that a husband was justified in beating his wife for at least one of eight listed reasons. These were: refusing sexual intercourse with him; infidelity; neglecting the children; coming home late; going out without his permission; arguing with him; and refusing to cook or burning the food. ■

Italy

Rome's bid to make Africa an offer it can't refuse

Europe needs Africa's fossil fuels. Its people? Not so much. Now Italy thinks it can square that circle with a new spin on the good old-fashioned Sicilian protection racket.

Sipho Kings

In a rare turn of events, Italy finds itself with a stable government, albeit one rooted in conservative and anti-immigrant fervour. This means Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's once-fringe governing party can try to deliver on its promises to stop illegal immigration and make Italy great again.

The pitch is that Italy will invest an initial \$5.5-billion to help African states grow, so people won't want to leave. That's essentially offering to pay Africa to leave them alone. Meloni phrased it as "guaranteeing the right [of Africans] to not be forced to emigrate".

A small group of African leaders, led by African Union Commission head Moussa Faki, crossed the Mediterranean this week by plane to hear all this in Rome – a city built in no small part on plunder from Africa.

Faki noted that African countries hadn't been consulted before the "Mattei Plan" for the continent was unveiled. He called for a "partnership" instead of the way EU states currently operate in Africa.

The Mattei plan is named after the founder of Eni, Italy's state-owned oil and gas company. Behind the rhetoric, the meat of the plan is for Africans to pick Italian energy firms instead of Chinese or French competitors as their partners of choice for oil rigs off the coast of places like Mozambique and Côte d'Ivoire.

With Russian gas off the EU menu, Meloni wants to make Italy an energy hub. Being right-wing helps her gloss over the fact that fossil fuels are driving the climate crisis, which is already hitting Africa hard, driving mass (mostly internal) migration.

European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen was also in Rome to talk up the "intense and renewed cooperation" between the two continents. And if that doesn't work, Europe can keep to its current playbook: Give authoritarian leaders money to make the immigration problem disappear. That's the plan with the likes of Kais Saied in Tunisia and Hemedti in Sudan. ■

Sudan

Why did South Africa's president gladhand a genocidal general?

Invoking the spirit of Nelson Mandela, facilitators of the controversial Hemedti-Ramaphosa meeting say this is how peace is made. But not everyone is convinced by the explanation.

Jesse Copelyn in Cape Town

On 4 January, a beaming Cyril Ramaphosa shook the hand of Sudanese militia leader General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, commonly known as Hemedti.

The meeting took place as Sudan's civil war raged on, with both sides accused of human rights abuses. In one case, in an advance on El Geneina in Western Darfur last year, Hemedti's militia killed as many as 15,000 people, many belonging to the Masalit ethnic group. He is also implicated in the genocide in Darfur in the early 2000s.

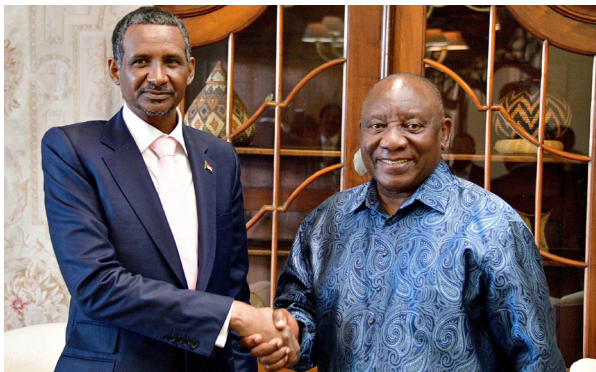
Hemedti's stop in Pretoria was part of a continent-wide trip to shore up support and gain legitimacy. Sudan is still technically led by his former ally and now opponent, General Abdul Fatah al-Burhan, who controls the army.

The backlash to the meeting included accusations that it was hypocritical and inconsistent with South Africa's post-apartheid values of equality and justice. It also came in the very same month that South Africa took Israel to the International Court of Justice, accusing it of genocidal acts in Gaza.

Vincent Magwenya, Ramaphosa's spokesperson, said that this was "not a meeting between two heads of state" but rather a gesture of courtesy.

The nonprofit that helped organise the meeting, the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes, has invoked Nelson Mandela in defending it. Its executive director, Vasu Gounden, told *The Continent*: "Mandela said you can't make peace by talking to your friends."

Gounden was in the meeting and said South Africa would meet with all the sides to a conflict in Africa. "If Burhan gets on a



**House on fire:
Sudanese warlord
Mohamed Hamdan
'Hemedti' Dagalo
and South Africa's
President Cyril
Ramaphosa.**

plane and comes tomorrow to meet with Ramaphosa, Ramaphosa would meet him.”

Hemedti's forces, which *The Continent* has previously reported are supported by the United Arab Emirates, currently have the upper hand in the war, controlling key parts of the capital Khartoum; Wad Madani, a major city south-east of the capital; and most of Darfur.

In his tour, Hemedti also went to Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya, Djibouti and Rwanda. But the South Africa leg was particularly important, according to Sudanese political analyst Kholood Khair.

The handshake – with the leader of a stable democracy – showed that Hemedti “is not only meeting despots”, said Khair. She said the reception in Pretoria and other capitals also showed that presidents “consider Hemedti to be presidential material, if not president in actual fact”.

She pointed to the quickly-deleted tweet by South Africa's government that referred to Hemedti as Sudan's president. These steps also serve to weaken al-Burhan's position.

Cameron Hudson, an analyst and former director of African Affairs at the White House's National Security Council in the United States, said that while mediation would require meeting with Hemedti, Ramaphosa seemingly has “no particular interest in being involved ... in bringing an end to this conflict”.

Others also claim that Hemedti's reception across Africa was helped by the UAE's outsized influence on the continent. The UAE has denied accusations that it has covertly been sending arms to Hemedti's forces via Chad. A relationship exists, however: the paramilitary provided troops to the UAE and its partners in their devastating war in Yemen, which South Africa supported with arms.

Gounden denies that the UAE played a role in his organisation's actions and said it has been involved in high-level conflict mediation efforts in Sudan since 2019.

More than 10.7-million people have been displaced since the start of the war and reports indicate that a victorious Hemedti could face revolutions at home and diplomatic isolation abroad. ■

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The Continent

William Ruto: Less hustle, chief

'Hustler' can mean a go-getter who brims with energy and enterprise. It can also mean swindler, con-man or crook. In his first year of office, Kenya's self-proclaimed hustler-in-chief William Ruto seems to have turned his thesaurus into a check-list.

Catherine Amayi

On the world stage, President William Ruto has positioned himself as the voice of Africa, speaking boldly on issues such as climate change, the dollar supremacy, and unequal partnerships between the Global North and Global South.

But in unobserved boardrooms, Mr Hustler is a darling of the Bretton Woods institutions, because he has commodified everything. Kenya is his hustle and the rewards are big: luxury foreign trips; a tripled budget for his spouse; alleged bribes for lawmakers; a refurbishment of the statehouse to his taste; and \$50,000 watches strapped to his wrist.

His position on climate change is telling. No expense has been spared in his quest to position himself as Kenya's own Greta Thunberg. He religiously attends climate events and hosted Africa's first climate week, to which he drove an electric car. He also calls out big polluters; initiated a national tree-planting day; has

promised a 100% renewable energy grid by the year 2030; and called for a global "carbon tax" campaign.

But peel away the veneer and you will find that Ruto has also downplayed the idea of climate change as an existential threat, instead steering the conversation towards seeing it as "an opportunity".

In particular, he sees in carbon credits a way to profit off of Kenya's nature, with millions of hectares of forested allocated to foreigners in secret agreements. All he has to do is get Kenyans off their land.

If you take his self-branding literally, he is supposed to be the poor folks' president. Instead 70,000 jobs, and countless small businesses have sunk in his year in office. Ruto has outpaced his predecessor Uhuru Kenyatta by borrowing twice as much in his first eight months in office and the Kenyan shilling has depreciated to a historic low.

His "Hustler Fund", a microloan programme for micro-enterprises, reportedly stacked up defaults of 9.9-billion shillings (\$61.5-million) in its

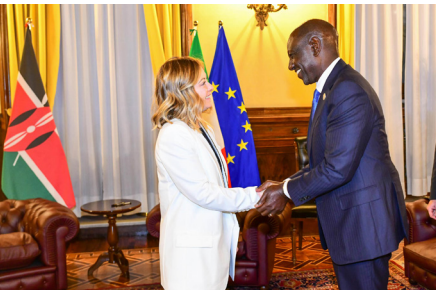


Photo: Tony Karumba/AFP

Top: President William Ruto meets far-right Italian PM Giorgia Meloni. Bottom: Offered a hand by predecessor Uhuru Kenyatta, Ruto goes for the whole arm.

first 11 months; a tab the Kenyan taxpayer will have to pick up.

Confronted with the reality of his fiscal brutality, Kenyans now commonly refer to Ruto as “Zakayo”, after the Biblical tax collector Zacchaeus, because as the national accounts got redder, he simply introduced new taxes or levies.

Scholars termed his plan to take another 1.5% of people’s income in a new housing levy “a raid on people’s pockets.” Judges have tended to agree, with both the high court and court of appeal ruling against it.

Maybe then it is his brand as “God’s chosen leader” that is authentic?

To understand Ruto’s ideological leanings, recall his political lineage. In 1992, the Youth for Kanu entity (YK’92) delivered a re-election for strongman Daniel Arap Moi in one of Kenya’s bloodiest and most fraudulent elections.

Ruto, then leader of YK’92, secured the political future of his mentor. But that foundation set him on a violent path that culminated in charges at the ICC for his role in the massacres that followed the 2007 elections. At home, his association with Christian fundamentalists is critical to laundering that image.

Abroad, Ruto woos the very empire that would not touch him with a 10-foot pole a decade ago by signing up for every neoliberal project sent his way. He is happy to export labour even to exploitative or racist destinations like Israel, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Germany. He can always tell his Bretton Woods friends of the remittances generated by shipping off Kenyan nurses, as hospitals across the country suffer staff shortages.

Ruto has mastered Machiavellianism and continues to use every tool at his disposal for his political survival. This is why he has outlasted most in Kenya’s political scene and successfully rebranded from his ICC charges, both at home and abroad. Whatever it takes – from smearing his peers to speaking as an ally of the Global South while selling his country out to capital – Ruto will do it.

And Ruto’s hustle might very well work – for him, and him alone. ■

Catherine Amayi is a Nairobi-based researcher and writer



All I want for Christmas is Uhuru: Visitors poured into Uhuru Park when it briefly re-opened on 25 December. Photo: Vincent Ng'ethe

Nairobi keeps shrinking for the real hustlers

If Nairobi's historic Uhuru Park fully reopens, it will be a "modern, orderly park" with two high-end restaurants, an amphitheatre, event spaces, exercise spaces and creature comforts for the city's well-to-do, writes **Vincent Ng'ethe**. It will also "accommodate very few vendors" because of its new design "and for control purposes". That's according to Nairobi county's chief environment officer, Ibrahim Otieno. So far the park

has re-opened only for a handful of days for end-of-year festivities. Before it was closed for refurbishment, more than 100 vendors worked in Uhuru and the nearby Central Park. Many now line the perimeter of the fenced-in park along Kenyatta Avenue, or are squeezed into Green Park, a nearby bus terminal. All of them are struggling to pull the volume of business they once did, and now it's forcing some out of Nairobi altogether.

Mary Wandungu found a spot for her drinks cart at the garbage-strewn Green Park bus terminal. In Uhuru Park which flanks the Kenyatta International Convention Centre, Parliament, Nyayo House and the National Health Insurance Fund, Wandungu made about 1,500 Kenya shillings (\$9) a day but once she moved to Green Park, her income nosedived to about 400 shillings.

Eventually she could not afford the house she rented for KSh12,000 a month in Umoja, a neighbourhood in Nairobi's Eastlands. She now commutes 55km each way from Kenol in Murang'a County.

Wandungu is also no longer able to fully stock even for the contracted customer base in Green Park. Most of her stock is just water.

"Many things that should be here aren't. No sweets, Tropicals, cigarettes. They'd sell if I bought them, but I don't have the money," she says. Only the fear of seeming irresponsible keeps her working. "You can't stay home with your children asking you 'What's next mum?' and then you tell them you have no work. It's just that you can't tell them that."

Wandungu pulls out a sheaf of documents: a 2010 registration certificate for the Uhuru Park and Central Park vendors association, a black notebook with the minutes of the group's first ever meeting, a list of the 128 vendors operating in the parks at the time of their closure and a 28 September 2023 letter from the group to Nairobi governor Sakaja Johnson. "We were promised to return after the work is complete," the letter reads.



Displaced: Pushed out of Uhuru Park, Mary Wandungu had to set up shop at the bus terminal. Photo: Vincent Ng'ethe

Wandungu says the governor didn't respond, but she has heard that each vendor will have to pay KSh14,000 shillings up front for permission to trade there again. Given their struggles since leaving the park, she says, demanding the money up front may shorten the list of vendors who can return.

Philomena Wangari Kamau started selling soda in Uhuru Park in 2006 after leaving the hotel business. Her archive of trading licences and clearances to operate cover more than a decade.

"The oldest I could get," she says, showing a document from 2007. It shows that she paid a licence fee of KSh2,000 and a "clearance" of KSh1,000 that year, when she traded by a tree near the boathouse.

Wangari was so upset by the 2021 eviction that she joined a protest. In a television news clip uploaded to YouTube,



Rough trade: Philomena Wangari had a stall at Uhuru Park. She has struggled since it closed. Photo: Vincent Ng'ethe

she gives an emotional interview, her voice shaking. Like many others she did try setting up in Green Park but found she could not make enough to keep her daughter in college or buy medicine for her high blood pressure and diabetes.

She also could not keep up her rent of KSh10,000 (\$63) in Zimmerman, Nairobi and now she lives in Thika with her daughter, 40km out of Nairobi.

If Uhuru Park reopened to vendors, she would go back in a heartbeat. "If we are allowed to return, I'll go there and earn some money so my daughter can finish college." In the meantime, she spends her days working on the cause of Mau Mau fighters (her father was one) who lost their land in that resistance.

Mike Njoki rents a few horses every day from a stable, and herds them to a park for children to ride. Whether he sells a ride or not, he has to pay the stable.

He used to offer rides in Uhuru Park

but the eviction forced him to move to Green Park.

His operation is not just less profitable – Sunday, a good business day, now brings in as much as he made on a weekday in Uhuru Park – it's also very chaotic.

He has to keep a close eye on his horses, to keep them from the rubbish dumped there. "If it eats garbage you have to call the vet, which is another cost."

But the dump site just keeps growing. "The waste from Uhuru Park is dumped here, even the grass that's cut there."


Many customers take one look at the commotion, judge it unfit for children and walk away. "It's dusty and when it rains, it's muddy. When it's sunny, there's no shade. The wind blows garbage everywhere. They won't let their children play in the dirt."

To entice them in, he often has to agree to half price even though his going offer is 100 shillings for a ride that goes for five times as much in better parts of Nairobi. "All we earn here is bus fare," he says.

Making matters worse, the government has built an exit off the Nairobi express way into the bus terminus cutting off space and adding to the commotion. On good business days like Christmas, the chaos is overwhelming.

"You're in charge of an animal that may react to the commotion. So you have to handle the commotion, the horse and the client, and make sure there's no injury because you're earning a living. It's a hard time," he says.

Njoki is very frustrated that the city authorities won't commit to a timeline for letting vendors back into the park. "We just hear it's close." ■



Ruto's carbon dream is a nightmare for the people of the forest

Forced migration looms over the Ogiek people as Western conservationists and Middle Eastern carbon credit traders seize Kenya's forests

David Soler Crespo in Sasimwani

Peter Meikobi has been warned he shouldn't be here anymore. But he has nowhere else to go. In November, rangers burned down 200 households in Sasimwani, including his family home. Meikobi was not told why this was done. "They spoke the language of axe and fire."

Getting there involves careful planning and co-ordination to avoid the rangers in this part of the Mau forest in Kenya's south-west. *The Continent* joins him for the walk and, after about an hour, we get to his family home. His dad's house is shattered; his brother's burnt to ashes.

Minutes after our arrival, a forest ranger shows up and asks us to leave. The ask is polite, which surprises Meikobi.

There is of course a reason: "He's afraid of you because you're a muzungu [white person]. If you weren't here he would have beaten us out."

The Ogiek are a small hunter-gatherer community. The Kenyan government put their population at about 79,000 a decade ago. More recent estimates by rights organisation Amnesty International put the number at 20,000 – with 75% living in the Mau forest.

Last October, Kenyan President William Ruto ordered that "encroachers" be removed from the forest, to protect it because it is the biggest water catchment ecosystem in the country. "Those in the forest should get out immediately as we are putting up a fence. It is not a request."

When rangers used that order to burn

Ogiek homes, they defied two rulings of the African Court. One in 2017, which recognised Mau forest as Ogiek ancestral land, and another in 2022 that ordered the Kenyan government to pay reparations to the community for harming them in earlier evictions in 2009.

The carbon credits hustle

During the first Africa Climate Summit in September, Ruto made it clear that he sees climate change as a business opportunity. “We must see in green growth not just a climate imperative, but also a fountain of multibillion-dollar economic opportunities that Africa and the world is primed to capitalise on.”

The next month, Dubai-based firm Blue Carbon LLC said it had signed a carbon credits agreement with Kenya for “millions of hectares”. It is unclear if those include the Mau forest – the official document hasn’t been made public and neither party responded to questions. But Ruto issued his eviction three weeks before the Dubai firm’s announcement.

Alex Kisioi, a member of the Ogiek Peoples Development Programme, suspects their current eviction is linked to carbon credits. “We are not forest offenders, we are custodians. They accuse us because of the carbon credits.”

Founded by a member of the ruling United Arab Emirates royal family, Sheikh Ahmed Dalmook Al Maktoum, Blue Carbon has existed for barely a year and has no track record in conservation.

But it already controls an area larger than the United Kingdom, including a fifth of Zimbabwe, a tenth of Liberia and Zambia and large tracts of Tanzania, having sold the political class on its carbon credits business model.

It’s far from the only capitalist interest on indigenous lands. Sasimwani village is inside the 60,000 hectares claimed by Dutch firm IDH, which says it works with tea plantations to conserve the Mau forest.

Kisioi finds the idea of evicting the Ogiek to conserve the forest nonsensical. “We are the forest. It’s like taking fish from the water.” ■



In the firing line: Ogiek community members find their storehouse in ashes in Sasimwani Mau Forest in south-west Kenya. Photos: James Wakibia/SOPA Images/LightRocket via Getty Images

PHOTO ESSAY

The love caravan of Harare

Photos: John Wessels/AFP

By 2022, thanks to relentless inflation, the average Zimbabwean employee got the least bang for their buck of all the world's salaried workers. Inflation has continued to rise, hitting 34.8% in January. That makes spending on life events like weddings feel like a lavish self-indulgence. Enter Daphne Siwardi in her white-roofed caravan.

For more than a decade, Siwardi has run a bridal rental shop out of a

rusty old green caravan parked outside a Harare courthouse. Here, couples can rent wedding dresses, bouquets, decorations and even get a speedy make-up and hairdressing, right before heading into the magistrate's court for their nuptials.

On assignment for the AFP, John Wessels captured a day at the caravan as lovebirds rushed in for a dream wedding that wouldn't break the bank.



A selection of dresses Siwardi offers at her compact bridal gown rental station.



Top: Martha Gutsa chooses a wedding dress at Siwardi's caravan.
Bottom: A bridesmaid stands in front of a selection of bouquets on offer.



Top: A groom walks out of the caravan ready to join his wedding entourage.
Bottom: A bride gets ready to make things official.

How professional is your police?

We've reported here on how often Africans say police demand bribes, stop drivers without good reason, and use excessive force. Overall, how do people assess the professionalism of the police?

Based on 53,444 interviews in 39 countries, only about a third (32%) of Africans say the police in their countries "often" or "always" operate in a professional manner and respect the rights of all citizens. Another third (32%) say they "sometimes" conduct themselves with professionalism, and 34% say "rarely" or "never". The police do somewhat better at helping people: 54% of respondents who asked for police assistance during the past year say it was easy to get the help they needed.

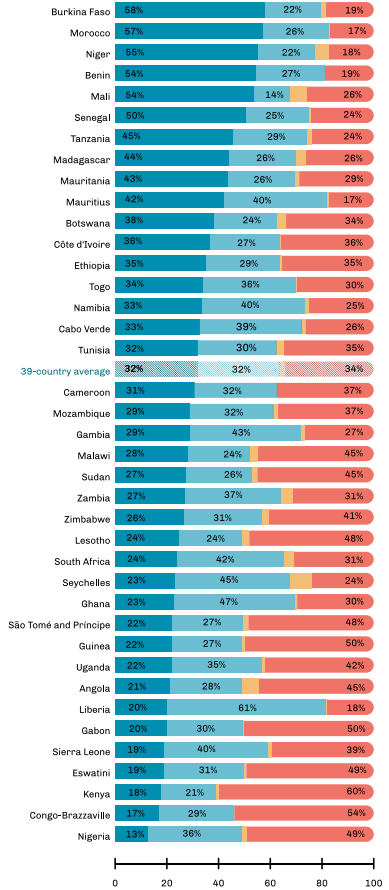
In just six countries did at least half of respondents think their police usually act professionally: Burkina Faso (58%), Morocco (57%), Niger (55%), Benin (54%), Mali (54%) and Senegal (50%).

Fewer than one in five respondents agree in Sierra Leone (19%), Eswatini (19%), Kenya (18%), Congo-Brazzaville (17%), and Nigeria (13%).

Meanwhile, Kenya stands out – with 60% of respondents who say professional police conduct is rare or unheard of. ■

Do police act professionally and respect citizens' rights? 39 African countries | 2021/23

● Often/Always ● Sometimes
● Don't know/Refused ● Rarely/Never



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.



Africa at Sundance: History in the making, and in the unmaking

The biggest films on African themes took dramatically different approaches

Wilfred Okiche

The pickings were especially slim for African films at the Sundance film festival this year.

The Battle for Laikipia (pictured above), which competed in the World Cinema Documentary category, was the only African-helmed title in the main competitions of Sundance 2024. While essentially American, Sundance is one of the most important launch pads for independent film. Seeing just one African film in its competitive categories was dispiriting compared with 2023, a banner year for African participation at the festival, where titles like *Mami Wata* and *Animalia* had splashy premieres and went on to win awards and global acclaim.

Laikipia's producer, Toni Kamau, won the festival's producer award for non-

fiction, a well-deserved nod for a film whose generous access to its subjects helps it go well beyond the climate change headlines. It overcomes a shaky start to weave a compelling narrative of the conflict between indigenous Samburu pastoralists in East Africa, whose customs do not necessarily recognise borders, and white ranchers of British descent, who erect fences to protect their economic investments and livelihood.

This conflict has been decades in the making, going back to the arrival of British colonisers and the land dispossession that followed. The transfer of power from colonialists to black elites during independence failed to address the land question, but it is a prolonged drought that brings things to a violent boil. There are no heroes or villains in this complex saga of historical resentments and intertwined

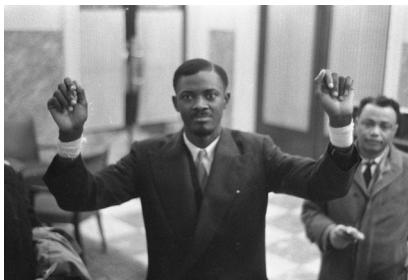
fates. Resolution demands a sustainable roadmap for the future but history (or a disregard for it) leaves the questions open.

Directors Daphne Matziaraki and Pete Murimi both have journalism backgrounds, and take care to remain neutral observers. While this is appreciated, one wonders if this approach best serves the history at play.

Johan Grimont's *Soundtrack to a Coup d'Etat* – which won a special jury award for cinematic innovation in the World Cinema Documentary Competition – departs from the neutral observer approach to interrogate a part of history many might prefer to be locked away. This highly inventive stunner melds history, politics and music into an intoxicating brew that details how the Belgian monarchy, the United States government and a pliant United Nations colluded to assassinate Patrice Lumumba, the first prime minister of the DRC.

Weaponising jazz, iconic African American musicians like Louis Armstrong, Dizzy Gillespie and Nina Simone were dispatched unwittingly to Africa (and Russia) as cultural decoys. They gave special concerts ostensibly to deflect attention while the CIA executed a coup whose repercussions are still traumatic in the DRC today.

This visual essay film comes at its objectives from diverse points of view using archival footage, home movies, official texts, as well as samples from Lumumba's fiery speeches. Belgian filmmaker Grimont threads these media together into a scattershot, non-linear but always fascinating whole,



B-Side: The Sundance jury hailed Johan Grimont's *Soundtrack to a Coup d'Etat*. Photos: Courtesy of The Sundance Institute

using jazz and rumba rhythms to drive home his points. There is no reaching for a balanced objectivity here even though Grimont notes the efforts of artists like Maya Angelou, Max Roach and Abbey Lincoln, who lent their voice to the protest movements. The film is audacious in its approach to form, taking inspiration from the free-wheeling energy of jazz.

In the Spotlight section, two films which had premiered previously at the Cannes film festival were presented to new audiences. Asmae El Moudir's *The Mother of All Lies* confronts family secrets and suppression of memory. With the assistance of co-operative relatives and despite facing resistance from her unyielding grandmother, El Moudir uses clay puppets and sets to revisit the trauma of the 1981 Casablanca bread riots.

And *à ma Gloria*, directed by Marie Amachoukeli, is a small but impeccable drama about the painful but necessary separation process between a six-year-old French child and her Cape Verdean nanny. ■

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

"The grass suffers when Elephants fight, but football fans love it."



Photo: World Monuments Fund

- 1_** Nelson Chamisa is an opposition politician in which country?
- 2_** Who served as the first elected deputy president of Kenya from 2013 to 2022?
- 3_** Which three countries announced their exit from Ecowas this week?
- 4_** What does the "S" in Ecowas stand for?
- 5_** Which country became the first African country to reach the men's world cup semi-finals in 2022?
- 6_** Which country's men's national team is nicknamed The Elephants?
- 7_** The pictured Historic City Centre is located in Libya's second largest city – which city is that?
- 8_** John Dramani Mahama is the former president of which country?
- 9_** The Red Sea, a seawater inlet of the Indian Ocean, lies between which two continents?
- 10_** Which Kenyan Rift Valley lake was formerly known as Lake Rudolf?

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

It's been a difficult week filled with goodbyes. Some of our leaders may be confused by the concept, so to explain further: "Goodbye" is what you say to people you love when you go abroad for healthcare, shopping trips, or a lovely little jaunt using taxpayers money. "So long" is what they say back to you when they remember how many decades you've been in office. "Good riddance" is another type of goodbye, for when you finally do step down.

This week we were obliged to bid a distinctly fonder "farewell" to Senegal as they exited the Africa Cup of Nations tournament, in what turned out to be their thrilling finish against hosts Côte d'Ivoire.

We have never hidden our fondness for the Senegalese team, particularly coach Aliou Cissé, and so the loss hit hard here at *Drift* HQ. Some healing has taken place after South Africa beat Morocco, but the wound remains fresh. However, we are not alone in grappling with our goodbyes.

The latest episode of *Keeping Up With The Coupdashians* dropped this week, as the military governments of Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mali announced they would be withdrawing from regional

bloc Ecowas. Assimi, Ibrahim and Abrourahmane, said they were, like, *so done here*, and accused the bloc of being under the influence of foreign powers and "a threat to its member states and populations". They also accused Ecowas of failing to provide assistance to all three countries in their fight against terrorism.

In response, Ecowas said the coup club's withdrawal was news to them, but if they needed someone to talk to, the bloc "remains committed to finding a negotiated solution to the political impasse".

All nice and diplomatic – until Nigeria, which currently chairs Ecowas, fired off a shot of its own, saying that it had actually already tried talking, but that "unelected leaders engage in

public posturing to deny their people the sovereign right to make fundamental choices over their freedom of movement, freedom to trade and freedom to choose their own leaders".

The Coupdashian drama does not stop there. Fifteen members of the European Union's Eucap-Sahel mission arrived in Niger, only to be told "bye bye" by the junta, as they were expelled after allegedly

Much ado over overdue adieus



CONTINENTAL DRIFT

Samira Sawlani

entering the country without telling authorities who they really were.

Someone familiar with goodbyes is the current holder of the Dora the Explorer Award for Globe-trotting African, Kenyan leader, William Ruto.

Cousin Billy has been awfully quiet on the matter of violence against women, despite the nationwide protests last weekend when thousands of Kenyan women took to the streets demanding that femicide be declared a national emergency. His deafening silence could perhaps be explained by the fact that he was out of earshot, finding himself in Rome, of all places, at the unveiling of Italy's grand plan to fix all of Africa.

He seemed especially taken by the plan's champion, Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, who pledged *billions* for projects in Africa (projects also benefiting Italy's state oil and gas companies, we might add, and bound to add plenty of fossil fuel to the climate trash fires they appear intent on burning). The idea here, to paraphrase Meloni, is to give African states just enough money to create just enough jobs to lift just enough people out of poverty and discourage them from coming over to Italy to make all her racist right-wing voters uncomfortable.

Slightly less enchanted than Ruto, AU Commission chair Moussa Faki Mahamat said that while the continent was willing to discuss the plan, "we would have liked to have been consulted *before*" its unveiling.

Meanwhile, it's now been a week since the International Court of Justice delivered its ruling on the emergency



Ambush! Italy's PM Giorgia Meloni has a fun surprise for AU Commission chair Moussa Faki Mahamat. Photo: AFP

measures requested by South Africa in its case against Israel. It ordered Israel to prevent acts of genocide, punish incitement to genocide, and enable the provisions of humanitarian assistance.

One week on, the number of these orders Israel has acted on is zero. The only significant development is that Israel's western allies have cut funding to the UN organisation providing aid to Palestinians.

This week South Africa's foreign affairs minister, Naledi Pandor, said her country "will continue to do everything within its power to preserve the existence of the Palestinian people as a group, to end all acts of apartheid and genocide against the Palestinian people, and to walk with them towards the realisation of their collective right to self determination".

Here at *Drift* we're not exactly in the business of praising politicians, but that Naledi Pandor? That there is a lady who stands on business. ■

Nelson Chamisa's exit is more than just a resignation

Until last week, Zimbabwe's opposition was at a 'unite or die' precipice. Nelson Chamisa's resignation might have pushed it off the cliff.

Edson Ziso

When Nelson Chamisa emerged as Zimbabwe's main opposition leader after the demise of Morgan Tsvangirai, his youthful charisma helped secure a credible performance in the 2018 and 2023 elections.

But the old guard who formed the Movement for Democratic Change with Tsvangirai in 1999 felt disrespected, believing in an age-based hierarchy. It didn't help that Chamisa's succession did not follow due process, and he fell out with Tsvangirai's deputy, Thokozani Khuphe.

Further splits in the MDC, and a vicious battle for the party's name and funds, led to Chamisa creating the Citizens Coalition for Change in 2022. Fearing infiltration, he abandoned traditional party structures, instead building a "people's movement" under his leadership. But by concentrating power on himself lieutenants such as Fadzayi Mahere, Amos Chibaya and Gift Siziba, Chamisa made it more difficult to rebuild relations with established figures like Tendai Biti and Welshman Ncube.

The absence of clear party structures also left CCC vulnerable to confusion

about who was in charge. This became painfully clear when Sengezo Tshabangu – a shadowy figure claiming to be a founding MDC member – announced he was the CCC secretary-general, then targeted elected CCC MPs and councillors, "recalling" them on the spurious claim their nominations hadn't followed procedure. Tshabangu is believed to be working for the Zanu-PF government, which facilitated recalls in Parliament and the courts. And rumours persist that his actions are supported by former MDC leaders who have a score to settle.

If the plan was to force Chamisa out, it succeeded when he resigned on 25 January, with no clear statement about his future. The vacuum this generated has triggered a damaging succession battle. With rivals like Tshabangu, Promise Mkwanziri and Jameson Timba competing for dominance, the credibility and cohesion of the opposition could hardly be lower. ■

Edson Ziso is a lecturer in the department of politics & international relations at the University of Adelaide. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa



THE BIG PICTURE

Coast is clear: Côte d'Ivoire supporters celebrate in Korhogo after the Elephants beat Senegal in their group's round of 16 clash last week. Afcon 2024 is shaping up to be the underdog's tournament – not one of Fifa's five top-ranked teams in Africa has made it to the quarterfinals.

Photo: Fadel Senna/AFP



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