

The Continent

Nigeria's
great
shea leak





COVER: Shea is far more important than the tub of body butter on a supermarket shelf might suggest. Most people encounter it as a cosmetic ingredient, but the world's largest buyer of shea is the chocolate industry. Its kernels are crushed and refined into shea stearin, a vegetable fat used as cocoa-butter equivalents. This helps to manage the cost of cocoa butter in chocolate, biscuits, and other confectionery – making shea an unlikely but strategic global commodity. It grows almost exclusively across a belt of West and Central Africa, where millions of mostly women collectors gather and sell the nuts. Yet its highest returns are in refining, blending, and chocolate manufacturing, largely the preserve of Europe, North America and Asia. Nigeria's bid to keep more of that value at home has turned a humble rural nut into a test case for who profits from Africa's "minor" crops. Hint: it's not the farmers.

Inside

- 7 North Africa:** Algeria accuses 61 Moroccans of planning acts of sabotage
- 9 DRC:** Former prez Joseph Kabila launches military outfit – officially this time
- 17 Zimbabwe:** Toxic asbestos is okay for home use but banned in exports
- 19 Photos:** Street Photography Africa captures city life, in motion
- 24 Kenya:** Big Tech spreads its grubby tentacles all the way to the top
- 27 Review:** This is why you can't use an AI tool to detect AI-generated writing



Africans of the Year:

It's that time of the year when we work on finding Africans doing the coolest and most important things. This year, we're inviting you, our readers, to nominate someone you think is worthy. You can do so by filling this simple and painless [form](#).

THE WEEK IN BRIEF

MAURITIUS

Schools shut, curfew in place amid protests

Police have imposed a curfew to quell Mauritius's most serious protests in decades. Demonstrations over water shortages and living costs that began last week erupted into violence last Friday when police shot and wounded a woman at a roadblock. The education ministry closed schools on Tuesday and said it would issue a statement on their reopening. At least 94 people, including 16 minors, have been arrested. They face potential prosecution under anti-terrorism laws.

ETHIOPIA

The battle of Adwa that didn't happen

Ethiopian federal forces entered Adwa in northern Tigray unopposed on Sunday after Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) fighters withdrew, *AFP* reports. This follows federal advances into Mekelle and Adigrat as fighting escalates in the region. Adwa is just 40km from Eritrea, raising the stakes amid the breakdown of relations with Asmara, which Addis Ababa accuses of cross-border incursions and backing rebels in Tigray. Eritrea strongly denies the allegations.



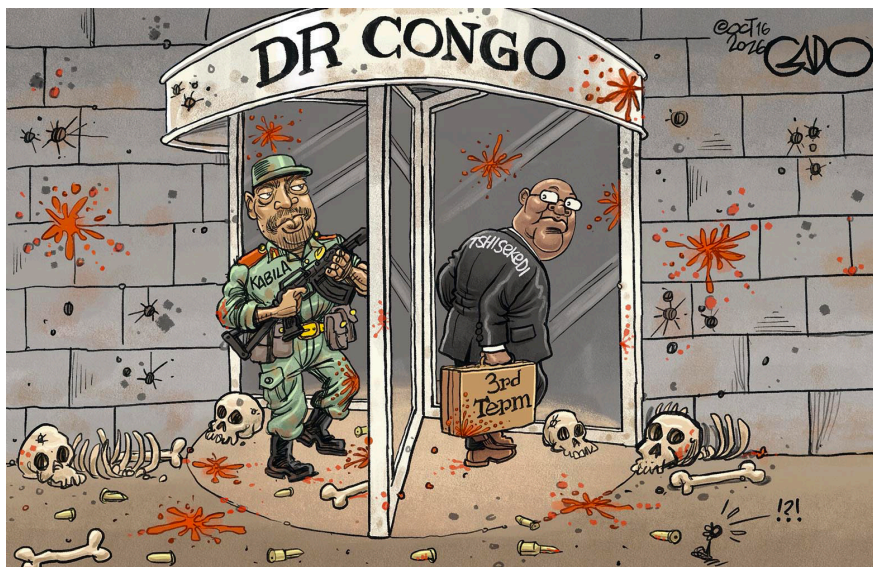
PHOTO: SIMON MAINA/AFP

Tanks for nothing: Kenya raised petrol and diesel prices by more than 4.5% this week.

KENYA

It's called a fuel hike 'cos now we gotta walk

Kenya's energy regulator raised the retail prices of petrol (up 6%) and diesel (up 4.5%) on Wednesday, citing higher import costs linked to the conflict in the Middle East. The country's transport unions say they will reluctantly increase fares up to 10% as they mull a countrywide transport strike. Union leaders accuse President William Ruto of going back on a deal he made back in May to freeze diesel price hikes that ended a similar strike. The latest price surges come as Kenyans grapple with a severe cost-of-living crisis, the *Daily Nation* reports.



FORMULA 1

Rwanda clinches historic F1 Grand Prix

Formula 1 is heading to Rwanda “from the early 2030s” – Africa’s first Grand Prix since 1993 in South Africa. That year, both countries were in the final months of a historic era: Rwanda, reeling from a civil war; South Africa finalising talks to end apartheid. Today, Rwanda’s centralised government has outmanoeuvred South Africa’s fractured democratic bidding process. Critics call the deal “sportswashing”, that distracts from Rwanda’s restrictions on political freedom. World motorsport boss Mohammed Ben Sulayem said he “honestly does not care” about those accusations.

NIGERIA

Tailor’s quest to be best is more than its seams

A Nigerian tailor completed a 120-hour, non-stop sewing marathon on Monday in a bid to set a new Guinness World Record, *TRT* reports. Abdulkadir Hassan Basari used his five-day challenge to sew school uniforms for children. Guinness World Records is expected to review and verify the attempt before making it official. Ever since Hilda Baci’s 2023 cooking marathon, breaking Guinness records has become something of a national pursuit in Nigeria – the country ranks seventh globally by applicant volume. The current sewing record was set in 2025 by yet another Nigerian.

GUINEA-BISSAU

Bissau saves its babies from RFK Jr's bizarre plot

Anti-vaxxer US health secretary Robert F Kennedy Jr has been championing a study meant to track side effects of the hepatitis B vaccine. The trial was to be conducted in Guinea-Bissau by Danish researchers, and would have denied the vaccine to test infants for six weeks – risking lifelong complications or liver cancer from exposure to the disease. Guinea-Bissau's health minister now denies approving the trial, saying officials were “surprised” by reports saying it had been greenlit. Experts called the plan “horribly unethical and cruel”, The *Guardian* reports.

BURKINA FASO

Traoré is now in a league he can own

Last week, junta leader Ibrahim Traoré threatened to take over Burkinabè football after a humiliating 7-0 defeat to Argentina. Now he has launched a new championship dubbed the “Sovereignty League”, featuring 20 teams from across the country. Players have been promised \$300 monthly salaries. Regional governors may oversee its organisation, putting football under political control. It's not clear how the new league will fit with the Burkinabè Football Federation, whose independence from government interference is protected by Fifa rules.



PHOTO: AMOS GUMULIRA/AFP

Hook or by crook: Shepherd Bushiri at a court in South Africa in November 2020.

MALAWI

Court rubberstamps Shepherd Bushiri's life on the lam

Malawi's high court has overturned an order extraditing controversial prosperity preacher Shepherd Bushiri and his wife to South Africa, citing “serious legal and procedural flaws”, *News24* reports. The couple fled South Africa in 2020 while on bail. They face fraud, theft and money laundering charges. A Malawian court approved their extradition in March 2025, but Bushiri successfully appealed, challenging the evidence and its reliance on anonymous witnesses. Before fleeing, Bushiri had built one of the continent's largest and most influential Pentecostal churches, using South Africa as his base.



Friends like these: Somaliland celebrates Trump's shout-out during a rally this week.

SOMALILAND

Status update incoming?

United States President Donald Trump has repeatedly targeted Minnesota's Somali immigrant community and Congresswoman Ilhan Omar. He has cited Somalia's instability in his anti-immigration rhetoric and accused Omar of immigration fraud. But at a rally this week, he praised Somaliland as an "entirely separate" entity. Those remarks sparked celebrations in Somaliland's capital Hargeisa, *AFP* reports. Somaliland, which declared independence from Somalia in 1991, has been formally recognised only by Israel. Seems that might change soon.

JOINING the DOTS

CHRISTINE MUNGAI

UGANDA IS on course to begin commercial oil production in June 2027, its national oil company says.

This is a full 20 years after its discovery of crude. The world has largely exhausted its "easy oil", making new projects slower and more complex to set up and operate. But Uganda's wait is exceptional. Ghana's took three years from discovery in 2007 to production, Guyana's offshore boom took four years, and even complex deepwater projects typically take seven to 10

years. Uganda's delays reflect political choices, including President Yoweri Museveni's insistence on a domestic refinery, coupled with environmental pushback and financing difficulties. But another political calculation may be at play. After more than four decades in power, Museveni faces an unresolved succession question just as Uganda approaches a potentially enormous oil windfall. Some analysts have suggested that this prospect has complicated his willingness to hand over power. Why step aside now, only for a Muhoozi-come-lately to inherit – and enjoy – the wealth, patronage, and political influence that oil will bring? ■

NEWS

NORTH AFRICA

‘Genuine cold war’ between Morocco and Algeria heats up

Sixty-one Moroccans have been arrested in western Algeria on suspicion of sabotage. Experts say the prospects for de-escalation between the two countries are ‘very remote’.

MADJID S. IN ALGIERS

ALGERIA has arrested 61 Moroccans on suspicion of planning acts of sabotage. The Algerian General Directorate of National Security confirmed the arrest this week, saying there was an “international Moroccan criminal network” that aimed to undermine public security and order in the country.

The agency claimed the suspects flew from Morocco to Tunisia before crossing into Algeria via remote, mountainous forest trails.

Relations between the neighbouring countries have been tense since October 1963, when Morocco fought the Sand

War against Algeria to claim the border provinces of Tindouf and Béchar.

The countries’ land borders were closed in 1994. Diplomatic relations were severed in 2021 after Washington recognised Morocco’s claim to sovereignty over Western Sahara in exchange for Morocco normalising relations with Israel.

“From Algeria’s perspective, Rabat is trying to settle the Sahara issue through external sponsors, instead of resorting to a referendum [on the status of Western Sahara],” said political analyst Akram Khariief. “Algeria’s vision of the Maghreb is a region that hosts no foreign military bases and is not subject to any party’s tutelage.”

Analyst and researcher Raouf Farrah believes the prospects for de-escalation are “very remote at this stage” because both sides have co-ordinated hostile media campaigns and military shows of force against each other.

“We are facing a genuine cold war between Algeria and Morocco, in which the security, military, diplomatic, and geopolitical dimensions overlap,” Farrah told *The Continent*.

The African Union has tried multiple times to mediate, without success. Instead, both countries have attempted to take control of the institution by routinely going head-to-head for leadership roles within the bloc. ■

DJIBOUTI

Scores of lives lost as shipwreck dooms migrants' desperate dream

The route to the Gulf via Yemen remains popular – despite its enduring peril.

YUSUF OMOTAYO

A SHIPWRECK off the coast of Djibouti has led to the death of 109 migrants. Some 116 others are missing in what the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) says is one of the deadliest incidents in the Eastern Migration Route.

The boat was carrying 305 people from Ethiopia on its way to Yemen last week when it capsized near Guhere, north of Obock. At least 80 people survived the shipwreck.

The ongoing violence in Yemen has not deterred economic migrants from attempting to reach there to connect to Gulf countries, even as Yemenis are fleeing to Djibouti because of Houthi attacks.

More than 20,000 people have left Ethiopia for Djibouti since September, according to IOM reporting.

“A journey that could involve drowning in the Red Sea or torture by human traffickers in Yemen is seen [by migrants] as less risky than remaining in their homeland,” said Zecharias Zelalem, a research fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations. ■



Restless wave: Rescue workers in protective suits prepare to recover a body on a beach near Guhere, Djibouti.

PHOTO: GUIRREH MOUMIN

DRC

Kabila takes up arms – and shatters peace

The former president has launched a rebel coalition that vows to topple the government – using force, if necessary.

AJABU ADOLPHE IN GOMA

FORMER Democratic Republic of the Congo president Joseph Kabila launched and took command of a new political-military rebel coalition on Monday, the Front pour la Refondation de la Nation.

Kabila, flanked by March 23 Movement (M23) rebel leaders, said his armed resistance aimed to topple President Felix Tshisekedi's administration "by any means necessary, including force".

Kinshasa has been battling for control of its eastern provinces. In early 2025, M23 took control of Goma and Bukavu.

Kabila's pronouncement has shattered the fragile peace brought by the 2025 Washington Accord and Doha Peace Process, negotiated by the US and Qatar respectively.

Goma resident Kitoko Ansima said he feared the political and security situation

will deteriorate with the former president entering the fray.

"After enduring so much for so long, we were finally hoping to breathe a sigh of peace. Now the rhetoric of war is intensifying with Kabila," he said. "We are asking for peace so we may find respite from our suffering."

Kabila ruled the DRC for 18 years before stepping down in 2019. He fell out with Tshisekedi in 2023 and was sentenced to death in absentia for treason and war crimes for allegedly backing M23. Kabila has maintained the charges were a political witch hunt.

International relations analyst Koko Buroko described Kabila's resort to arms as "a significant turning point" in DRC's fragile road to peace, and called for dialogue.

"The country risks sinking deep into a civil war that will drag on for some time," he told *The Continent*. ■



Rebel rouser: Joseph Kabila was the fourth president of the DRC, from 2001 to 2019.

Reading is resistance



Get *The Continent* delivered for free every week.
Message +27 73 805 6068 on [WhatsApp](#), [Signal](#) and [Telegram](#), or email
read@thecontinent.org and send “Subscribe”

THE TEAM

Christine Mungai Editor-in-Chief
Athandiwe Saba Editor at large
Refiloe Seiboko Production Editor
Matthew du Plessis Managing Editor
Lisa Muchangi Communities Lead
Yusuf Omotayo Commissioning Editor
Yemsrach Yetneberk Illustrator

Paul Botes Photo Editor
Sipho Kings Publisher
Dumi Sithole Distribution
Evania Chiza Finance
Gado Cartoonist
Ashleigh Swaile Designer
Wynona Mutisi Illustrator

OUR PARTNERS

The Continent has received support from the following institutions: 11th Hour Project, African Climate Foundation, Africa No Filter, African Union, Amplify SA, Ford Foundation, Fred Foundation, GiZ, Luminare, National Endowment for Democracy, Mott Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Pulitzer Centre and the Swiss Philanthropy Partners.

EGYPT-SUDAN

Artisanal gold miners pushed to the edge – and slain

Witnesses say aircraft ordered miners to leave before dropping bombs. Most of those killed were Sudanese refugees.

EISA DAFALLAH

ABOUT 80 mineworkers were killed last week when war planes bombed the al-Uqaidat mine in Sudan's Red Sea state. Many more are missing. Witnesses say the aircraft carried Egyptian flags, although Cairo has neither confirmed nor denied carrying out the attack.

On Monday the Egyptian military released a statement saying it is continuing a campaign against illegal gold mining in its Eastern Desert. According to witnesses, aircraft dropped leaflets ordering miners to leave before the bombing.

The operation is intended to protect Egypt's borders and natural resources. But the men working at the al-Uqaidat mine say they were in Sudan.

Lazim Haroun says the mine lies about 20km inside Sudanese territory. He saw between three and five warplanes drop at least nine heavy bombs on an area in which more than 12,000 people were digging for gold.

It was the second attack on the site.

An earlier strike in June killed more than 20 miners.

The latest bombing left the surrounding hills scattered with survivors searching for friends and relatives. About 70 wounded men were taken to al-Ansari, a nearby market town. Hundreds of men fled into the mountains with little food or water.

Most of the dead were buried in the nearby hills by the men who had worked alongside them. Local community members spent the first two days carrying the wounded in their vehicles. On the third day, they returned to help survivors get care.

Haroun's brother Ayman was missing for three days before he was found. Two of Haroun's friends, Adam Idris and Yacoub Mursal, were among the dead, he told *The Continent*.

A refuge no more

For many of these mineworkers, the goldfields have been a refuge from Sudan's civil war. Most mineworkers in the area come from Darfur, Kordofan,

Gedaref, and Kassala.

Haroun's family left North Darfur in September 2025, before the fall of El-Fasher, and now rents a house in Omdurman. He and Ayman went to the goldfields to support the family.

Al-Numan Hussein has worked in the mines for three years. He says most of the mineworkers are young men who have nowhere else to go. War has taken their homes and the collapse of their livelihoods has left them with few ways to earn money.

Egypt has controlled the disputed Halaib triangle, which Sudan claims as part of its Red Sea state, since 1995. This was after it accused Khartoum of involvement in an attempt to assassinate then-president Hosni Mubarak.

Sudan's Sovereignty Council has appointed prosecutors, judicial officials, and security officers to investigate the latest bombing.

The tension between Egypt and Sudan has already reached beyond the border

Darfur governor Minni Minnawi also met Egypt's ambassador in Port Sudan. He said Cairo expressed regret, offered condolences, and promised to help to establish what happened. Minnawi urged both sides to show restraint.

The tension has already reached beyond the border. In a Khartoum market, a Sudanese gunman shot dead two Egyptian truck drivers and wounded a third. Police arrested a suspect and



PHOTO: AHMED ALTAIEB ABO BTESAM

Murdered: Bodies of Sudanese miners wrapped in makeshift shrouds at the al-Uqaidat goldfields.

described the shooting as an isolated criminal act. They said they were still investigating the motive.

For families waiting for news from the mines, the diplomatic exchanges offer little comfort. Hundreds of people have posted appeals asking survivors to help to locate missing relatives.

Mubarak Issa Ibrahim Ishaq travelled to the goldfields from Nertiti in Central Darfur. His family has heard nothing from him since the bombing. His brother Hasabu is asking anyone in the area to tell them whether Ishaq is alive or dead.

Safiya Abakar is also searching for her younger brother Mahmoud Abakar Saleh in the area.

"The hardest part is that my mother asks me every day: 'Where is Mahmoud?' And I have no answer," she said. "I stand there helpless and broken. I can't reassure her and I can't bear her pain." ■

This story was produced in collaboration with Egab



PHOTO: AUBERGE TIVITA

FEATURE

The great shea escape

Shea trees grow along a vast belt, from Senegal to Ethiopia. Africa is their home. For centuries, their red and brown nuts have been essential for food and cosmetics. Now they are a cheap ingredient for chocolate. In a dynamic played out across the continent, tonnes of raw nuts are exported before overseas manufacturers extract their value and make the real profit. To try to retain value locally, Nigeria banned raw shea exports last year. That backfired, causing local prices to crash while fuelling a lucrative grey market across West Africa that allows overseas manufacturers to still get their cheap shea nuts.

DAMILOLA AYENI IN LAGOS

IYA IBEJI IS a small-scale gatherer of shea nuts based in Ilesha, Osun State, in southwest Nigeria. In August 2025, the government announced a ban on raw shea-nut exports in an aggressive bid to force local value addition.

Iya Ibeji's margins crashed by nearly a third and haven't recovered. A standard measuring bowl dropped from 18,000 naira (\$13) to 11,000 naira (\$8).

A bag holds 30 bowls, each weighing about 13kg. For a woman handling 10 or 20 bags, "you can imagine the loss", she told *The Continent*.

Shea-nut farming is primarily women's business in Nigeria and elsewhere in West Africa. Women farmers walk long

distances to gather fallen shea fruit from trees and then spend days boiling, sun-drying, and manually cracking the fruit to expose the oil-rich nut inside.

That labour gets a woman half of what foreign buyers will later pay for nuts.

Although Nigeria produces 40% of the world's shea supply, it lacks the processing capacity to capture that value locally. Haruna Abubakar, chair of the Baruten branch of the All Farmers Association of Nigeria, told *The Continent* there's been little evidence of the state investment needed for export processing. That investment would be a core part of any trade ban working.

Cross-border aggregators, traders, and processors have stepped in with access to foreign currency and export markets.



Butter nut: A Nigerian farmer sorts her shea nuts for sale to larger buyers. PHOTO: SHEA NIGERIA



Too shea: A vendor sells shea butter at a stall in Korhogo, Côte d'Ivoire. PHOTO: FADEL SENNA/AFP

This has meant more nuts on a global market that can then pay less for them.

Officials estimate more than 90,000 tonnes, or roughly a quarter of the crop, leaves Nigeria informally each year. Before the ban, this was mostly through a long-standing informal cross-border trade. In many cases, it was not necessarily criminal, although it bypassed official channels and taxes.

The ban has changed that, creating an incentive for smuggling the nuts. That smuggling thrives openly on social media. On Facebook groups seen by *The Continent*, sellers list consignments far below official regional rates, routing them through Benin and Burkina Faso to Ghanaian ports. A Ghanaian buyer told *The Continent* that border officials can be “sorted” for “something small”.

Foreign buyers use shea as a

substitute for cocoa butter in chocolate manufacturing, with EU rules allowing it to comprise 5% of the finished product. A cheaper Nigerian nut means cheaper input for European and Asian chocolate makers and confectionery suppliers.

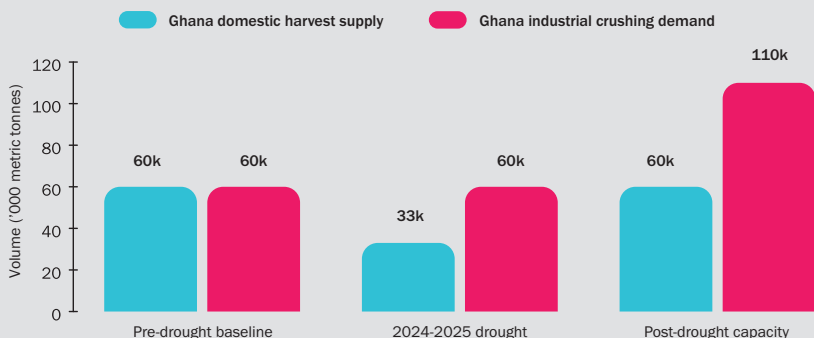
Regional arbitrage

Nigeria is not alone in its export ban: Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, and Togo have also restricted raw shea-nut exports.

Burkina Faso has pursued a more conditional model – reopening exports only under controls that require exporters to allocate a share of volumes to domestic processors, and then pay an export levy.

But each country has made its own unilateral interventions, rather than working to formulate and follow a regional industrial policy.

Ghana's shea supply vs industrial demand



Source: Tridge, industry data and author's calculations.

That has allowed smuggling to proliferate.

Official Nigerian shea exports fell nearly 9% in the year after the August 2025 ban. Benin recorded a 25% rise in shea-export transactions over the same period and Ghana's rose 19%.

The pattern is consistent. Shea nuts that once left Nigeria through formal channels now cross land borders informally, then enter regional supply chains through Benin, Togo, Burkina Faso, and Ghana.

Ghana's numbers are particularly difficult to reconcile with its domestic harvest. This is estimated at about 60,000 tonnes a year, whereas the country's crushing capacity is 120,000 tonnes. Climate shocks in 2024-25 cut yields further and pushed local prices up 140%.

Yet trade data show simultaneous growth in raw-nut exports and processing in Ghana – strongly

suggesting that the country's mills are being fed by nuts that have been moved across borders.

By one estimate, European buyers, particularly in The Netherlands and Germany, rerouted procurement of the nuts toward Ghana, Burkina Faso, and Mali after the Nigerian ban.

These buyers are paying premium spot prices of as much as \$1,330 per tonne on the international open market. By contrast Iya Ibeji, the small-scale gatherer in Nigeria's Osun State, gets half that when she sells her shea nuts.

The result is an unintended subsidy: Nigerian collectors receive less, while processors and traders beyond Nigeria's borders capture the margin.

The ban was meant to change that. Instead, it may have made raw Nigerian shea nuts far cheaper, with the women who collect them paying dearly for that drop in price. ■

FEATURE

Banned abroad, safe for home

Manufacturers in Zimbabwe produce asbestos-free roofing materials for export, but asbestos-sheet roofing is pushed as a safe, affordable material for domestic housing. The World Health Organisation says there *is* no safe level.



PHOTO: TATENDA CHITAGU / CONFRONTPOWER.ORG

Cut a lung story short: Asbestos dust coats the ash-grey dunes of the Zvishavane tailings in Zimbabwe.

LINDA MUJURU IN HARARE

IN SOUTHLEA Park, one of Harare's fastest-growing high-density suburbs, builders have completed the roof of a new family home using grey fibre-cement sheets.

They are the go-to affordable roofing material, but each sheet contains chrysotile asbestos. It is banned in more

than 60 countries because of its links to diseases like cancer, mesothelioma, and asbestosis.

Microscopic asbestos fibres become permanently trapped in the body when inhaled. Blue and brown asbestos are considered to pose severe health risks. But Zimbabwean government officials and construction industry leaders argue that white or chrysotile asbestos

can be used safely if “controlled”.

The World Health Organisation and the International Agency for Research on Cancer disagree, classifying all types of asbestos as Group 1 human carcinogens.

Zimbabwe holds the largest chrysotile asbestos reserves in Africa. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, its asbestos industry generated more than \$40-million.

The largest mines – Shabanie and Mashava – shut in 2010. Zimbabwe now relies on importing raw chrysotile asbestos, which is processed domestically.

Turnall Holdings, the country’s largest manufacturer of fibre-cement roofing sheets, has produced asbestos cement materials that have been used in homes and public infrastructure across Zimbabwe for decades.

Its 2025 annual report said it was investing in asbestos-free product lines because of international opposition, while continuing to manufacture chrysotile products “where legislation still permits their use”.

This exposes a striking contradiction: Turnall has produced asbestos-free products for export since 2008, yet continues to manufacture asbestos roofing for the domestic market.

Responding to *The Continent*, Turnall defended its chrysotile production, arguing the distinction between asbestos fibres is scientifically important.

The company stated it neither imports nor uses blue or brown asbestos. Chrysotile accounts for 7.9% of its finished fibre-cement products and

about 53% of its current range contains the material.

The biggest casualties of asbestos are factory workers, who are at high risk of inhaling the fibre, according to Dr Persistence Machingauta. He noted that prolonged exposure can lead to diseases such as lung cancer and, ultimately, prove fatal.

Machingauta says most workers do not know the risks of asbestos exposure.

“I have met and attended to patients who had lung cancer due to asbestos exposure,” he told *The Continent*. “If you are using appropriate masks, the risk is reduced, but most don’t use them.”

Taurai*, a former Turnall employee who worked at the company for more than 20 years, said he was not aware of any health risks. “I always thought that as long as I used protective clothing [eye protection, gloves, coveralls and hard hats], I was completely safe,” he said.

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry says the long latency period contributes to lack of awareness of the risk. It might take up to 40 years for an exposed person to manifest related diseases.

Blessing Nhende, president of the Cement, Lime and Allied Workers Union of Zimbabwe said the union is pushing for safer alternatives. But some asbestos-industry workers believe the campaign will harm their livelihood. ■

*Name shortened for fear of victimisation.

This story was produced in collaboration with *Confront*

PHOTO ESSAY



Untitled

SARAH WAISWA, ABIDJAN, COTE D'IVOIRE, 2024



Music Artist Famas for Poplin Project

NUITS BALNEAIRES, TREICHVILLE, COTE D'IVOIRE, 2023

Us, in motion

HOW do we see and think of the places we call home? Curators Nadine Barth and Azu Nwagbogu commissioned 33 photographers to capture scenes from African cities to explore this question. The resulting book – *Street Photography Africa* – will be published later this month. The cities represented are

Ouidah, Benin; Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire; Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; Accra and Ho, Ghana; Al Hoceima and Casablanca, Morocco; Abuja and Lagos, Nigeria; Cape Town, Johannesburg and Soweto, South Africa; Dakar, Senegal; Lomé, Togo; and Kampala, Uganda. Here is a selection of photos shared with *The Continent*. ■



Child's Play from the series *Portrait of a City*

CALEB PRAH, KUMASI, GHANA, 2023



More or Less Magazine

KRISTIN-LEE MOOLMAN, DAKAR, SENEGAL, 2023



We Dey Road Dey Come

KOTHEGRAPHER, WUSE ABUJA, NIGERIA, 2024



Old Wall, A Balancing Act

KOTHEGRAPHER, GWAGWALADA FCT, ABUJA, NIGERIA, 2024



Ego Death, a Masked Skater Crossing the Street

SHAWN HOUNKPATIN, COLONOU, BENIN, 2022



Lagos in Motion

SALAKO ADEDOLAPO, BERGER, LAGOS, NIGERIA, 2025



From the series *Marché 100 Francs*

NAETT MBAYE, DAKAR, SENEGAL, 2024



Before the World Changes Us

UNAVAILABLE PHOTOGRAPHER, LAGOS, NIGERIA, 2025



Daniel

JUDE LARTEY, ACCRA, GHANA, 2024



Yellow Blue Car Rapide

ALEXANDRE GANDAHO, DAKAR, SENEGAL, 2023

DATA

Up in alms

WE'VE PREVIOUSLY reported that lived poverty has surged across Africa over the past decade (see Issue #190). This International Day for the Eradication of Poverty on 17 October, we're following up on that theme to see how often Africans turn to others to make ends meet.

Across 38 countries, almost half (47%) of citizens say they requested financial assistance from family members over the past year, including 22% who did so "several times", and 8% who did so "often".

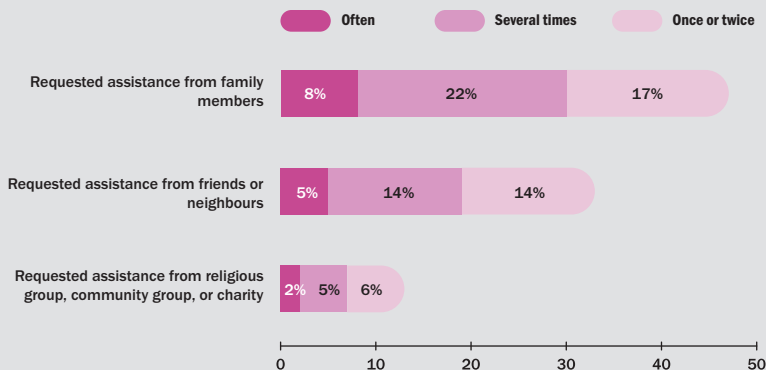
One in three (33%) approached a friend or neighbour and one in eight (12%) sought help from a religious, community, or charitable organisation.

A sizeable majority (57%) requested assistance from at least one of these three sources.

About seven in 10 reached out for help in Namibia (73%), Zimbabwe (71%), Guinea (70%), Madagascar (70%), and Uganda (70%). But even in the continent's wealthiest countries, about a quarter asked for contributions (25% of Mauritians and 23% of Seychellois).

Deprivation drives need: about two thirds of people experiencing moderate (65%) or high (69%) levels of lived poverty asked for help, compared to 21% of people experiencing no lived poverty. ■

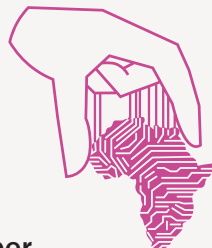
Requested assistance | 38 African countries | 2024/2025



This story was made possible with support from the Pulitzer Center and forms part of the Africa leg of Big Tech's Invisible Hand, a cross-border collaborative investigation led by Brazilian news organisation Agência Pública and the Centro Latinoamericano de Investigación Periodística.

FEATURE

Inside Kenya's hidden deals with Big Tech



Global technology companies, including Meta, Microsoft, and Amazon, have been moving deeper into the Kenyan state. *The Continent* found at least 12 engagements since 2023. But the agreements, negotiations, and oversight remain largely concealed from the public.

**ATHANDIWE SABA, ANGELA CHUKUNZIRA
AND MONICA ATIENO**

WHEN an outsourcing company contracted by Meta was sued in Kenya, it took its problem to the Kenyan president.

The dispute began in May 2022, when former Facebook content moderator Daniel Motaung sued Sama – the company Meta outsourced for content moderation. The case was about moderators' working conditions, which involved them repeatedly viewing deeply disturbing material.

Another 43 moderators brought a case in March 2023. They argued that Meta, which benefited from and controlled aspects of their work, should also be held responsible.

Meta fought to remove itself from the litigation, arguing, among other points, that Kenyan courts did not have jurisdiction over the foreign company. In September 2024, the court of appeal rejected that argument.

Then, in December 2024 at a town hall meeting, President William Ruto publicly said Sama had approached him about its legal troubles.

"Now I can report to you [Sama] that we have changed the law," he said, as reported in *Time Magazine*. "Nobody will take you to court again on any matter."

In August this year, Kenya's National Assembly approved changes to the Business Laws (Amendment) Bill, which would require companies like Sama to take responsibility for workers'

employment claims, even when another company benefits from their work.

These changes, however, don't necessarily benefit Sama. Instead they absolve Meta – or any other company that outsources some of its functions – of any legal responsibility. The amendments now await Ruto's signature.

The workers tried to block the changes in court, but in June the high court declined to intervene. Meanwhile, their legal battle against Meta continued. On 29 September, the employment and labour relations court gave Meta and other companies 21 days to respond to the lawsuit, with further directions scheduled for November.

Despite this progress, former content moderator James Oyange believes the government has sided with the technology companies.

"We are on our own. It is the responsibility of the government to protect us, but they are taking Big Tech's side," he told *The Continent*. It means the companies can do what they want."

A bigger trend

The Sama case is one part of a much wider relationship between Kenya's government and global technology companies. *The Continent* identified at least 12 publicly documented meetings, agreements, regulatory engagements, and partnerships between the Kenyan government and Microsoft, Google, Amazon, TikTok, and Starlink since 2023.

It is evident the major technology companies are moving deeper into public services, infrastructure, and policymaking – often through agreements that are not public. At the same time, laws and policies are being developed that can make it easier for these companies to operate.

What is more difficult to establish is who negotiated the arrangements, what Kenya agreed to, and who is checking whether they serve the public interest.

More than a dozen opposition representatives were approached by *The Continent*, including members of parliamentary committees responsible



Black lives, Meta:
Legal counsel
for 43 former
Facebook content
moderators follow
proceedings during
a virtual pre-trial
consultation with
a judge and Meta's
legal counsel in
April 2023.

PHOTO: TONY
KARUMBA /AFP

for agriculture, ICT, and labour. None of them agreed to explain what oversight Parliament had exercised over the agreements or if they knew what they contained.

Government departments and agencies did not provide the agreements requested or explain how technology partners had been selected. Sama, Meta, and Microsoft did not respond to questions about their relationships with the Kenyan government.

Agriculture offers one example. In 2020, the ministry of agriculture signed an agreement with Microsoft to provide cloud technology for digital tools using information about weather, pests, farming inputs, and production. The partnership expanded in 2022, with Microsoft's Kuzabot, a platform that sends farmers advice by SMS and WhatsApp.

“[Kenya] is apparently the home of innovation, yet we are being trained only to work... with monopolies.”

A 2023 report by the Community Alliance for Global Justice said Kuzabot also sent product recommendations and allowed agricultural advisers linked to seed, fertiliser, and pesticide companies to advertise through bulk messages.

Neither Microsoft nor the ministry provided the full agreement to *The Continent*.

A similar question arises at Konza Technopolis, Kenya's planned flagship smart city south of Nairobi.

On 13 August 2026, Kenya's Technopolis Development Authority signed an agreement with Amazon Web Services (AWS) to promote cloud technology in public institutions, train Kenyans in artificial intelligence and data management, and explore new cloud infrastructure at Konza Technopolis.

AWS said it was proud to support Kenya's cloud adoption journey and that “[did] not cover the Kenyan government's use of any AWS cloud services and carries no financial commitment”.

Digital-rights lawyer Victor Kiamba said Kenya's Constitution requires public procurement to be “fair, equitable, transparent, competitive, and cost effective”. But when agreements are unavailable for scrutiny it becomes difficult to establish whether those requirements have been met.

Digital-rights expert Irene Makau said the agreements cannot be separated from the laws and policies developing around them. “You find legislation being pushed that doesn't necessarily seem to have any correlation,” she said, “and yet, they are meant to facilitate ease of operation”.

Makau also questioned what Kenya's reliance on a handful of global technology companies means for local competitors and control over digital infrastructure. “Why are these Big Tech companies being glorified as though we have options?” she said. “[Kenya] is apparently the home of innovation, yet we are being trained only to work for and with monopolies.” ■

REVIEW

What *The Atlantic* got wrong in its Caine Prize AI witch hunt

The essay accusing the winner of using AI lacked definitive evidence. It's just the latest example of a trend that disproportionately targets African writers.

LOLOADE FANIYI

LAST week, Zimbabwean writer Simbarashe Steyn Kundizeza won the Caine Prize for his short story, *The Blue Fighter*. Five days later, *The Atlantic* published an “exclusive” essay by Vauhini Vara, who claimed she had evidence Kundizeza used artificial intelligence to write his story.

The AI-detection tool Pangram is Vara's sole source of “evidence” for her accusation.

In her essay, Vara describes herself as an expert on AI and writing, which supposedly gives her the ability to determine authentic or AI-assisted writing. She has also written an in-depth profile of Pangram and its founders for *Bloomberg Businessweek*, where the tool is described as “near perfect” at detecting AI-generated text, even when written by non-native English speakers.

As additional “proof” of AI authorship, Vara compares Kundizeza's Caine prize-winning story to an example of his earlier work, a 2021 short story titled *The Whistleblower*. She claims because the language and style of the



Prize Fighter: Simbarashe Steyn Kundizeza

two stories are different, only the former can authentically be the author's work. Pangram came to the same conclusion.

I would think Vara should be able to identify the necessary stylistic difference, given the context of each story. The first portrays a simulated conversation within a comically corrupt political system, whereas the second features the interior voice of a child watching the pain in his mother's eyes and the absence in his father's.

Vara's own book, *Searches* – written in part with ChatGPT – argues that since writing is always already co-produced through editorial processes,

the relationship between human and AI authorship should be seen in terms of value – a sort of scratch-my-back, I-scratch-yours exchange between Big Tech and writers.

Vara boldly claims she used large language models (LLMs) in her writing and describes her OpenAI and Pangram connections, while positioning herself as an AI witch-hunter of writers. In fact, she is a sinister bridge in this wave of literary technopower – normalising the use of AI-detection tools while pushing their negative consequences onto writers marginalised or exoticised by the global publishing industry.

In 2026 alone, there has been a wave of Black or African writers accused of AI cheating. As well as Kundizeza, there's been Thélyson Orélien (Haitian) and Jerry Falade (Nigerian).

The root of this is fairly well understood. Big Tech relies on outsourced workers in the anglophone Global South to label data and train LLMs, meaning data workers' moderation choices influenced the formal tone and stylistic standards of AI-written text. The legacy of British colonial education has leaked into how AI English sounds.

There is a running social media joke about Africans' dramatic language use, including the everyday use of words like “delve” long before the age of generative AI.

Perhaps the biggest irony is Vara's final sentence. She calls generative AI a product of the world's most powerful people and companies, argues that it is

a damaging mimicry of people's actual values and cultures, and claims literary prizes have been infected by language that misrepresents these.

Yet Vara does the very same thing in her essay, which reads like a puff piece for Pangram, masquerading as a dispassionate critique of an African writer's work.

In the end, this gatekeeping – masking itself as scientific or objective AI detection – has winners and losers: the winners are the techno-capitalist class and their self-appointed witch-hunters, to the detriment of us all. ■



PHOTO: VAUHINI VARA

Autocompete: Self-appointed AI-detector Vauhini Vara herself used ChatGPT to help write a book.

Ololade Faniyi is a PhD candidate at Emory University, where she studies African women reimagining data work, platforms, AI, and technological modernity in the service of the postcolony and its decentred communities

The Quiz

- 1 Which country is Nobel Peace Prize winner Navi Pillay from?
- 2 In which year did Joseph Kabila's term in office end?
- 3 What is the world's second-largest tropical rainforest and river basin (pictured)?
- 4 Derg/Dergue was the military junta that ruled which country from 1974 to 1991?
- 5 What are the official languages of the Republic of Cameroon?
- 6 What is the demonym for people from Angola?
- 7 True or false: Burundi's currency is the Burundian dollar.
- 8 Who is the king of Morocco?
- 9 Which African country has Formula One awarded an upcoming Grand Prix to?
- 10 Which Kenyan runner set a record at the Melbourne Marathon last Sunday?



HOW DID I DO?

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

0-3

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

4-7

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

8-10

"Life in a rainforest river basin isn't *that* bad... till Joseph Conrad shows up to write a book about you."

Big Pic

Flock and hard place: Mokoto Masotsa watches over his sheep above a gorge near Semonkong, in Lesotho. About a third of the country's school-age boys work as shepherds, often spending months away in isolated mountain pastures.

PHOTO: TOMMY TRENCHARD/PANOS PICTURES



The Continent is a member of the Press Council of South Africa. This means we adhere to its Code of Ethics. It also means that there's an independent body you can reach out to with a complaint about our reporting. That process is on their website — www.presscouncil.org.za.

**all protocol
observed.**

publisher of **The Continent**

The Continent is published by All Protocol Observed, a not-for-profit based in South Africa. Our home is dedicated to creating a space for African journalists to do quality journalism, which we then get to you wherever you are. For suggestions, queries, complaints, or to make a donation, please contact us at read@thecontinent.org.