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The Continent



Why everything is so expensive

– and who is profiting

Illustration: Wynona Mutisi



COVER: Food is getting more expensive – and it's about to get even worse. We speak to shoppers and shop-owners in Kenya, Ghana and South Africa to understand the impact of the cost-of-living crisis (p12), which Afrobarometer data confirms (p15). But it does not have to be this way. A new investigation by a consortium of international media houses, including *The Continent*, shows how the price of wheat is being artificially inflated by western investment firms who are speculating on grain exchanges – making themselves richer even as tens of millions of people go hungry (p16).

Inside:

- **Congratulations!** Cameroonian wins top forestry award (p8)
- **Eid Mubarak:** Here's how Africa celebrated (p20)
- **Lost generation:** The children caught up in Mozambique's conflict (p23)
- **Review:** *Silverton Siege*, an apartheid crime caper (p25)
- **Comment:** Nairobi's new road is only for the rich (p27)
- **Quiz:** Put your pan-Africanism to the test (p29)

Welcome to Season Six

After a three-week hiatus, *The Continent* is back with our trademark mix of on-the-ground reporting, hard-hitting comment and international news from an African perspective. If you haven't subscribed already (it's free!), drop us a WhatsApp/Signal/Telegram on +27 73 805 6068 and we'll make sure you don't miss an edition. Feel free to share the newspaper – but only with people you think will appreciate quality African journalism.

Editor's note: At *The Continent*, we are committed to the highest possible editorial standards. Occasionally we get it wrong. When we do, we promise to let you know, and to take steps to make sure it does not happen again.

Apology to Gemfields and Montepuez Ruby Mining

Last August, *The Continent* ran an article about mining and conflict in Mozambique headlined, “Cabo Delgado is a warzone, but profiteers are doing a roaring trade”.

One mine in particular was mentioned, Montepuez Ruby Mining Limitada, along with its partner, Mwiriti Limitada. Our editorial team did not send detailed and relevant enough questions to either party, and for this we apologise. Giving people a right of reply is a core part of our work.

Gemfields, on behalf of the two, complained to the Press Council of South Africa. This is a body we are part of which allows for independent oversight of our journalism. Its ruling on this is available on their website.

The complaint showed other failures in the article, which we also apologise for. These include: Wrongly implying impropriety in the amount Gemfields paid to Mwiriti for mining rights; Inaccurately stating that Mwiriti earned \$17.9-million from an auction in 2019 (it was \$3.1-million); suggesting that youths that were allegedly tortured in 2012 around Montepuez might have been recruited by insurgents; wrongly suggesting that MRM “shifted” its ownership offshore, that the

The Continent | ISSUE 82, AUGUST 28 2021



Cabo Delgado Agrarian Centre in Cabo

The Continent | ISSUE 82, AUGUST 28 2021

Mozambique

Cabo Delgado is a warzone, but profiteers are doing a roaring trade

partner Angbar Falbrahali.

Their company owns 7% of all the concessions in the province, but that figure could rise to around 10% if other mining projects where it is a shareholder are included.

It's been four years since the insurgency began, forcing French oil giant Total Energies to stop its operations. But a recent study found that mining in the province has forging ahead regardless.

Luis Nhauchete

Last month, Maputo-based NGO the Centre for Public Integrity published a study showing that requests for mining concessions in Cabo Delgado have increased in tandem with the raging armed conflict.

The study also showed that the biggest single holder of concessions in the province is Mwiriti Mining, owned by retired general Raimundo Domingos Pachimapa and his Iranian business

Lucrative mines, with some torture
Raimundo Pachimapa is a veteran of Mozambique's struggle for independence from Portugal, and a senior figure in the ruling Frelimo party, being a member of Frelimo's 19-strong political commission, which guides party policy on a weekly basis.

A member of the Makonde ethnic group to which President Filipe Nyusi belongs, Pachimapa was governor of Cabo Delgado between 1980 and 1983.

His company, Mwiriti, rose to prominence after a person discovered a rich vein of rubies in 2009, in the locality of Namashumbite, in the district of Montepuez. The find has since been described as “the most important ruby discovery of this new century” by the Geological Institute Of America.

Soon after the discovery, Mwiriti took control of the area, and in 2011 formed Montepuez Ruby Mining (MRM), a joint venture between Mwiriti, with 25%, and Gemfields, which owns 75% of the company. The mining operation occupies 33.6 hectares of land.

Despite formally having capital of just

ind by the insurgents to join their in 2019, Gemfields agreed to pay \$10 million in compensation to people around its ruby mine in Montepuez, though they were the victims of rights abuses by the police and guards employed by Gemfields.

The company agreed to make the \$10 million without admitting any liability, but said it had been “proactive and active in addressing the wider issues raised by local communities in this case.”

By that same year, Gemfields and announced a new joint venture to open gold mines in Cabo Delgado. MRM told *The Continent* they have “noted and investigated carefully” suggestions that might in some way have links of inequality and alienation

company's structure is opaque and that it is not conducting open business; and using a misleading headline and sub-heading.

The Continent has worked out what went wrong and taken steps to make sure there are no repeats. We will continue to report on resource extraction and its role in driving inequality in Mozambique. ■



SENEGAL

Can't handle the truth

President Macky Sall is concerned that his country has allowed the media environment to flourish so much that it “will lead to deviations which will be very bad for our democracy and the balanced development of our nation.” Speaking of the media growth in the country, Sall said: “Twenty-nine dailies in a country like Senegal is anarchy. 450 news sites, it’s not possible!” and confirmed that his government is working towards regulating social media, calling its abuse “a cancer of the modern world”. World Press Freedom Day was this week. Senegalese authorities blame social media for the violent March 2021 protests that followed the arrest of opposition leader Ousmane Sonko on rape charges.

CAMEROON

Kidnapped senator ‘resigns’ in video on social media

Regina Mundo, a Cameroonian senator from the ruling party, and her driver were kidnapped late on Saturday in the country’s restive Anglophone region. A video of her reading her resignation and calling for independence of the would-be breakaway Ambazonia republic later appeared on social media. Separatists fighting for Cameroon’s Anglophone region to secede from the rest of the country claimed responsibility for the kidnapping and may have forced her to read the statements in the video.

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Empty coffers – please send Bitcoin

The minister for the economy in the Central African Republic says “the future looks very uncertain” and public finances need external funding, as state budgets have been cut by between 40% and 60%. The country has placed at least some of its hopes in cryptocurrency. This week it became the second country in the world after Honduras to adopt Bitcoin as legal tender. Other countries are experimenting with less volatile approaches such of digital currencies issued by the central bank, like Nigeria’s eNaira.

POP CULTURE

One giant leap for Afrofusion

Musician Burna Boy became the first Nigerian artist to sell out New York City's Madison Square Garden (20,789 capacity) last week. While he's happy, he told *The Daily Show* that he would also appreciate it if these things were not talked about like he is "the first [expletive] that landed on the moon." He has performed at sold-out venues in major venues in London, Geneva, Manchester, Paris and Hollywood. In Madison Square, performing with his band, The Outsiders, he was also joined by Senegalese legend Youssou N'Dour.



Photo: Twitter/TheGarden

MOZAMBIQUE

Pirates beware, magistrates be here

On Wednesday, the Mozambican parliament passed a bill detailing how new courts that will specialise in trying crimes like piracy, illegal fishing, and offshore terrorism will work. These maritime crimes have reportedly been rising in the country, which has a 2,400km coastline and where 60% of the population lives in coastal areas. Mozambique's justice minister said that magistrates for these courts were already being trained. The courts were first proposed in 1996 but were never activated.

GUINEA

Coup crew puts Alpha Condé on trial

Former Guinean president Alpha Condé, who was removed by a coup in September, will stand trial for crimes ranging from sexual assault to murder and his neglect of the country's economy. He'll be joined by 26 others who helped him run the country right up to the point where the army decided they'd do a better job. Others facing prosecution include an ex-premier, former ministers, an ex-president of the constitutional court, a former speaker of parliament and a number of other former members of parliament.

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TRAVEL

Africa's green faves top ecotourism list

Botswana and The Gambia are the best destinations in Africa for climate-conscious travellers, as ranked by travel site Big 7 Travel. They also placed second and third in a ranking of 50 places “doing good for the planet”. Each shows commitment to protect natural resources, people or heritage, the site said. Mafia Island in Tanzania, Cape Verde and Mauritius also made the list.

SOMALIA

Al-Shabaab militants overrun AU base

Fierce gunfighting happened on Tuesday morning between African Union peacekeepers and al-Shabaab fighters at al-Baraft camp, about 160km north-east of Mogadishu. Al-Shabaab says it killed 170 AU soldiers and captured others. Burundi is the only country that has said it lost soldiers in the attack, putting its dead at 10 and the missing soldiers at five.



Photo: Twitter/WilliamsRuto

KENYA

Everybody wants to be president now

Some 49 people will run for president in Kenya's elections on 9 August. Only three are endorsed by official political parties. The country's current vice president,

William Ruto, will run for the United Democratic Alliance while opposition figure Raila Odinga is endorsed by a coalition of 23 parties. Safina, a party founded by renowned scientist Richard Leakey, endorsed one candidate, Jimi Wanjigi. The other 46, who include a gospel artist and a Methodist pastor, will run as independents.

World



Photo: Elna Schütz/*The Continent*

Tree cheers (and a global award) for Cécile Ndjebet

After a visit from Wangarĩ Maathai, the Cameroonian activist dedicated her life to saving Africa's forests

Elna Schütz in Seoul

Cécile Ndjebet wipes away tears of joy. “Today is a very special day in my life,” she says. “You can’t understand how

I feel in this moment.”

The Cameroonian activist is delivering her acceptance speech as the Wangarĩ Maathai Forest Champions Award winner 2022, during the World Forestry Congress in Seoul.

Ndjebet is the founder and president of the African Women’s Network for Community Management of Forests, which empowers women in 20 countries to better use and preserve forests. This is crucial, considering that the continent has had the second highest rate of deforestation over roughly the last 20 years, and women play a major role in using and protecting forests.

“I would like to let the world know that in Africa, if we are talking about having food, it is the role of rural women,” Ndjebet tells *The Continent*. “They are in charge of food production, and they’re producing not less than 80% of the agricultural food, and we need to pay them respect, because if not, the continent is starving.”

Ndjebet describes her work over the past three decades as happening at four levels. At a local level, she equips women with skills such as leadership, negotiation, and communication to have a greater impact in their communities. She works nationally to influence policies, and continentally with her organisation for regional change. Lastly, she advocates

globally, for instance as an advisory Board member of the United Nations Decade on Ecosystems Restoration, which runs from 2020 till 2030.

A day in the forest

While past winners of the prestigious award hail from around the world, Ndjebet's connection to its namesake – the late Kenyan environmental activist and Nobel Peace Prize winner Wangari Maathai – is particularly strong and almost serendipitous. “It was a great day in the whole city when Wangari Maathai came. She was a Nobel prizewinner and to be with her was like I was dreaming.”

Maathai, the first African woman to win a Nobel Peace Prize, also worked on issues of gender and forestry and visited Ndjebet's organisation in Edéa in Cameroon's Littoral Region years ago as part of a funding initiative.

“We spent a day and visited the forest. She was in love with forest, and what she told me has been a kick-off in my career and in my work. She told me, ‘Cécile, make African women plant trees.’”

Ndjebet looks back at this pivotal moment as a wake-up call that fueled her passion and direction. She recalls Maathai saying, “Get women to plant trees and they will gain. Take them to fruit trees, because then they will have the fruit and they will feed their family. They will sell the overproduction, but the tree will remain and will stay for the environment.”

Ndjebet has been doing exactly this and more. Ndjebet's work now focuses on challenges like women not being able to own land due to conflicting, patriarchal

systems of traditional and legal policies. This is then linked to them not having the funds to buy land. Also, Ndjebet says the attitudes of both men and women need to shift to better respect the rights of women in forestry and agriculture.

Beyond the honour and recognition, the \$20,000 cash prize has Ndjebet boldly dreaming about what she could do next. “I have been thinking, but I did not have to think long. I'm dreaming to build a rural women's international training centre. That's my dream.”

“I have been thinking, but I did not have to think long. I'm dreaming to build a rural women's international training centre. That's my dream.”

Another former winner of the award, Gertrude Kabusimbi Kenyangi from Uganda – the 2015 laureate – encouraged Ndjebet to apply. “She's not frivolous, she does not change with the wind. So she's very, very consistent, which means she's convinced that what she's doing is the right thing,” said Kenyangi.

Maria Helena Semedo, the chair of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests – which organises the awards – praised Ndjebet's energy and dedication to promoting women's rights to land and forests. “She has actively shown that women's participation in forest governance and preservation is fundamental to achieving sustainable forest management.” ■

Health

Malawian doctor leads 'kinder' TB breakthrough

The success of a clinical trial led by Bern-Thomas Nyang'wa has convinced the WHO to update its tuberculosis treatment guidance. But to get the treatment to those who need it, global pharmaceutical giants will have to lower prices

The World Health Organisation announced this week that it will update its global guidance on tuberculosis treatment after a clinical trial led by Bern-Thomas Nyang'wa, a British-Malawian doctor and director of medical services at Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF).

Nyang'wa said the research journey began nine years ago after observing that patients with drug-resistant tuberculosis were being subjected to "lengthy, ineffective, and gruelling treatment that

disrupted their lives", making treatment plans difficult to stick to. "Little progress was being made to find kinder treatments; diseases that are most prevalent in low- and middle-income countries don't attract investment," he said.

The clinical trials stage of the research began in 2017 and enrolled 552 patients in South Africa, Belarus and Uzbekistan, giving them a treatment consisting of four drugs. Results showed 89% of patients on this treatment were cured, compared to 52% among those getting the usual, much more complicated tuberculosis treatment, which often comes with nasty side-effects.

About half a million people fall sick each year with drug-resistant tuberculosis, MSF said. Many of them are in low income countries. However, two of the drugs in the new ground-breaking treatment are sold by big pharmaceutical companies at prices that make it prohibitively expensive – about \$800 for the six-month dosage required. According to Christophe Perrin, the tuberculosis advocacy pharmacist with MSF's Access Campaign, the new treatment "will only see meaningful changes if treatment is affordable".

Johnson & Johnson, one of the biggest pharmaceutical companies in the world, with \$93.77-billion in sales in 2021, has previously said that its medication for drug-resistant tuberculosis is priced fairly – and that calls to reduce the price are "not realistic". ■

Liberia

The ‘Angel Gabriel’ flies free yet again

Gibril Massaquoi’s rebel group brutalised Sierra Leoneans and Liberians. He first avoided prosecution by testifying against his compatriots at a United Nations tribunal – now he has again been acquitted in another trial.

Dounard Bondo in Monrovia

Last week, a Finnish court acquitted Gibril Massaquoi, a Sierra Leonean accused of war crimes including murder, rape and torture in Liberia. Massaquoi is a former spokesman of the Revolutionary United Front, a rebel group that fought in the Sierra Leonean civil war of 1991-2002. It also operated in Liberia, where it worked with the National Patriotic Front of Liberia, rebels led by Charles Taylor.

Massaquoi avoided prosecution by becoming a witness at the UN Special

Court of Sierra Leone, where high-level RUF figures were successfully prosecuted. Taylor himself is now serving a 50-year prison sentence in the United Kingdom.

In 2020, after an investigation based on reports from Switzerland-based Civitas Maxima and its Liberian counterpart, the Global Justice and Research Project, Finnish authorities arrested Massaquoi on allegations of war crimes in Liberia.

At his trial, prosecution witnesses testified to seeing Massaquoi commit murder, rape and torture under the war moniker “Angel Gabriel”, but the timeline they gave to police coincided with when Massaquoi was supposedly in the Special Court’s witness protection safehouse. The case then rested on a theory that he had left that safehouse and committed war crimes in Liberia on behalf of Charles Taylor. The court found that this was not proven to the legal standard of “beyond reasonable doubt” and acquitted him.

The Liberian civil war ended in 2003 with a death count of over 200,000 people.

Liberia itself has not prosecuted anyone for crimes committed during its wars, and many recommendations of its truth and reconciliation commission were never implemented.

Instead, key actors during the war have gained significant political power and victims seeking justice have turned to foreign courts – with limited success. ■

Africa



From Jo'burg to Nairobi, soaring food prices are stretching us to our limit

African governments face looming civil unrest from people who are hungrier and poorer thanks to the pandemic, war in Ukraine, climate pressures on food systems and poor policy decisions.

Caroline Kimeu in Nairobi and Colleta Dewa in Johannesburg

Anne Njuguna runs Sugarbaked, a corner bakery store in Loresho, a leafy Nairobi middle-class

neighbourhood. In the three years since she started the business, she hasn't seen anything like the current price surge. The costs of almost all her ingredients have shot up and it has become impossible to forecast demand and profit margins, she

says. She had already increased her prices in December last year, and plans to do so again in May.

In Johannesburg, 49-year-old Anziswa Ndlovu, a mother of three in the high density suburb of Cosmo City recounts what the Covid pandemic cost her. She lost her job in 2020 and was already battling to keep her children in school but now just putting food on the table has become an all-consuming struggle. The average cost of a basic household food basket is now 10% higher than it was in early 2021, national data shows. “I had to cut down on the number of meals. From four meals per day we now eat in the morning and wait for supper in the evening,” she says.

Dramatic cost increases

In Accra, a plantain trader tells *The Continent*: “We make very little from the business” because of “the hike in fuel prices leading to an increase in transport fares.” Such economic pressures translate almost directly into higher prices: across the continent prices of basic goods are skyrocketing, turning ordinary foods into expensive luxuries. This is compounding an already significant problem because, as International Monetary Fund data show, Africans already spend more of their income on food than other parts of the world, at nearly half of household income.

In Kenya, prices have shot up by eye-watering margins over the past year. Since last April, the cost of a litre of cooking oil has risen by nearly 42% and the cost of a 2kg bag of wheat by roughly 25%, according to the country’s national

statistics office. A net importer of food, Kenya imported roughly 34% of its wheat from Russia and Ukraine before the war.

In South Africa, according to data from the latest Household Affordability Index released by the Pietermaritzburg Economic Justice & Dignity group, the price of cooking oil rose by 42% between April 2021 to April 2022 and a plethora of other food including polony, beef liver, apples, butternut, frozen chicken, margarine, spinach, eggs, potatoes and tea have seen price hikes of up to 31% in the same period.

On top of reducing the number of meals she gives her children, Ndlovu is also cutting back on what’s on the plate. Sandwiches have become just two slices of bread. “Margarine has gone up and so have eggs and polony. So we have resorted to just plain bread.”

In Nairobi, Njuguna is seeing her middle-class clientele making similar decisions. Some are forgoing the luxury of her baked goods. She now offers “bundle deals” – pairing goods whose ingredients are facing high price fluctuations, like cake, with those that aren’t, like cookies.

The politics of bread and butter

But citizens can’t simply adjust their consumption to offset all of the pressures of the increasing cost of living and analysts fear the situation is already boiling over.

“An empty stomach is not a good political adviser. Politics is about economics and economics is about bread and butter issues. Each time a country, community or family risks running out of food, you risk sociopolitical

instability,” says Victor Kgomoewana, a South African business specialist and commentator.

In Kenya, where a 2021 Gallup poll showed that roughly seven out of every ten people said they had lacked money to buy enough food for themselves or their families over the past year, the cost of basic food began sparking online outrage in February this year. Ahead of the country’s elections in August, hashtags like #LowerFoodPrices and #NjaaRevolution (HungerRevolution), are being tweeted or brandished on protest placards alongside #BoycottElections, #NoFoodNoVotes.

In July last year, South Africa saw its worst riots since the end of apartheid, triggered by the arrest of former president Jacob Zuma but also seen as an expression of desperation, and Ndlovu believes the only way people will be heard will be by taking to the streets again. “We are suffering and the only way our leaders will hear our cry is if we stage demonstrations against this price madness!”

Kenyan economist Ken Gichinga advises African governments that people want to see them “shift focus from funding infrastructure projects to putting money into businesses and [citizen’s] pockets”.

Fresh out of silver bullets

But the problem might be too layered for any single solution. Many of the factors driving the cost of living up both predate the challenges of the present moment and exceed the geographies of these countries.

Even before the pandemic, Kenya’s economy was slowing down. The country has been servicing debt of more than eight



Against the grain: The pandemic and the war in Ukraine have compounded existing economic woes. Photo: AFP

trillion shillings (\$69-billion), which Kenyans are bearing through heavily taxed goods. Things have only worsened with the government’s stop-gap measures to bring inflation under control. In April, inflation rose to 6.47% – its highest in seven months.

Citizens, meanwhile, see the layered nature of the problem and are not holding much hope for solutions from the state.

Cramming a wrinkled 100 shilling (\$8) note into his coat pocket after serving his last customer of the day, Francis Mwangi, a grocer in Nairobi’s Valley Arcade market, says he thinks Kenya’s economy became weak because a “weak opposition” failed to keep the government in check. He isn’t expecting any new leadership that might emerge from the elections later this year to save the day.

“Where would it get the money from to reduce the cost of goods?” he asks. “Or would they borrow even more money and make things worse?” ■

Additional reporting by Marian Efe Ansa in Accra.

More and more people are going hungry

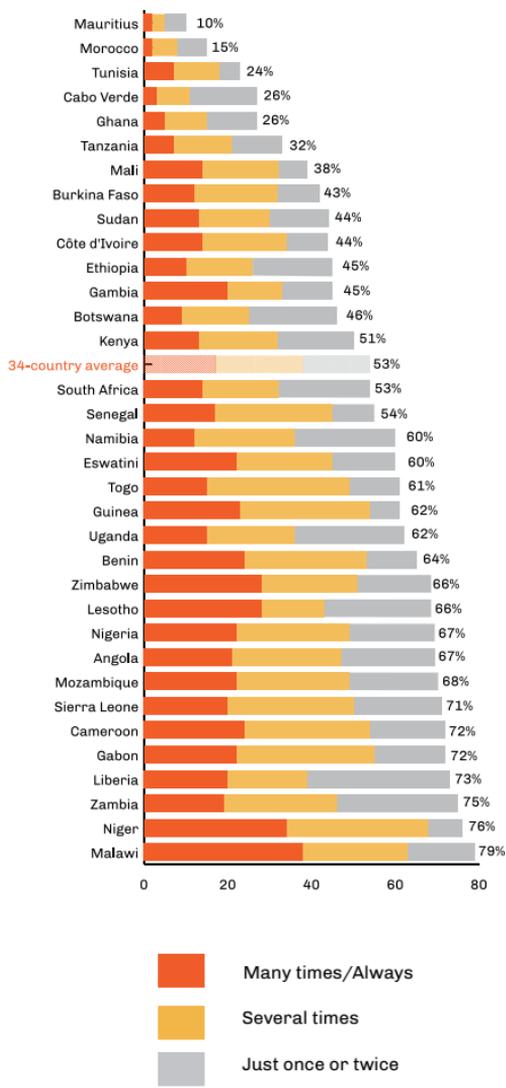
Hunger is not new in Africa, but it's entering more households.

On average across 34 African countries that Afrobarometer surveyed in 2019-2021, more than half (53%) of adults say their household went without enough food at least once during the previous year, including 17% for whom this happened “many times” or “always.” That’s the highest level recorded in the past decade.

Overall, majorities in 21 countries reported food shortages in the household. As usual, rural areas (58%) were at a disadvantage compared to the cities (47%). Twenty-two countries saw significant increases since 2014/2015, led by Nigeria (up 24 percentage points, to 67%) and South Africa (up 23 points, to 53%). Three countries did see improvements: Morocco (-10 points), Tanzania (-9 points), and Burkina Faso (-5 points).

The situation is most dire in Malawi, where eight out of every 10 people (79%) report going without enough to eat at least once during the past year, including 38% who did so frequently. Niger (76%) and Zambia (75%) aren't doing much better.

Households that went without enough food during the previous year | 34 African countries | 2019/2021



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.



World



Photo: Jonathan Fontaine/Hans Lucas via AFP

Profiting from starvation

Food everywhere is a third more expensive than it was last year. This isn't because there is less food. It is, in part, because American and European traders have found loopholes that allow them to profit by speculating on the price of food. Millions more will now starve.

Margot Gibbs, Thin Lei Win and Siphon Kings

Egypt imports most of its wheat. An explosion in the price of bread in 2011 helped drive the protests that would overthrow the government. This April, Egypt's state wheat buyer bought 350,000 tons of wheat for \$450 a ton. It paid \$252 for the same quality wheat in February.

Between those two months, Russia invaded Ukraine. The two are some of the world's most important producers of grains. Sanctions and war mean there will be less grain. But other countries have stepped into the gap and are growing more grain – which means there are other factors in play that are driving up the price of grain, and other basic foodstuffs.

An investigation led by European non-

profit newsroom Lighthouse Reports, and including *The Continent*, found that one of the key causes of high food prices has been rampant speculation. This has profited a few investors, who are able to exploit loopholes in European and United States laws.

The United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation says food prices are, on average, a third higher than they were last year. They are at their highest level since the organisation started keeping records in 1990.

The World Food Programme expects its food costs to go up by 50 percent this year. In West Africa alone, this will cost it \$136-million more a year.

This is the third food price crisis in the past 15 years. The World Bank estimates that each increase of a single percentage point in food prices puts 10-million more people into extreme poverty.

Incongruously, the global production of food has actually increased over the same period. There is currently about a third more cereal in reserve, globally, than is needed to feed everyone. And that's

despite political instability and climate change.

More food but higher prices

An indicator of what's happening comes from the Paris milling wheat market, the biggest market for grains in Europe. In 2018, about a quarter of the food contracts it carried were speculative. That number has tripled to three-quarters.

These markets allow the future supply of food to be sold to people now. Usually, a farmer expects to harvest so much wheat at the end of the season. A miller agrees to buy it at a given price. The farmer gets money to pay for fertiliser and everything they need to farm that harvest. They then deliver the wheat.

There is a risk in this. Crops may fail. Wars could break out. A bumper crop can lead to price collapse.

To manage the risk, the miller can sell a contract for the same amount of grain on the futures market. That's where a speculator can come in: an investor studying weather patterns or patterns of demand cycles can make a bet that the



Fallow: Rampant speculation by profit-hungry investors is contributing to food crises around the world. Photo: Per-Anders Pettersson/Getty Images

price will go up by the time of harvest, and buy the miller's contract. If the price does go up, they pocket the difference.

A healthy level of speculation allows farmers and grain users to hedge their risk, and make their incomes more predictable and less volatile than the weather.

But speculation can go too far: where the level of speculation is "excessive", demand from speculators trying to profit from a predicted increase in price can cause the "futures" prices to increase beyond the scope of supply and demand.

And because futures prices are used as the benchmark for actual wheat prices, this impacts on the price of food.

Because futures prices are used as the benchmark for actual wheat prices, this impacts on the price of food

That kind of speculation means a different kind of logic gets applied to the cost of food. Since the turn of the millennium, institutional investors like pension funds have increasingly invested in the commodity futures markets as a so-called "hedge" against inflation. That, said experts, has meant the futures price has been dictated by their investment decisions – which have nothing to do with market fundamentals.

Normally, food is bought with the expectation that it can then be sold at a profit. The more food there is, the cheaper food is, which means less profit.

This means food prices gradually change between years as droughts and floods mix with bumper crops around the world.

But too much speculation from investors treating food as a commodity changes things. Supply and demand are no longer the main arbiters of price. In the past 15 years this has seen food prices yo-yo up and down, despite global supply remaining steady.

'Betting on hunger'

Speaking to the consortium of newsrooms, Olivier De Schutter, the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights and co-chair of the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems, said funds are "betting on hunger and exacerbating it".

Between January and April, at least \$1.3-billion poured into two such funds, run by Teucrium and Invesco. \$589-million of that came in the first week of March. By comparison, in the whole of last year they brought in \$200-million. Demand for shares in Teucrium exploded, with the *New York Times* reporting there were none left for people who wanted to profit off the windfall of that fund.

Last October, Teucrium's wheat fund manager wrote on his company website: "While food inflation threatens to negatively impact the global economy, informed investors could potentially benefit from a trend of rising prices."

In a report on food prices released this week, De Schutter's food systems panel pointed to "predatory financiers betting on food" and "gambling on food prices" as a driver of high prices.

A rural farmer waters a crop in Amudat, Uganda. Soaring prices are plunging millions more Africans into food crises. Photo: Luis Tato/AFP



In its response to the consortium, Teucrium would only say: “Investment flows into commodities stimulate production, efficiency, and investment which ultimately results in more reliable commodity (food) supplies and reduced price volatility over time.” Invesco pointed to extreme weather as a driver of price fluctuation and said: “Fundamental economic factors – market demand and supply conditions – provide the most consistent explanation for recent trends in commodity prices.”

It could have been avoided

This week the sixth Global Report on Food Crises was released. A collaboration of groups like the World Food Programme, it found that of the Democratic Republic of Congo’s 90-million people, nearly 21-million are classified as being in food crisis. That means people skip meals and use up any savings to keep eating. A further seven million are classified as being in a food emergency — where hunger is killing people. It expects the

increasing cost of food to make hunger much worse this year, particularly in northern Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Niger, Kenya, South Sudan and Somalia.

The impact of food speculation on food price increase also isn’t clear. Despite their gambling with the ability of people to feed their families, the mainly Western markets don’t need to disclose their data in detail. When a similar food price crisis happened in 2007, regulators in Europe and the United States swung into action. But the industry responded with intense lobbying and lawsuits. Regulations were weak to begin with, and then watered down even more in 2020.

As a result, food is costing more, and there are few ways of stopping this. In the meantime, a tiny few will profit and a great many more people will go hungry. ■

Margot Gibbs is an investigative reporter specialising in finance, corruption and the environment. Thin Lei Win is a Rome-based journalist specialising in food systems and climate issues.



Photo: Ousmane Makaveli/AFP

PHOTO STORY

Eid Mubarak, Africa



Eid Al-Fitr prayers marked the end of Islam's holy month of Ramadan earlier this week. In Burundi's capital, Bujumbura, one does not simply go to Eid prayers without looking one's best. Photo: Tchandrou Nitanga/AFP

Wild horses couldn't keep the faithful from attending Eid Al-Fitr prayers in Yaounde, Cameroon; in some cases they might even help them get there – in a not inconsiderable amount of style. Photo:

Daniel Beloumou
Olomo/AFP





In Nigeria, horses even join proceedings: riders here perform the Hawan Daushe mounted dance – an Eid tradition that has been going strong for 600 years in northern Hausa districts of the country. Photo: Adam Abu-bashal/Anadolu Agency



The bright hearts of the faithful find joyous expression in exuberant colours after Eid prayers at the Ggaba landing site on Lake Victoria in Kampala Uganda, on May 2, 2022. Photo: Badru Katumba/AFP

The glorious garb of the devout honours the dignity of Eid Al-Fitr prayers at West Africa's largest mosque, the Massalikoul Djinane Mosque in Dakar, Senegal. Photo: Fatma Esma Arslan/Anadolu Agency via AFP



Mozambique

For the lost children of Cabo Delgado, going back to school is a fading dream

In Mozambique's conflict-riven province of Cabo Delgado, children and young people are being deprived of education by the fundamentalist insurgency that began in October 2017

Luis Nhachote in Cabo Delgado

Twelve-year-old Abdul* was studying in the fifth grade at the primary school in the village of Nova Zambezia in Macomia when the sound of gunfire erupted from the football pitch.

Amid the panic that ensued, he found his family already on the run, joining the rush to escape without slowing down. Scooping him up, they left for safer ground: the bush. They are now staying in the village of Muaje in Ancuabe, a district 100km south of their home but still within Cabo Delgado.

This region has not itself been touched by conflict, but it is serving as a refuge for a great many of those who, like Abdul and his family, have been displaced by the violence.

Abdul is safe, for now, but he wishes he could go back to school.

Across Cabo Delgado, about 300 schools have been partially or completely destroyed and 98,000 students have been left without any prospect of continuing their education any time soon. Some 1,736 teachers have been displaced by the conflict, according to official figures.

Around 300 schools have been destroyed and 98,000 students have been left without hope of furthering their education.

It's no surprise that the insurgency has targeted schools – in the relatively neglected Cabo Delgado, schools were one of the few significant examples of state infrastructure. Moreover, one of the few demands the insurgency has ever articulated is that people in Cabo Delgado

should stop sending children to school.

In Palma – the district home to the multibillion-dollar gas project that insurgents overran last March, triggering foreign intervention – 7,500 pupils and 1,700 teachers fled. Just 113 of those teachers have since returned, despite the presence of Rwandan troops, who ejected the occupying insurgents and restored peace and government control to the district. Only 12 of the district's 43 schools have reopened.

In Abdul's home district of Macomia, meanwhile, 13 out of 54 schools have reopened, but he and many others are not ready or even able to return.

Three years ago, nine-year-old Heba also fled Macomia. She now lives in a centre for internally displaced persons in Montepuez, more than 200km south of the village her family once called home.

Heba was in the fifth grade when she had to interrupt classes. Her dream is to be a doctor 'to help heal people', but it is on hold because, according to her, 'Al Shabab destroyed everything'.

She too was in the fifth grade when the insurgency turned her world upside down. Her dream is to be a doctor “to help heal people” – but in Cabo Delgado such dreams are on hold, at best. “Al Shabab destroyed everything,” she says.

Also in Montepuez is 14-year-old Karima, from the village of Chinde near Awasse, a village that sits on a key

crossroads that has been fiercely contested by insurgents and government forces. One day, Karima and her family heard gunfire and fled into the bush, where they hid for two months. “I didn't take anything with me,” she says. “No clothes, no books.”

Her family eventually made it to Montepuez. But she longs to return to school, she says. “To be somebody.”

Learning in the open air

For those children in Cabo Delgado who *can* go to school, many are finding their classes are taking place in the open air. The number of lessons being held outdoors grew 15% in 2021, from 777 in 2020 to 893 last year, provincial director of education Ivaldo Quincardete told *The Continent*, in an interview in Pemba.

When Quincardete heard *The Continent* was also going to visit baby Awa, who was born on a boat bringing her mother to relative safety in Pemba, he said his unit wanted to offer her a scholarship. *The Continent* first reported her story two years ago. They now live in the Paquitiquete neighbourhood, where displaced people have been given lodging.

For Awa, at least, some kind of education is on the cards – but authorities still have much to do in rebuilding Cabo Delgado's education infrastructure.

And returning to their home village of Pangane, which they left in October 2020, is still a distant dream. ■

**All the names of the children interviewed for this story have been changed. Their real names are known to The Continent.*



Silverton Siege
– a glossy but
glossed-over
apartheid flick

Wilfred Okiche

The glossy Hollywood-style production values, smart advertising and a strategic Freedom Day release date all conspire to lend the Netflix action thriller *Silverton Siege* some air of prestige. But the true picture is a lot more generic, as director Mandla Dube's high-profile revisiting of an apartheid-era historical incident is more hackneyed middle-ground fantasia than definitive account.

According to history books, three armed activists of the African National Congress's arms-bearing uMkhonto we Sizwe faction – Humphrey Makhubo, Fanie Mafoko, and Wilfred Madela – took a bank hostage in Silverton, Pretoria in 1980. It wasn't a bank robbery per se, as the men were fleeing the site of an





All photos: Netflix

aborted operation with hostile officials in hot pursuit. Occupying the bank was a desperate act of survival that soon took on immense political dimensions when the activists, seeing no viable path to their freedom, tapped into the restive national mood by demanding the release of Nelson Mandela.

Dube brings his rich eye for period detail to this loosely imagined fictional account where enough liberties are taken to make his film seem removed from the source material. Dube is reunited with his *Kalushi* leading man, Thabo Rametsi, who plays Calvin Khumalo. As the anguished captain of the group, he must draw on reserves of fire and steel to work through an impossible situation.

The film opens with a bang and is easy on the eyes, boasting accomplished set pieces and fluid action sequences that are at least worth the price of admission. The screenplay credited to Sabelo Mgidi could

have used a few more revisions as the film begins to overreach, trotting out subtext and weighty themes it has limited capacity to grapple with. Every radical bent of the story is toned down to the blunt “both sides have good guys” pleasantness of a Saturday matinee.

The events of *Silverton* as well as the rich political and historical backdrop lend themselves to great drama, but this unsure attempt plays like a missed opportunity. ■



Silverton is streaming on Netflix.

Nairobi's road to riches will take its toll on the poor

A new expressway will solve the city's infamous congestion – but only for those who can afford it

Gilbert Kiprono

Nairobi, one of Africa's biggest cities, will soon have a road system that prioritises those who are wealthy over those who are not.

The government of Kenya, in partnership with state-owned China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC), is constructing a 27km four-lane dual carriageway that will cut across the city, infamous for its traffic jams. The “Nairobi Expressway” will link the upmarket suburb of Westlands to Mlolongo, near the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport. It is tentatively scheduled to be opened to the public in June this year.

The road is being financed through a private-public partnership that will see the state cover the cost of land acquisition and relocation of utilities along the construction area, while the Chinese company covers the cost of construction.

It is estimated that the total cost of the project will hit 194.7-billion Kenyan shillings (\$1.7-billion). This includes \$760-million for construction; \$130-million for the land and relocation costs; and \$910-million in projected profits for CRBC (minus the \$380-million

they are expected to incur in maintenance and operational costs over the nearly three-decade term of the agreement).

Once the road is complete, CRBC will operate the road for 27 years and have the right to collect toll fees from vehicles that use the road. For cars to travel the length of the road, it will cost 360 Kenyan shillings (\$3.10).

Toll fees are not new to Kenya, having first been introduced in the 1980s. But a new method for maintaining road infrastructure was later adopted: the “maintenance levy”, a tax on every litre of fuel purchases (currently 18 Kenyan shillings, equivalent to 16 US cents). The government is not planning on scrapping the maintenance levy, but Nairobi motorists will be expected to fork out for the new tolls – leading many citizens to feel that they are being double taxed.

Not rich? Stay in your lane

The main purpose of the expressway was to decongest the roads in the capital. By some estimates, Nairobi is the fourth most congested city in the world: residents spend an hour on average in traffic every day. This costs the country up to \$86-million each day in lost productivity.



Highway robbery: It will cost drivers more than \$3 in tolls to make a single trip on the new expressway in Nairobi, set to open in June. Photo: Simon Maina/AFP

But is the Nairobi Expressway really the solution? Pedestrians, bicycles and motorcycles will be prohibited from using it – so where does it leave the 45% of Nairobians who walk to work every day?

Additionally, only high capacity buses will be allowed on the road, excluding matatus – the minibus taxis that are by far the most-used means of public transport.

Compounding this problem is the apparent neglect of existing roads in favour of the shiny new expressway, specifically the existing A8 road which has become dilapidated, causing even more traffic build-up. This neglect may force some residents to use the new road when it is opened, despite the high tolls.

Also neglected were the tens of thousands of slum dwellers who were

evicted to make way for the road during the initial phase of construction, with no resettlement plans articulated. The government's promises of compensation to evicted families have yet to be fulfilled, with many still living in makeshift camps.

With the road due to open in June, it seems likely this massive infrastructure project will benefit only the city's relatively wealthy elite – and leave the rest of the population stuck in even worse traffic. What remains to be seen is whether enough Kenyans will be able to use the road to make the project's ambitious revenue projects come to pass. ■

Gilbert Kiprono is a freelance writer from Nairobi, Kenya who advocates for public accountability.

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 sell out Madison Square Garden if they had quizzes there."



Photo: Wolfgang Kaehler/LightRocket via Getty Images

- 1_ "CAR" is shorthand for which country?
- 2_ What is the demonym for people from Burundi?
- 3_ True or false: Cameroon is part of Ecowas.
- 4_ Mwai Kibaki is a former president of which country?
- 5_ True or false: Wangari Maathai was the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize.
- 6_ Which tree is also known as the "tree of life"?
- 7_ Which five African countries qualified for the upcoming Fifa World Cup? (Give yourself a point for each correct one.)
- 8_ Which Nigerian just became the first from his country to sell out Madison Square Garden?
- 9_ "The king of rumba rock" is a nickname given to which Congolese artist?
- 10_ Praia is the capital and largest city of which country?

HOW DID I DO?

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

Would you like to send us some quiz questions or even curate your own quiz? Let us know at TheContinent@mg.co.za

All the gilded guns of the gala



Continental Drift

Samira Sawlani

For those who may not be aware, this week saw some of the world's most famous celebrities grace the red carpet at the renowned Met Gala in New York.

The theme for this year was “Gilded Glamour”, which refers to a period in United States from about 1870 to the early 1900s. Ironically, while the A-listers created looks inspired by the past, some American lawmakers seem to want to create laws rooted in the dark ages – even though you can never ban abortion, you can only ban safe abortion. And kindly note that what a woman does with her uterus is strictly her business.

Backward thinking notwithstanding, all that glitz and glamour had us thinking about what it would be like to see our favourite leaders on the red carpet, serving up pouts and poses instead of tear-gas.

First up would undoubtedly be the stars of *Keeping up With the Coupdashions*, starting with Guinea's transitional president and coup leader, Colonel Mamady Doumbouya. Confirming that he is no stranger to fashion, the colonel certainly served up some gilded glamour when he appeared on TV this week in

full dress uniform, sans his usual black sunglasses and military fatigues, wearing instead a rather fetching red beret and bringing the bling with a whole heap of medals on display.

Adding to the ambience, he appeared to be standing in front of a school blackboard covered with equations as he announced that the roadmap towards civilian rule would take a whopping 39 months. After that feat of speculative mathematics, it's safe to say the only thing Ecowas heads of state will be wearing on the red carpet will be scowls and frowns!

Meanwhile, former president Alpha Condé, whose attire once suggested he took his fashion tips from *The Devil Wears Prada*, may want to start shopping for a jumpsuit instead: Guinea's attorney-general has revealed that Condé and 26 officials who served under him will be prosecuted on charges ranging from murder, sexual assault and rape to enforced disappearances and attacking the national economy.

Creations by French fashion houses are frequently seen on the red carpet, but if there is one Coupdashion who is unlikely to be wearing Chanel, Dior, YSL or anything borrowed from the House of Macron, it is Mali's post-coup leader, President-Colonel Assimi Goita.

Over the past few months, relations between Bamako and Paris have been deteriorating, and this week Mali's military

government said it would be terminating its defence and military co-operation agreements with France once and for all.

Some of the reasons given include violations of Mali's airspace and the French making decisions regarding its forces in the country without consulting with Mali.

In response to this, a French foreign ministry spokesperson described the decision as "unjust". Meanwhile a delegation headed by Mali's minister for foreign affairs travelled to Togo, and it was agreed that Togo's President Faure Gnassingbe would be a mediator between Mali and the international community.

A leader who inherited the presidency from his father, won elections whose legitimacy have been questioned and is serving his fourth term? We're sure everyone is all ears!

How not to shoot your deputy

As far as the stars of the spin-off show *Keeping up With the Kenyans* are concerned, we may not want to see them on the red carpet together.

President Uhuru Kenyatta recently lashed out (indirectly) at his deputy, William Ruto, saying there were those who had failed to solve problems and so should simply quit. In response, Ruto tweeted saying he was "just one phone call away" and that others were responsible for the failures, adding a little jab with, "Sadly the last cabinet meeting was two years ago."

A cabinet meeting! While Kenyans are facing rising costs, a pandemic, debt crisis and an election year. Why hold a cabinet meeting when you can just fire shots in public!



Shots fired: Kenya's President Uhuru Kenyatta had a proper go at his deputy and would-be successor, William Ruto.

Photo: Twitter/StateHouseKenya

Holding out for our heroes

While our leaders may bring us all the glitz, glamour, drama, decadence and sheer excess, we cannot forget those who tell us about it.

This week Reporters Without Borders released its Press Freedom Index for 2022. Countries such as The Seychelles, Namibia, Cabo Verde and South Africa scored well, however, at the other end of the spectrum were countries like Eritrea and Djibouti. According to the organisation there are far too many cases of arbitrary censorship (including internet shutdowns), arrests of journalists and violent attacks.

So while the world of fashion and celebrity celebrates its Met Gala faves, we'd like to take a moment to celebrate the brilliant, fearless and courageous journalists across the continent: Those that work hard to bring us important news every day, those that put their lives at risk in search of the truth, those who remain detained, and those whose whereabouts are sadly unknown.

They are the real superstars. ■

Isaias Afwerki's gamble in Ethiopia may be undermining Eritrean sovereignty

Yohannes Woldemariam

Eritrea has been heavily and controversially involved in the civil war in Ethiopia, with conscripts as young as 16 allegedly sent over the border to die in a conflict that has little to do with them.

While a lot has been written about the significance of this involvement for the Tigray region and the prospects for a peaceful resolution to the conflict, less has been said about its impact on Eritrea itself. Yet the implications of President Isaias Afwerki's adventurism abroad are no less significant for Eritrea and Eritreans.

Having been put under sanctions from the United States, the Eritrean government has become increasingly reliant on a range of authoritarian backers, including Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Russia and China.

At the United Nations General Assembly in March 2022, Eritrea voted against a proposal to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine – the only African country to provide this level of support.

By selling his country's allegiance in this way, Isaias is gambling with Eritrea's future in the same way that he gambled with the lives of Eritreans he has been sending across the border to fight in

Ethiopia's war, potentially endangering Eritrean sovereignty by rekindling Ethiopian expansionist ambitions from elements who never reconciled themselves with Eritrean independence.

Russia may shore up his authoritarian hold over Eritrean politics and society by providing military assistance, but it is unlikely to invest the aid and support that will be necessary to offset the opportunity cost squandered by Afwerki's meddling in other countries.

As always, the real losers will be the Eritrean people. While Isaias meddles in the region, hoping to secure the elimination of his long-term rivals, the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front, Eritrea has become Isaias's prison for Eritreans who live in extreme destitution.

Of those who work, 75% are estimated to earn less than \$3.10 a day. If Eritreans were his priority, changing this situation would be Isaias's concern – not embroiling Eritreans in costly foreign adventures that could easily be avoided. ■



Yohannes Woldemariam is an Ethiopia expert who has been researching the Horn of Africa for many years. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa

The Big Picture

Photo: Delwyn Verasamy/M&G

Coast is cleared: City workers begin clean-up operations at Umdloti Beach near Durban after the destructive floods that tore through eastern South Africa last month, leaving more than 400 people dead in their wake. Tons of debris were carried out from the interior of the KwaZulu-Natal province by rivers that broke their banks on the way to the sea, spilling waste along the region's Indian Ocean beaches.



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