

# The Continent

with Mail & Guardian

## Addis Ababa's AU makeover

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**Cover:** We all like to get our house in order before welcoming guests. But authorities in Addis Ababa took this to the extreme by forcibly removing and detaining beggars and street vendors for the duration of the recently concluded African Union Summit, an investigation by *The Continent* reveals. How can we expect our leaders to solve poverty when they don't even want to see it? (p10)



## Write for us

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**SOUTH AFRICA****How to find a tunnel at the end of the light**

Following breakdowns at five power stations, South Africa's state-owned power utility, Eskom, was generating less than half of its installed capacity by Monday morning, a new record low.

Already struggling with rolling power cuts, businesses and residents now fear they are headed for the next stage of that load shedding – 12 to 14 hours of no power a day. Eskom's chief executive, Andre de Ruyter, was removed from office on Wednesday, after giving an explosive media interview in which he compared the ruling party to a “feeding trough” of corruption.



Photo: Eskom

**KENYA****If you can't beat 'em, ask them to invest?**

Kenya's auditor general Nancy Gathungu proposed a strange new approach to the anti-graft fight in her country. “Perhaps we should start a campaign that says if you steal it and you are able to get away with it, invest it in the country where it is stolen. If you steal it from Kenyans, invest it in Kenya.” She speculated that the country might then see some development from the proceeds of public theft. “Later we ask the questions, where did you get it from?” she said.

**BOTSWANA****Rhino population halves in five years**

In the past five years, Botswana lost 214 rhinos – half of the wild population it had. Most of them (138) were killed by people likely to have been poachers who trade in rhino horns, wildlife authorities in the country said. Natural causes like disease, old age and injuries from rhino fights led to 76 deaths, a mortality rate that conservationists say is also abnormally high. The country has de-horned and relocated the remaining population to protect it.



**Thrice as tall: Burna Boy's an All-Star.**  
Photo: NBAE/Getty Images

## GLOBAL AFRICA

### Nigeria takes over the All-Star Weekend

With Nigerian music superstars Burna Boy, Tems and Rema as this year's halftime performers, American basketball's All-Star Weekend leaned fully into an African theme. The All-Star Weekend is an annual exhibition hosted every February by the National Basketball Association (the US national professional league). Its centrepiece is a basketball match in which the game's biggest stars face off. As with all big American sporting events, the adrenaline rush of the game is pumped even higher by music celebrities performing at halftime.

## MADAGASCAR

### Cyclone readiness saves more lives

Cyclone Freddy, a sea storm of rare strength that formed nearly three weeks ago near Indonesia, howled past Mauritius, where it flooded some hotels, then slammed into eastern Madagascar, where it killed seven people and ripped roofs off houses on Tuesday. It hit Mozambique on Friday. It is expected to cause heavy rains as far inland as Zimbabwe. It struck Madagascar a month after Cyclone Cheneso killed 35, but this time authorities had pre-emptively evacuated 7,000 people.

## MONEY LAUNDERING

### South Africa and Nigeria greylisted

In a meeting in Paris on Friday, the Financial Action Task Force, an intergovernmental financial regulations body, put both Nigeria and South Africa on a list of countries that don't have enough controls against money laundering and terrorism financing. The "grey list" of 23 countries already included nine in Africa of which one, Morocco, was removed after it improved its financial controls. Burkina Faso, DRC, Mali, Mozambique, Senegal, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda remain greylisted.

## GHANA

## Black Star mourned after Türkiye quake

Initially reported to have been rescued alive from the huge earthquake that ripped through parts of Türkiye and Syria, Ghanaian football player Christian Atsu was this week confirmed to have died. The 31-year-old player was caught under rubble in Hatay. He played for Ghana's national team and Türkiye's Hatayspor Kulübü. Before that, he played for Newcastle United and Chelsea in the United Kingdom. "Football has lost one of its finest personnel and ambassadors,



**Rising star: Christian Atsu was among 47,000 people who died in the quake.**

one who will be difficult to replace," said Ghanaian president Nana Akufo-Addo.

## COLONIAL LEGACY

## Plantations are still plantations

A BBC documentary released this week found that on Kenyan tea plantations set up by British colonialists and still run by British companies, workers are still being treated *like they are on a plantation*. The documentary reveals sexual abuse of women by plantation managers, backbreaking and lowly labour, and that mechanisation simply increased the opportunity for exploitation as jobs became rarer and competition for them even stiffer. The British owners of the plantations at the time of the abuses, Unilever and James Finlay, expressed shock about the revelations and fired four managers.

## SUDAN

## General says coup backfired on him

General Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, the leader of the notorious Sudanese paramilitary group, Rapid Support Forces, which was accused of the June 2019 massacre of pro-democracy protesters and committing genocide in Darfur 20 years ago, has some regrets. Not about any of that, though. He regrets that the October 2021 coup, in which he and other generals removed Sudan's civilian government, has "become a gateway" for the return of the allies of former longtime ruler Omar al-Bashir. "Hemeti" as he is widely known, expressed this sentiment in a televised speech on Sunday.



**Top of the class: Sierra Leone's David Moinina Sengeh is good at ministering**

## SIERRA LEONE

### Education minister is best in world

David Moinina Sengeh, the education minister of Sierra Leone, won the Best Minister in the World award at the World Government Summit in Dubai. A biomedical engineer with degrees from Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Sengeh was a trailblazer long before he joined the government, winning multiple awards for innovative healthcare technologies. His 2019 appointment to lead the ministry is part of Sierra Leone's push to transform its education sector, in which it now invests 22% of its annual national budget.

## BURKINA FASO

### Third Burkinabé army recruitment drive in a year

The army of Burkina Faso announced yet another recruitment drive this week. It's looking to enlist another 5,000 soldiers, who will serve in the army for five years – specifically to fight militants in the Sahel region of the country. This follows similar drives in October and April 2022, in which at least 3,000 were recruited. About 40% of Burkina Faso's territory is controlled by the militants, and Ibrahim Traoré – the president who took power in a coup last September – has staked the legitimacy of his regime on taking it back.

## NIGERIA

### Ballot box opens

The fate of Africa's most populous country and biggest economy will be decided by the Nigerian electorate on Saturday. With 93-million registered voters, this is the largest democratic exercise in African history. The three frontrunners are the ruling party's Bola Tinubu, the main opposition's Atiku Abubakar, and a relative dark horse in the form of Peter Obi, who hopes to have mobilised the youth vote. It is too close to call. If no one gets a clear majority, there will be a run-off election. See Issue 116 of *The Continent* for more in-depth coverage.

# Burkina Faso



Killing field: Thomas Sankara's reburial in Ouagadougou. Photo: De Maismont/AFP

## Sankara remains interred

### Kiri Rupiah

**T**he remains of Burkina Faso's revolutionary leader Thomas Sankara have been reburied alongside those of 12 others at the site of their murder nearly 30 years ago.

Soldiers and community leaders paid tribute during a ceremony on Thursday in the capital, Ouagadougou. He is now interred at the Thomas Sankara Memorial Park, which features a life-sized statue of Sankara pumping his fist in the air.

His widow Mariam and children were not present. In an earlier statement, his family said the reburial should have been at a site that "allows us to gather and

appease hearts, and not divide us and increase resentment", instead of the scene of his assassination.

Sankara was regarded as a pan-Africanist who championed a modest lifestyle and spoke out against neo-colonialism and Africa's dependency on the West.

He overthrew the ruling military regime in 1983 with his army colleague and friend Blaise Compaoré, but was shot just four years later – on the same day that Compaoré seized power.

Last year Compaoré, who led Burkina Faso for 27 years before being forced out by popular protests, was convicted in absentia of Sankara's murder. ■

# African Union

## Israel's bust-up steals Assoumani's thunder

The opening ceremony of the 36th African Union Summit in Addis had barely begun before it descended into acrimony. On the floor of the main hall, security guards confronted and then evicted diplomat Sharon Bar-Li, Israel's deputy director for Africa, saying that she did not have appropriate accreditation.

Later, the African Union said that Bar-Li was kicked out because she is not Israel's accredited ambassador to Ethiopia, who had been invited. Israel said it "looks harshly on the incident" and that Bar-Li was an accredited observer – with entrance badges.

The incident is the latest flashpoint in Israel's years-long quest to become an official observer nation to the AU (it was previously an observer at the Organisation of African Unity, the AU's predecessor). AU Commission chairperson Moussa Faki granted this status to Israel in 2021, but some member states – most notably Algeria and South Africa – have said that he does not have the authority to make this decision unilaterally.

Support for Palestine – which is, according to international law, unlawfully occupied by Israel – is a key plank of both Algerian and South African foreign policy. Palestine already has observer status at the AU.

"Until the AU takes a decision on whether to grant Israel observer status, you cannot have the country sitting and observing. So, it's not about South Africa or Algeria, it's an issue of principle," said South Africa's diplomatic spokesperson Clayson Monyela.

The incident overshadowed the appointment of Comoros president Azali Assoumani as chair of the continental body, replacing Senegal's Macky Sall.

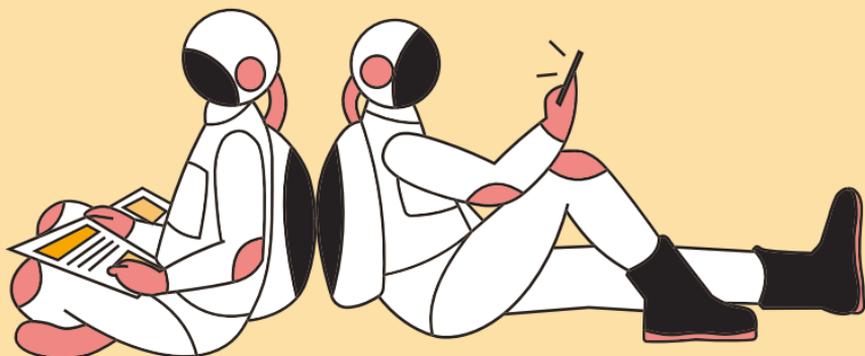
In his acceptance speech, Assoumani promised to focus on making the African Continental Free Trade Area a priority, and called for the cancellation of all of Africa's overseas debt. ■



**That's Sall, folks: Outgoing chair – and Senegal's president – Macky Sall addresses the closing session of the AU summit.** Photo: Eduardo Soteras/AFP

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# Ethiopia



See no evil: Poverty hidden behind big billboards and small slogans. Photo: AFP

## Nothing to see here.

**Ahead of the African Union Summit, authorities in Addis Ababa tried to hide all signs of extreme poverty – including poor people themselves.**

### Samuel Getachew in Addis Ababa

**W**hen African heads of state flew into Addis Ababa last weekend for the 36th African Union Summit, the streets of Ethiopia's capital city were unusually clean and orderly.

Gone were the beggars at the intersections. Gone were the street vendors hawking vegetables and second-

hand clothes. Gone were the teenagers offering roadside shoe-shines and sticks of gum.

Messy construction sites and informal markets were hidden away, concealed by giant billboards plastered with presidential portraits and pithy slogans. "Unity determines Africa's destiny," read one. "African solutions to African problems," another proclaimed.

At the summit, which concluded on Sunday, leaders discussed ambitious plans to lift 30-million Africans out of extreme poverty. The talks were held within the gleaming glass-and-steel Chinese-built skyscraper that houses the headquarters of the AU, a building that would not look out of place on the skylines of Dubai or Shanghai.

But the most visible signs of the extreme poverty that exists within Addis Ababa itself were hidden from view.

This was no accident.

### Potemkin village

*The Continent* spoke to a number of low-income families in the city who said that the beggars and street vendors who usually work in the streets had been

summarily detained by authorities and kept in detention centres for the duration of the summit. They were replaced by a heavy police and security presence.

In one incident, according to eyewitnesses, young women who begged near the Hyatt Regency Hotel were bundled into unmarked trucks by policemen last week. Some were beaten and verbally abused. Some had babies or toddlers strapped to their backs.

The hotel was hosting a number of heads of state and senior diplomats for the duration of the summit.

In Bole, an upmarket suburb near the international airport, the young people who normally work on the streets were conspicuously absent for the duration of the summit. People like 20-year-



**Fronting:** In Kera, a neighbourhood not far from the AU headquarters, newly-erect billboards offer a welcoming facade. Photo: Sawra Tafara/*The Continent*



Going up: Addis Ababa's skyline has adopted the angles and edges of Dubai and Shanghai

old Henok, who shines shoes on the pavement, had simply disappeared. Henok's mother, Almaz Tadesse, had no idea where he was, and when or if he would return. She worried that he would be sent to a prison far from the capital, and that his equipment – purchased with her meagre savings from her time as a domestic worker in Lebanon – would be confiscated.

Henok was released from a detention facility in Addis Ababa on Monday, the day after the summit concluded. His equipment is missing.

Another mother, whose son makes a living by begging, spent the weekend agonising over his whereabouts. "I did not think begging is illegal, but perhaps the government is making poverty illegal for us poor people," she told *The Continent*.

Addis Ababa Police did not respond to a request for comment.

Daniel Bekele, the head of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC), a state institution, told *The Continent* that the commission was aware of the issue. "EHRC has regularly received complaints about temporary detention of street children and others as part of security and rehabilitation measures, and we are concerned about it and doing more investigation of its human rights implications," he said.

According to the World Bank, 27% of Ethiopia's 120-million population live below the poverty line of \$2.15 per day.

### Image problems

Addis Ababa is not unique in trying to remove its poorer residents for

the duration of a major international gathering. Last year in Kigali, ahead of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, Rwandan authorities allegedly rounded up homeless people and beggars from the streets and placed them in an unofficial detention facility.

The push to clean up the city went even further, according to the *New York Times*: “Some residents said that they had been ordered to renovate or paint their homes or buy banners advertising the country’s tourism industry.”

“Rwanda’s strategy to promote Kigali as a hub for meetings and conferences often means continued abuse of the capital’s poorest and most marginalised residents,” said a Human Rights Watch spokesperson.

Infamously, authorities in Uganda did the same thing ahead of the 2007 Commonwealth meeting in Kampala, removing “undesirable” people from the streets in order to promote a “good image” of the country, according to researcher Sarah Musubika. And in both Athens and Beijing, vulnerable and itinerant communities were forcibly displaced ahead of the 2004 and 2008 summer Olympics respectively.

This week, after all the foreign heads of state returned home, Addis Ababa’s streets returned to normal. The beggars are back. The street vendors are back. Only the billboards remain in place, proclaiming their idealised vision for an Africa that does not yet exist – no matter how much, or whom, is concealed from view. ■



**Ignorance is bliss: Poverty was high on the agenda at the recently-concluded African Union summit in Addis Ababa.** Photo: Amanuel Sileshi/AFP



The other net zero:  
Fishermen remove  
plastic waste from  
their nets in Accra.

## The ocean is choking

**In Accra, as in much of urban Africa, waste management falls far short of what it needs to be. Plastic waste is killing marine life and people's income.**

**Marian Ansah (words) and Ernest Ankomah (photos) in Accra**

**F**rustration is written across Richard Yartey's face as he drags his empty net to shore. Empty isn't quite the word. The net is filled with plastic bottles and grocery bags, but not fish. This will cost him money. "We often have to repair our fishing nets two or three times a week due to plastic in the water," he tells *The Continent*.

Jamestown in Accra, where Yartey had cast his net, was once a thriving fishing

enclave. But Yartey says they now often have to leave Accra and travel to Elmina, a fishing spot about 130km away.

In Accra, the fishers are close to the better-paying city markets, but the same city also pollutes their fishing waters with discarded water bottles and sachets. Ghana produces 840,000 tonnes of plastic waste annually, with only a small portion being recycled, according to data provided by the World Economic Forum.

When the unrecycled waste finds its way into the ocean, it's not just a problem for humans. "Marine animals like turtles



**(Above) Fishermen with their catch, at Accra's Jamestown waste-strewn fishing enclave (below)**

and whales mistake it for food and suffer serious harm or even die,” says Professor Christopher Gordon of the Institute for Environment and Sanitation Studies at the University of Ghana.

A 2018 United Nations study said that

80% of municipal solid waste generated in African cities was recyclable and could generate up to \$8-billion a year.

In 2019, Ghana launched its national plastic action. It relies heavily on encouraging businesses to make products



out of recycled plastic.

Some have heeded the call – Nelplast Ghana, for example, produces pavement blocks from plastic waste with a workforce of 300 people.

But across the continent, small-scale private enterprise is an insufficient solution to this major public problem. Citizen initiatives in Africa recycle about 11% of the recyclable waste, says a 2022 UN

report by Professor Desta Mebratu and Dr Andriannah Mbandi. But there are few large-scale efforts so the rubbish instead ends up as an unsightly and costly mess.

In communities like Jamestown beach, every plastic-clogged net is a reminder of the urgent need for bigger solutions. Professor Gordon says that a ban on single-use plastic should be one of Ghana's solutions. ■



**Risible tide: The rubbish littering Jamestown has begun to drive fisherfolk away from the once abundant waters along Accra's coast.**

# Is your identity more national or ethnic? How about both?

Scholars often cite ethnicity as a source of division in African societies. Some politicians are happy to play that card.

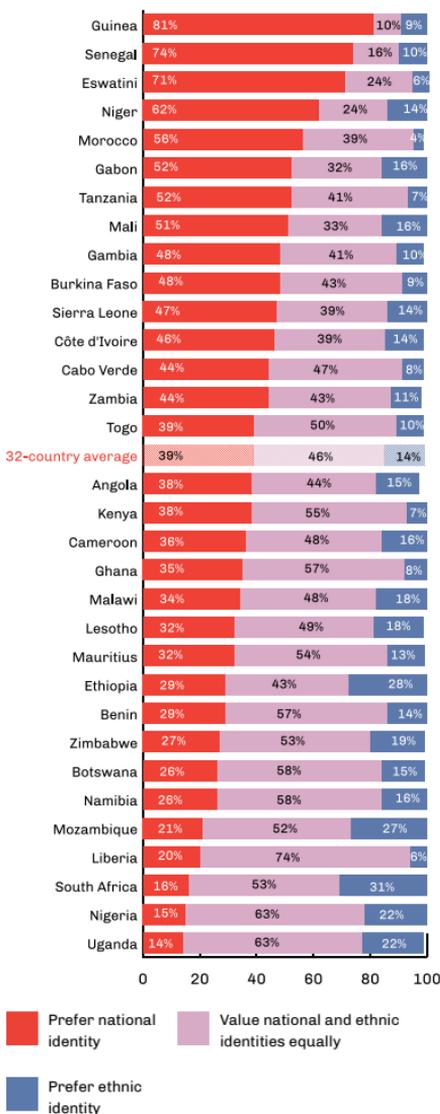
But are Africans more at home with their separate ethnic identities or their shared national one? The most popular response is “both,” according to Afrobarometer surveys in 32 countries.

While a plurality (46%) feel equally “national” and “ethnic”, 39% are more attached to national identity, and 14% lean more toward their ethnic identity.

Preferences vary by country. Most Liberians (74%), Ugandans (63%) and Nigerians (63%) value both identities equally, in contrast with Guineans, who strongly prefer national identity (81%), as do most in Senegal (74%) and Eswatini (71%). About three in 10 favour their ethnic identity in South Africa (31%), Ethiopia (28%) and Mozambique (27%), compared to one in 20 Moroccans (4%).

Zero Discrimination Day (1 March) reminds us ethnic discrimination is still a reality – 33% of Africans say their ethnic group experiences unfair treatment by the government. But so is tolerance: 91% say they’d have no problem living next door to people of different ethnic backgrounds. ■

National vs. ethnic identity | 32 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.





## Three's a tough crowd

It's hard to go wrong with a romantic Valentine's Day film – yet here we are.

**Wilfred Okiche**

**A**nother Valentine's Day, another Netflix romance. Oh, how we have come to dread them.

Two years after failing to strike gold with the so-called Nollywood-Bollywood mashup *Namaste Wahala*, Netflix tries again for a seasonal hit that will keep audiences indoors, chilling and all up in their feelings.

Three is a crowd in *A Sunday Affair* – an anaemic romantic drama produced by Nigeria's EbonyLife Films and directed by

Walter Taylaur. Starring Dakore Egbuson-Akande and Nse Ikpe-Etim, it has the hallmarks of the studio's output.

Ridiculous dialogue, great gowns, bad wigs, too much makeup, cardboard cut-out characters and familiar stars playing someone's fantasy version of upper class Lagosians. Except this time, there is hardly a sense of place to be discerned and the indoor, constricted locations could just as easily have been Cape Town or Accra.

The plot is simple enough. Two lifelong friends fall for the same (married) man. He swears he loves them both and wants to be with at least one of them – just as soon as he finalises his divorce. Don't feel bad for the wife. She is going to take their child to the United States and away from him. There is no mention of her again.

Anyway, how to resolve the impasse? Easy, throw in a health scare, a major one. That always works. Plus, it will help wring out the inevitable waterworks. Never mind that the film has not done any work to earn even a single tear.

The terribly leaden plotting manages to waddle into the final act where it becomes clear that, all along, this entire business has really been a clumsy attempt at retooling *Beaches*, the 1988 Garry Marshall Hollywood tearjerker starring Bette Midler.

If only the filmmakers had the guts to fully embrace their obvious influence, *A Sunday Affair* might have been much more interesting than the romance-challenged, humourless tedium that it offers up for our consideration. ■

# Cameroonian music or nor nor thin

**Local content quotas don't work, pushing bitter artists into xenophobia against Nigerians**

## Shuimo Trust in Buea

**C**ameroonian law requires broadcasters to keep their content 80% local and 20% foreign. But Nigeria's continued domination of the airwaves has turned into a social media war between Nigerians and Cameroonians.

"We cannot sit down and watch Nigeria colonise us. No to Nigerian music in Cameroon. We are tired of your greed," CY International, a Cameroonian comedian, said in a widely circulated video in 2021.

Nonetheless, local radios and entertainment bloggers often won't promote local artists unless they are paid, but will alert their audiences to new foreign songs, especially Nigerian ones, for no fee. Nigerian performers in Cameroon are often paid far more than their local artists. In December 2022, Nigerian star Kizz Daniel was reportedly paid \$70,000 to headline a show in Cameroon while home-based artists got \$5,000 to \$10,000.

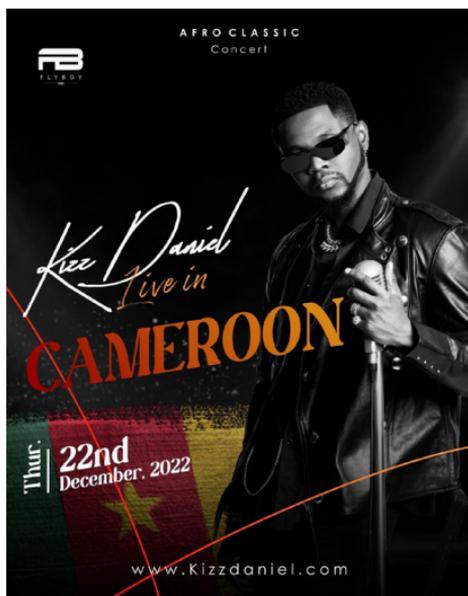
Industry gatekeepers often dismiss concerns about preferential treatment by saying it's just what the market dictates.

"Everyone is paid based on what they bring to the table," said media entrepreneur Bonteh Engelbert.

"If the music you put out is good enough, you won't even need to pay for promotion. The music will promote itself," said blogger Ndicho Boris, who also manages Cameroonian artists.

"I prefer to play music from Cameroon but I have to follow the dictates of my customers who prefer Nigerian and Congolese songs," Cameroonian DJ Paolo told *The Continent*.

Such explanations do little to calm frustrated local artists like CY. He believes his aggressive "80-20 Campaign" is "spiritual" and that he is ordained by





**Big deal: Nigerian artists like Kizz Daniel (left) are the focus of vitriol from Cameroon's CY International (below)**

God to save Cameroon's entertainment industry from foreign dominance, even as he veers into xenophobic claims like "Nigerians are greedy".

In February 2021, he spearheaded a fierce campaign that caused the cancellation of a concert by Nigerian hitmaker Naira Marley, having convinced authorities that Marley sets a bad example for Cameroonian youths. His 80-20 campaign has targeted other Nigerian celebrities, albeit without success, and often degenerates into social media wars between Nigerians and Cameroonians.

Even the chief executive of the Cameroon International Film Festival, Prince Agbor Gilbert, who agrees that the Cameroonian government has deliberately refused to implement the 80-20 law, is taken aback. "The current 80-20 Campaign by CY is full of hate, bitterness, tribalism and is even escalating to xenophobic attacks," he says.

CY is unfazed. "We have completely changed the mindset of Cameroonians to love their culture and music," he told *The Continent*, after claiming that "young



Cameroonians were abandoning their culture and almost everything that defines them in favour of foreign culture – to be precise, Nigerian culture".

Cameroon isn't the only country whose local content law isn't delivering. Zimbabwe requires local media to broadcast at least 75% of local content.

And in 2016, the South African Broadcasting Corporation instituted a policy to play 90% local music and only 10% foreign music across its 18 local radio stations – although this was later abandoned. ■

# 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

"Someone told me it was called the Simbadrone, but they were lion."



- 1\_** Before gaining independence, which country was known as "Overseas Province of Guinea" (from 1951 to 1972)?
- 2\_** Which country in Africa uses the escudo as its currency?
- 3\_** Name the Nigerian politician who served as the country's military head of state from December 1983 to August 1985.
- 4\_** Which lake (pictured) was originally called Lake Mwitanzige?
- 5\_** Angola just held its own Sambadrome. In which city did it take place?
- 6\_** In which city was the recent African Union Summit held?
- 7\_** The late football player Christian Atsu played for which country's national team?
- 8\_** The First Libyan Civil War ousted which leader 12 years ago?
- 9\_** True or false: Faustin-Archange Touadéra is the prime minister of the Central African Republic.
- 10\_** Where are Chagossians from?

## HOW DID I DO?

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



## THE CONTINENT'S FIRST-EVER REAL-LIFE QUIZ NIGHT

Last week *The Continent* had the pleasure and privilege of taking part in the Africa Media Festival in Nairobi. Two jam-packed days of sharing knowledge, gaining insight, meeting amazing people and celebrating the kaleidoscope of African journalism. Our job was to bring the energy and set the tone in the best way we know how: A quiz! But, like, live? In person? There were funny team names, dance battles, anagrams, a tense tiebreaker and cool prizes. We had *fun*. Our night of competitive mingling was an all-out success – and we look forward to doing it again next year. The only way it could have been better is if you had been there too. What do you reckon – fancy a quiz some time? ■

# Tradition meets technology to extend access to justice

Uganda's court system is prohibitively expensive, complex and corrupt. But innovations are making things a little bit easier.



Bataka Court in session. Photo: World Voices Uganda

**Diana Taremwa Karakire and Jonah Kirabo**

The last time Evelyn Kobusingye had a land boundary dispute with her neighbour, it was settled in a matter of days by a village court sitting in an open community square in Uganda's central district of Kibaale.

"I am happy that the matter was resolved quickly without costing me a lot of money and time," Kobusingye said. "I can now till my land in peace."

Kobusingye's experience is the opposite of what typically happens in this country, where citizens experience up to 12.7-million legal problems a year according to a 2020 survey report by The Hague Institute for Innovation of Law. About 4.7-million of those problems are abandoned without resolution.

Pursuing justice in government courts is complex, expensive (in both lawyer and bribery costs) and time consuming, so while 84% of Ugandans reported having had a recent legal problem, only 5% said

they went through the formal legal system.

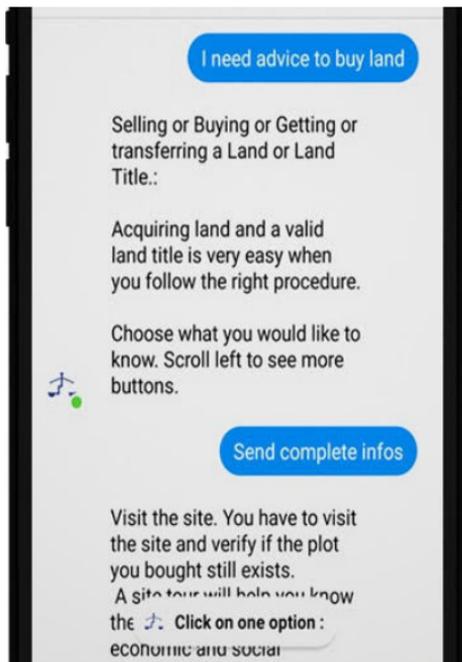
Kobusingye referred her dispute to a Bataka court, a modern rendition of pre-colonial justice traditions. Each court is led by seven people selected by the community, including women and youth representatives. An initiative of World Voices, a civil society organisation, Bataka courts are now operational in three of 135 districts: Kibaale, Kyenjojo and Kyegegwa. They have handled 6,353 cases involving 36,000 people since their launch in 2014.

Bataka courts hear cases on land, domestic and neighbourhood conflict; debt; and succession disputes, among others, and often conclude cases within 24 hours. The remedies and penalties may include public apologies, community service, orders for compensation and consent agreements.

Gard Benda, the executive director of World Voices, says their goal is to eliminate legal costs and so extend justice to more Ugandans.

But communities cannot completely do without the formal court system. According to prominent Ugandan law professor Fredrick Jjuuko, Bataka courts make justice “accessible, affordable and comprehensible to ordinary people” – but their rulings are non-binding and “rely primarily on social pressure which may not be sufficient for some cases”.

When poor people must go to the government court, there is another innovation that can help. JusticeBot, launched in 2018 by Asimwe Magezi Sagesse and his team, is a chatbot powered by artificial intelligence that connects people to lawyers via Facebook’s



Messenger app. “You could pay something little but we also have pro bono lawyers who can take on some issues for free,” says Sagesse. It also offers free basic legal knowledge.

In March 2022, Nanfuka Mary, a single mother of four was on the brink of losing her land to a local business owner who was claiming ownership.

She had tried reporting the matter to the police but says they did not offer much help, until a friend introduced her to JusticeBot which connected her to a pro bono lawyer. With this representation, Nanfuka got a restraining order against the businessman and kept using her land.

JusticeBot says they have handled over 100,000 requests for legal information and lawyer connections since they launched in 2018. ■

# AU! Who me? No, not you.



## Continental Drift

Samira Sawlani

Forget Hollywood, Bollywood, and Nollywood. Forget the Oscars and the Grammys. Last weekend the African Union Headquarters in Ethiopia was the place to be – and the place to be *seen* to be! The stars were all out at the African Union heads of state summit in Addis Ababa. Who needs red carpet fashion when you have these guys!

Zimbabwe's President Emmerson Mnangagwa looked extra snappy in his trademark scarf featuring the colours of the Zimbabwean flag.

Mr Millennial himself, Chad's Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno, was spotted in a stunning white ensemble, which he teamed with an interesting pair of pointed white shoes.

Even Cyril of South Africa looked dapper in his suit, perhaps because he had the privilege of not having to get dressed in the dark thanks to loadshedding.

The gang were out in full force, although it seems our own invitation to join them was inexplicably lost in the post? Also not present were the lead cast of *Keeping Up With The Coupdashians* from Guinea, Burkina Faso and Mali.



**Oh snap! Emmerson Mnangagwa, the exceedingly scarfed president of Zimbabwe, chats with his own shadow.**

The foreign ministers of those three governments had held a pre-party in Burkina Faso, where they said they “deplored” the sanctions imposed upon them by Ecowas and the African Union, from which they have also been suspended, and agreed to “pool their efforts and undertake joint initiatives for the lifting of the suspension measures and other restrictions”.

How sweet! Solidarity duly secured, off the suspendees then went to the African Union summit itself to see if they could slide into the proceedings anyway.

Meanwhile, the Ecowas leaders had their own group therapy sessions on the sidelines of the summit.

Would they let the three countries back in? We were on the edge of our seats (really, who needs Kim, Kourtney

or Khloe when you have Mamady, Assimi and Ibrahim!)

Alas, Ecowas leaders decided it was not to be. Were they scared of setting a worrying precedent – or worried about seating a scary president? Did the military chic clash with the caviar? Only they know! The bloc announced instead that it had decided to maintain the existing sanctions on all three countries.

The AU also got in on the action, announcing that all three countries, along with Sudan which is also yet to return to civilian rule, would remain suspended, as the assembly reaffirmed “zero tolerance against unconstitutional change,” the AU’s commissioner for political affairs, peace and security, Bankole Adeoye was quoted as saying.

Nice to see they have zero tolerance for *something*. But not for drama, of which more was to come, after a video circulated of an Israeli diplomat being escorted out of the venue.

The AU said she was not a properly accredited official, leading Israel to blame Algeria and South Africa for orchestrating her removal. A South African government spokesperson said no decision had been made on Israel’s observer status at the AU, so “you cannot have the country sitting and observing”.

We only have two words to say on the matter: Free Palestine.

While our leaders were hobnobbing at the AU, there was one among them for whom it was something of a swansong: Nigeria’s President Muhammadu Buhari. To our Nigerian friends going to the polls this weekend: We wish you well.

## A bitter brew

We’re sure plenty of tea was served (or spilled) at the AU summit, but this week also had us wondering about the real cost of the tea we’re drinking, after BBC Africa Eye uncovered allegations of sexual abuse on Kenyan tea farms owned by Unilever and James Finlay & Co, which supply big international brands like Lipton, Sainsburys and PG Tips.

The harrowing documentary showed women employees at these farms talk about supervisors asking them for sexual favours in return for jobs, being pressured into having sex with them and facing sexual harassment and abuse.

A woman journalist went undercover, applying for a role at Finlay’s Tea farms.

At the interview, the male recruiter – who has been with the company for years – asked for sexual favours in return for giving her a job and at one point pushed her up against a window.

While the companies involved say those facing accusations have been suspended, one thing is clear: these men carried out these acts because they knew they could.

They know about the global culture of victim-blaming, about the lack of protection and support mechanisms for employees, about companies not caring as long as they make money and about the absence of effective systems to protect and aid victims.

But the more light we throw at them, the harder it is for them to hide their darkness.

Now we see.

Now we rise. ■

# The Big Picture

Photo: Alexis Huguet/AFP

When the sun shines: A sapeur steps out in Kinshasa, capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo, on 10 February. Dozens of extravagantly dressed dandies, known as sapeurs, turned out to commemorate the death of Sertvos Niarcos, the legendary Congolese pop star who died in 1995 and who came to epitomise the pursuit of elegance in the face of poverty in the central African country.



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