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The Continent

The trouble with Farmer Bill





Cover: Nearly a billion more Africans will need food on their tables by 2050, yet farms are already struggling – and one in 10 people go days without food. Big solutions are needed. The world's seventh-richest person thinks he has some of those, and has injected a fortune into African agriculture. But Bill Gates' work has many critics. And some farmers say that the people promising solutions already owe "reparations" for the damage they say has been done by those solutions (p13)

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HISTORY

To the dinosaurs, South America was simply West Africa

A set of 260 dinosaur footprints discovered in Brazil and Cameroon has added to historical evidence that South America and Africa were once part of one supercontinent known as Gondwana. Left 120-million years ago, the footprints are nearly identical in shape. This affirmed to the researchers, an international team led by Dallas-based palaeontologist Louis L Jacobs, that the dinosaurs which left them roamed a landmass that eventually separated at the Cameroon coast and the north-east corner of Brazil.



Brazil or bust: But when the dinosaur looked back, it only saw one set of footprints. Photo: Ismar de Souza Carvalho

MIGRATION

Canada wants some African migrants

Students from Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Mali, Niger, Senegal and 12 Francophone African countries are eligible for a new Canadian citizenship path, if they agree to study in some parts of the country where French speakers are dwindling. The scheme, also open to French speakers from Lebanon, Egypt, Haiti and the Dominican Republic, seeks to recruit 2,500 tertiary students because, outside Quebec, Canada's percentage of French speakers is declining, which spoils the country's multicultural brand.

BURKINA FASO

Non-combatants killed in the trenches

Over the weekend, gunmen opened fire on people digging trenches on the orders of the Burkinabé army, killing up to 400 workers. Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin, a militant group, later told *Reuters* that it killed 300 and that they were militia members allied with the army. The Burkina Faso military government recruited tens of thousands of civilians as so-called "volunteer defenders of the fatherland" who do non-combat tasks but are not trained soldiers, blurring the line between civilians and fighters.

TECHNOLOGY

Starlink now in 12 African countries, but still no option for SA

Elon Musk's Starlink internet service launched in Botswana this week, bringing to 12 the number of African countries in which it's available. Starlink has so far

failed to get a licence in South Africa, where Musk was born, reportedly because post-apartheid racial equity laws require electronic communications companies to be 30% black-owned. A company representative told *The Continent* that Starlink and South Africa are trying to find a workaround, after Musk had "a positive conversation" with President Cyril Ramaphosa several months ago.



Sky-fi: All of your SpaceX, and just one basketcase.

Photo: SpaceX/AFP

CHAD

Flood death toll is more than triple previous reports

At least 175 people have died since late July in massive flooding that has now spread to all 23 provinces of Chad, the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of

Humanitarian Affairs said on Wednesday. International media reports focused on a massive mid-August incident that killed 54 people in the north-eastern Tibetsi province but the UN said the country's south-west region is the worst affected. Across Chad, 960,000 people have been affected, 250,000 hectares flooded and 30,000 heads of livestock washed away.

SUDAN

Burst dam adds to country woes

Heavy rains extensively damaged Arba'at dam in Sudan's Red Sea state leaving at least 60 people missing. The floodwater sent about 5-million cubic metres of

silt downstream, destroying at least 20 settlements. The dam is the main source of drinking water for Port Sudan, the wartime government base, so the city is likely to suffer significant shortages in the near future. The Sudanese army has been at war with the Rapid Support Forces, a paramilitary group that once did its dirty work, for 500 days this week.

Photo: AFP



NIGERIA

Kidnapped medical students rescued

Twenty students from the universities of Maiduguri and Jos, who were kidnapped on their way to a convention, were freed late last week, police said over the weekend. Armed men demanding a ransom seized the medical students on 15 August as they travelled to a conference in Benue State, in the country's central region. Police spokesperson Olumuyiwa Adejobi said the students were "rescued tactically and professionally" and no ransom was paid.

NAMIBIA

Israeli ship blocked on war-crime fears

Namibian authorities blocked the docking of a ship in Walvis Bay, concerned that it was carrying arms that could be used in Gaza. Justice Minister Yvonne Dausab told journalists that the *MV Kathrin*, which began its journey in Vietnam, was stopped because it had "explosive material destined for Israel". The International Court of Justice ruled in a case brought by South Africa that Israel's war could result in genocide and Namibia doesn't want any part of that.



Saint Pavel? A Russian protester holds up an icon depicting Telegram's founder. Photo: Olga Maltseva/AFP

FRANCE

Telegram's Russian founder arrested

Pavel Durov, the founder and chief executive of the social media and messaging platform Telegram, was arrested in Paris this week, and may face charges of obstructing justice. Telegram allegedly provided encrypted channels for criminals to co-ordinate illegal financial transactions and the distribution of child sexual abuse material. The case highlights the messiness of social media regulation: platform owners earn billions while taking no responsibility for harms caused, and surveillance states may use that to dismantle user privacy tools, like end-to-end encryption.

TANZANIA

Hassan observes that her rival just can't wait to be king

Visiting the Tanzania Wildlife Association earlier this week, Tanzanian President Samia Suhulu Hassan saw a restless lion and asked, "Does that lion have a name? If not, name him Tundu Lissu." Opposition leader Lissu is, in President Samia's estimation, always as unsettled as that lion. Considering that he will be coming for her job in next year's presidential election, the president's next visit should perhaps consider visiting an elephant graveyard to get some hyenas on her side.

GEOPOLITICS

Some things too rotten for the state of Denmark?

Weeks after the government of Assimi Göita gave Sweden's ambassador, Kristina Kuhnel, 72 hours to leave Bamako, Denmark announced that it will close its embassies in Mali and Burkina Faso, and appoint a special representative for the Great Lakes and Sahel region. On Monday, Copenhagen said it would open new missions in Senegal, Tunisia and Rwanda as military coups had "severely limited the scope for action in the Sahel".

South Africa

Greed, inertia fuel Mzansi's toxic legacy

A UN report praises SA's potential, but damns its environmental betrayal.

Sheree Bega in Johannesburg

South Africa has “enormous potential” and its people and environment are two of its most valuable assets. But they must be protected from toxic pollution being “fuelled by corporate greed and government inaction”, according to the United Nations special rapporteur on toxics and human rights, Marcos Orellana.

He warned that the legacy of pre-1994 environmental racism persists, exacerbated by outdated laws and inadequate enforcement.

“The negative impacts of toxic pollution from mining, coal-fired power plants, greenhouse gas-intensive projects, landfills, pesticides and other hazardous substances disproportionately affect marginalised and low-income communities along racial lines.”

South Africa has ratified key multilateral environmental agreements

on chemicals and wastes. It has also taken on a global leadership role in the human rights and environmental areas. And all this is backed by strong local laws. But Orellana noted that: “This is severely undermined by a widespread lack of enforcement, owing to limited financial and human resources and the low priority given to environmental offences.”

Outdated laws are “resulting in human rights violations and abuses”, he said.

And existing laws, as well as the capacity to enforce them, are being consistently weakened. Orellana pointed to two of South Africa's biggest polluters, state power utility Eskom and petrochemical giant Sasol, which have been given many postponements to comply with pollution minimums.

Orellana also noted that the country's ageing water and wastewater infrastructure is on the “brink of collapse”, primarily because of low investment in maintenance. One in every three wastewater treatment plants are in a critical condition.

Notes like this all return to a central theme – a country with strong laws but a state that is failing to enforce the laws, and a corporate sector that profits from that failure. ■

This story originally appeared in the Mail & Guardian

Health

Red tape, lost lives, and then more red tape

With mpox spreading faster than ever, the WHO has still not approved the two available vaccines.

The Democratic Republic of Congo says it needs 3.5-million doses of an mpox vaccine to curb the health emergency there. Emergency responders hoped doses would start arriving this week, after Japan pledged to buy three million vials for the country. None came.

“There are still several processes to follow,” Cris Kasita, the head of the DRC mpox response team, told *Reuters* on Monday.

The only country that has cut through the red tape and received vaccines is Nigeria, which received 10,000 doses this week – a donation from the United States that was requested long before mpox was officially declared an emergency, the BBC reported.

In East Africa, the epicentre of this year’s outbreak, mpox keeps spreading. The Burundian health ministry said in a statement this week that 193 people are

hospitalised with mpox. No deaths have been reported there. But in DRC, where it spread to at least 18,000 people, 615 people have died, and scientists say the virus strain currently driving the mpox outbreak is mutating faster than they expected.

Little wonder then that when the continent’s public health experts met for the WHO Africa conference in the Republic of Congo this week, the opening was overshadowed by demands to speed up the paperwork that will get the vaccine out, as reported by *Health Policy Watch*.

The WHO would have to approve available vaccines for emergency use, in order for Gavi and Unicef, Africa’s main vaccines partners, to buy them and cut away the red tape of bilateral donations.

WHO director-general Dr Tedros Ghebreyesus, said at the Brazzaville conference that the approvals will happen in the next three weeks. ■



Intense reaction: The strain driving the outbreak in East Africa is mutating faster than projected. Photo: AFP

Not yours

Bad week for Western dealers in Africa

Endeavour Mining's fire-sale ended in nationalisation – and the Boston Consulting Group's corrupt dealings with the Dos Santos regime blew up in its face.

Kiri Rupiah

Two mines at the heart of a legal dispute between two multinational companies have been nationalised by the Burkina Faso government.

Endeavour Mining and Liliium Mining have been duking it out in a London arbitration court since March after the latter bought the Wahgnion and Boungou mines. Endeavour claimed Liliium missed payments of more than \$100-million. Liliium's excuse was that Endeavour exaggerated the financial and operational capabilities of the mines in the first place.

Endeavour Mining was the subject of a special report by *The Continent* last week, which revealed that the London-listed company has earned at least \$598-million from Senegal's Sabodala mine since buying it in 2021. The company keeps 90% of the profits from operating the mine, which it values at \$2.5-billion, leaving the Senegalese government a paltry 10%.

Endeavour also owned mines in Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso and Mali but as

of June 2023, months after a coup in Ouagadougou, the company tried to sell-off the Burkinabé mines for \$300-million.

It is going to have to take a haircut on the deal, at least in the short-term. In the settlement agreement reached this week, the Burkina Faso government will take the mines, pay Endeavour \$60-million by the end of the year and a 3% royalty on up to 400,000 ounces of gold produced at the Wahgnion mine.

But it will be one legal headache lighter, as Endeavour and Liliium "have agreed to cease the current legal proceedings against each other".

In other bad news for western dealing, the Boston Consulting Group will pay \$14-million profits from corruption in Angola to the US department of justice.

The firm admitted to US authorities that it paid millions of dollars to win business in Angola, in the last six years of the rule of Eduardo dos Santos. *The Financial Times* reports that in that time, the company got 12 Angolan contracts worth \$22.5-million. ■


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The Continent

A photograph of President Mokgweetsi Masisi of Botswana, smiling and holding a large, clear, faceted diamond in his right hand. He is wearing a dark blue suit jacket, a white shirt, and a red tie. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a museum or gallery setting with other exhibits.

Rock slide: Big diamonds won't save slipping diamond revenue all on their own.

Photo: Monirul Bhuiyan/AFP

The panic behind Botswana's big, sparkly diamond show

Diamonds account for 30% of Botswana's entire economy. But lab-grown gems mean less demand for ones dug out of the soil. For now, Botswana is trying to get more control over the money still to be made from its precious stones.

Keletso Thobega in Gaborone

Diamonds are how all presidents of Botswana have seen roads built since 1967. Last week was no different. When he unveiled the largest diamond to be mined this century, President Mokgweetsi Masisi exclaimed: "I can see new roads being built."

The translucent gem is the size of an adult's palm. The second-largest diamond ever found, it could sell for tens of millions of dollars. And 10% of

that will go to Botswana because, unlike other countries rich in raw materials, the southern African state has kept its seat at the table. Through agreements with mining companies, it earns crucial dollars and keeps a share to sell for itself.

But Masisi has to work harder than his predecessors to keep the cash cow alive. Botswana is the world's biggest producer of mined diamonds by value, and mines 20% of all diamonds, by weight. That value is falling rapidly thanks to lab-grown diamonds. These are cheaper and hardly

distinguishable from mined ones.

In January, the middle-income country estimated that its economy would grow by 4.2%. But then diamond sales nearly halved in the first three months of the year. Last month, the IMF changed its own estimate and said the economy would only grow by 1%. It also advised the country to spend less on infrastructure because it would have less money.

Seeing the shifting market, Botswana has started to change its diamond marketing strategy and invested in making splashier announcements: big rare finds that make international news.

Canadian miner Lucara Diamond has helped. The Karowe mine, 500km north of the capital Gaborone, gave up this diamond after two other big finds in its 12 years of operation. One of these was reportedly sold for over \$50-million. Last week's 2,492-carat stone was found using x-ray technology designed to identify and preserve large, high-value diamonds so that they can be extracted whole.

But discovery of rare, highly sought-after stones is "not the basis for an industry", says mining historian Duncan Money. "Ultimately, it doesn't change the fact that synthetic diamonds are becoming cheaper and better."

So Masisi's other bet is to swing for more of the pie – even as it dwindles.

Last February, he threatened to sever ties with Anglo American, which with Botswana co-owns mining giant De Beers, and local miner Debswana, which runs four of Botswana's five active diamond mines.

Masisi's critics accused him of

nationalist rhetoric but when the Debswana arrangement was renewed (in principle) a few months later, the half-century partnership had some crucial new changes. Where Debswana used to only be able to sell 25% of its diamonds to the state-owned Okavango Diamonds marketing company, it can now sell 30%. And that number will grow to 50% over the next 10 years.

The rest will still go to De Beers, in which Botswana has a stake of 15%. In addition, De Beers will invest a billion pula (\$75-million) into a fund for development, ramping that up to 10-billion over 10 years.

The Botswana government's work to protect its diamond income also means keeping others out. This May, when Anglo American announced it would split from De Beers, Masisi said Botswana was prepared to buy more of a stake in the spin-off, to keep out "bad guys" with "impatient capital". De Beers made only \$72-million last year – which is a bust in the diamond industry. But its profits have historically ranged between \$500-million and \$1.5-billion, according to *Mining Weekly*. Its target is to return to an annual core profit of \$1.5-billion by 2028.

Masisi reckons that if Botswana puts enough public money in the game to patiently ride out the booms and busts of the erratic diamond industry, he and his successors will continue building roads, schools and hospitals. Others, like Money, reckon it's time for Botswana to start diversifying its economy instead. ■

Additional reporting by Kiri Rupiah



Photo: Guillem Sartorio/AFP

Bill Gates, Big Agriculture and the fight for the future of Africa's farmland

The Microsoft founder wields enormous influence over agriculture in Africa. He may be trying to end hunger, but critics say he is 'playing god' – and getting it wrong.

Simon Allison

Africa has the fastest-growing population on the planet. There could be more than 2.4-billion people on this continent by 2050. That is a *lot* of mouths to feed. Feeding them all is the single greatest policy challenge facing African leaders.

The scale of the problem is daunting,

given that we can't even keep our existing population fed. Of the 1.5-billion people that live in Africa today, about 10% face severe food insecurity – that means they sometimes go entire days without eating a proper meal. Hundreds of millions more don't always know where their next meal is coming from.

Now add another 900-million people into the mix. Something has to change.

The people tasked with figuring out what this change looks like are meeting next week in Kigali at the African Food Systems Forum. With the participation of the African Union, the forum will debate and then promote a 10-year plan to accelerate and transform African agriculture.

The premise is deceptively straightforward: to feed the people, you have to fix the farms – in particular, the continent’s 33-million smallholder farms. These farms currently grow 70% of Africa’s food – but do so with some of the lowest yields in the world.

But exactly how to fix those farms, while protecting the farming communities, is a matter of increasingly bitter debate.

The most influential figure in this debate is not an African farmer, or political leader, but a software engineer from the United States who has not worked a field in his life – although he does own quite a few: an estimated 270,000 acres across 19 US states.

The American dream

Bill Gates, the world’s seventh-richest person, is passionate about farming. He believes that modern industrial agricultural practices can solve world hunger. In the US, he has leveraged his fortune, estimated at \$129-billion, to buy up so many fields that he is now that country’s biggest owner of farmland.

Farming in America looks very different to farming in Africa. The farms there are enormous: the size of an average US farm is 100 times bigger than its

African equivalent. American farmers also tend to grow a single cash-crop, like corn or soybean, from genetically-modified “hybrid” seeds. New seeds must be bought every year – because they cannot reproduce themselves – from massive industrial agriculture companies like Bayer and Syngenta, along with all the chemical fertilisers, herbicides and pesticides necessary for them to thrive.

All those inputs mean that it is an expensive model, and farmers need access to finance to make it work. But when it does work, it delivers: corn yields in the US are around 11 tonnes per hectare. In Kenya, the average is just 1.4 tonnes per hectare.

For Gates, the solution to hunger in Africa lies in bridging the gap between these two numbers. To feed more people, African farmers need to grow more food – and to do so, they must learn how to farm like their US counterparts. Farms must get bigger. African farmers need access to the latest hybrid seeds, and the capital to purchase them. Tired soil needs help from chemical fertilisers, crops need protection from bugs and disease, and harvests should be sold at market rather than stored for subsistence.

It sounds simple, but in practice this would be nothing short of a revolution in African agriculture, overturning centuries of traditional methods.

A revolution is exactly what Gates is proposing. In 2006, the Gates Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation set up the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (Agra), and between them have ploughed more than a billion dollars into reshaping

both national and continental agricultural policies.

But the revolution has not gone according to plan.

A food system in collapse

Last month, the African Centre for Biodiversity released a report that sought to answer a question: Is Zambia's food system collapsing? The country is suffering through one of its worst-ever droughts. Nearly half of maize under cultivation has been lost, while the price of this staple food has risen by 30%. More than six million Zambians, from a population of 20-million, are at risk of acute food shortages and malnutrition.

This was not part of Bill Gates' vision. Successive Zambian administrations have been among the most enthusiastic adopters of the kinds of policies recommended by the Gates Foundation. The country is a poster-child for Agra's drive to industrialise African agriculture, having implemented in 2009 a new subsidy programme to incentivise farmers to switch to commercial seeds and intensive fertiliser use. More than a million farmers did.

But, instead of increasing yields, the new approach simply increased farmers' vulnerability to climate shocks like the current drought, the new report concludes. The use of hybrid seeds and imported fertilisers has degraded the soil, making it difficult to grow anything else; and the push to replace subsistence crops with cash crops, which then failed, means that farmers and their families are going hungry.

"We used to grow diverse crops,"



Gatekeeping: Volunteers unload maize meal in Simumbwe, Zambia, where food insecurity affects over six million people. Photo: Guillem Sartorio/AFP

said Mary Sakala, a Zambian farmer and chairperson of the Rural Women's Assembly, which commissioned the report. "But now governments and agribusiness have pushed farmers into monoculture that depends on inputs. Their programmes have made us all vulnerable."

It's not just Zambia: broader continental studies have also cast doubt on the effectiveness of Agra's policy proposals, including one commissioned by the Gates Foundation itself, along with Agra's other funders. That study, released two years ago, found "Agra did not meet its headline goal of increased incomes and food security for 9-million smallholders."

Another study, by Tufts University in the US, found no evidence in national-level data of the 13 key countries targeted by Agra to suggest that its "green revolution policies had any meaningful positive impact on crop yields or food security. Despite objecting to its findings, Agra appears to have taken at least some note of its findings: it removed "Green

Revolution” from its name in 2022, and is now known by its acronym alone.

‘Playing god’

“Bill Gates and big agribusinesses are playing god,” said Durban-based cleric Bishop Takalani Mufamadi. “They claim to be messiahs of the hungry and the poor, but they have failed dismally to deliver because of the industrialisation approach, which degrades soils, destroys biodiversity, and values corporate profit over people. It is immoral, sinful and unjust.”

Mufamadi was speaking on Wednesday on behalf of the Southern African Faith Communities’ Environment Institute, which called for the Gates Foundation to commit to “reparations” to repair the damage its agricultural policies have caused in Africa. Although he would not be drawn on a specific figure, he said that the foundation must work with the people who have been harmed to “repair the land and the water table”.

This call was echoed by the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa, a civil society umbrella group that claims to represent more than 200-million smallholder farmers, pastoralists and indigenous peoples across the continent.

“The path they are leading us on is a kind of agriculture where we cannot farm without the use of agrichemicals,” said general coordinator Million Belay. This, he argues, leaves farmers vulnerable to extreme weather events and the fluctuating prices of inputs like fertilisers, which are usually imported.

Belay’s criticism goes a step further: he argues that the Gates Foundation has

used its enormous political and monetary influence to crowd out alternative ideas. “I’m not saying that African governments have no agency, they do also have agency, but they are tied up with debt and other money challenges, which opens the door for the Gates Foundation and other big funders to come and influence our policies and strategies.”

When contacted by *The Continent*, the Gates Foundation rejected these critiques. “Our support of many organisations like Agra helps countries prioritise, co-ordinate, and effectively implement their national agricultural development strategies, based on country plans, to achieve this goal.”

Enock Chikava, the Gates Foundation’s director of agricultural delivery systems, went on: “We also believe that engaging in open dialogue with a diversity of African voices – including farmers themselves – is critical to our work and will continue to seek out constructive dialogues to address food and nutrition security around shared goals and the best ways to achieve them.”

For now, however, those dialogues will not include groups like Belay’s Association for Food Sovereignty in Africa, which will not be attending the big forum in Kigali next week – a forum where Agra plays a major role, with support from development partners like the Gates Foundation and industrial partners like Bayer and Syngenta.

This means that, once again, it is Bill Gates’ vision for the future of African agriculture that is likely to shape continental policy for the next decade – whether it works or not. ■

PHOTO ESSAY

Your friendly neighbourhood Ethio-Spider-Man!

The creators of Captain Mfombi, a fictional Zimbabwean superhero, said that their idea of a hero is one who saves the world “one menial task at a time”. On the streets of Addis Ababa, that vision is being realised. Dressed in a Spider-Man costume, a man – as yet unnamed – engages in small acts of kindness to the people

around him: mending old clothes, dusting the shoes of passers-by, and serenading onlookers. He has become an internet sensation, and is inspiring other residents of Ethiopia’s capital to engage in community service. AFP photojournalist **Amanuel Sileshi** was there to witness the community crusader in action.



Horse and buggy: A man dressed in a Spider-Man costume patrols the streets of Addis Ababa in his horse cart earlier this month, on the lookout for good deeds in need of doing. Ethio-Spider-Man has become an internet sensation in Ethiopia, with viral TikTok videos inspiring people in Addis Ababa and beyond to engage in community service and offer a helping hand.





Drought, and the neighbours who can't get along

Severe drought brought a Moroccan farming village to its knees, but unresolved conflict is its most existential threat.

Salah Mahfoudh in Tiazite

Fattuma Al-Ma'ti sits on her porch in Tiazite village, central Morocco, tracing patterns on the hem of her dress. Gazing at mountains that have been her home for almost a century, the 90-year-old recalls the most difficult time her community has ever faced: the year of hunger.

In 1944, drought hit Tiazite and continued for three years. Her home, just a three-hour drive northeast of the Ouzoud Waterfalls, became a barren expanse of despair. The springs dried up, the oak and carob trees withered, family grain reserves were nearly depleted, and livestock perished one by one.

"We had no choice but to leave," Al-Ma'ti says. The villagers migrated southeast to desert oases where water and gardens still promised life. For two years, they could not return to the mountains.

Upon their return to Tiazite, Al-Ma'ti says her community was determined to never face such hardship again. But today, she fears history is repeating itself. For more than five years, Morocco has grappled with another severe and long

drought. It dried up Tiazite's natural spring and triggered panicked responses that have divided the village, to the point of paralysis.

Lessons of the past unlearned

Because of the drought, for more than five seasons, the village hardly harvested any barley, olives, or almonds, the main crops cultivated there. Yet, a new well dug by the local municipality six months ago remains unused due to disputes on how to share its water.

Some members of the village want the water reserved for personal use only but the area is home to large almond and olive orchards that need it too, and are very important to the local economy and nutritional needs.

Many of these orchards date back to when Al-Ma'ti and her contemporaries returned to the land after the 1940s drought. Desperate to avoid a repeat of their ordeal, the villagers chose to "live with the land not against it" as Al-Ma'ti puts it. They replaced livestock with olive and almond trees, and imposed stiff fines for animals that trampled gardens.

In time, plant-based agriculture

became the area's mainstay. To share the water resources, each family was allocated a share of water from the village spring using a unit of measurement based on a day and night cycle.

But that system appears to have been discarded, along with the natural spring it was based on, which has run dry. The problem is: the community has failed to reach an agreement on a new system.

“The community must establish an association to oversee the daily management of water distribution,” says Abdelmajid Tamzoura, head of the Beni Hassan family in the area.

But others want an existing village association, Tiazite Charity Association, to manage the well. Saleh Ben Kroom, the treasurer of the association, which was set up in 2015, says it already has the financial and administrative capabilities to manage this facility.

Underpinning the deadlock are old grievances. While the old rules of water sharing were universally applied and effective when the natural spring run, their limitations were not always accepted happily, especially during difficult times.

“Some grudges arose,” says Ben Kroom. “These grudges did not die with the grandparents’ generation; instead, they were inherited by successive generations.”

Those that didn't suffer those rules gladly would prefer to negotiate new ones starting with a blank slate, and those that liked them see that as an attempt to “impede the preservation of the village's natural responses”, as Ben Kroom puts it.

As the deadlock lingers, the impact of inadequate water intensifies. With their



Legacy issues: Inherited grievances complicate Morocco's water woes.

Photo: Salah Mahfoudh

own olive, almond and barley harvests still throttled, Karam says, families now rely on flour subsidies from the government. And some residents are improvising, often in costly and ineffective ways, by extracting water elsewhere.

In this arid, harsh environment, the survival of Tiazite depends not only on the availability of water but on the ability of its residents to work together, overcome differences and embrace their shared heritage. ■

This story is published in collaboration with Egab.

Israeli jets continue to traumatise African migrant workers

The Beirut port explosion four years ago shattered thousands of lives and its trauma is still palpable. Many of Lebanon's African migrant workers are haunted by memories of that fateful day. Their wounds – both physical and emotional – were left untreated, and now an expanding Israel-Hamas war is traumatising them once again.

Amélie David

A few minutes before 5pm on 6 August, a boom rippled across Beirut.

Two days earlier, people in Lebanon's capital had commemorated the 2020 Beirut port explosion. The boom was reminiscent of the shattering sound back then, when 237 people were killed.

This explosive sound was quickly followed by another – stronger and louder. In the bustling streets, terrified people scrambled for shelter.

It was not a bomb, or an explosion at the port: Israeli attack planes had torn through the air, flying as close as possible to the ground, fast enough that they broke the sound barrier. The sonic boom and shockwave this creates is used as a tool of psychological warfare, and it came right before a scheduled speech by Hezbollah's leader Hassan Nasrallah.

It wasn't the veiled threat of war by Israel that threw Marian Sesay, a Sierra-

Leonean migrant living in Lebanon. It was the trauma of the past.

“Those sonic booms, that's like what happened on the fourth of August explosion for sure,” says Sesay, referring to the port explosion among whose fatalities were 76 foreign nationals. “Now, I'm scared of every little sound”, she says over the laughter of children in the background.

On that day in 2020, 2,750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate kept in Beirut's port exploded, killing hundreds, injuring more than 6,000 and leaving around 300,000 people homeless.

Sesay worked as a domestic worker then in the Bourj Hammoud municipality, on the outskirts of Beirut, not far from the port. When the blast boomed through the air, like everyone, she was stunned at first then fear rapidly set in.

“After the blast, I was afraid of everything. I had insomnia and I was always afraid I was going to die”, she



Crowded out: Hundreds gathered in Beirut on 4 August to mark four years since the devastating blast in Lebanon's capital. Photo: Ibrahim Amro/AFP

recalls. “That sound is a trigger.”

The young woman came to Lebanon 10 years ago to work for a Lebanese family under the Kafala system, an extreme form of employment sponsorship that allows employers to control the entry, exit, work, and residence of migrant workers, making the labourers vulnerable to exploitation and modern slavery, particularly in domestic work.

Collectively, the Arab region is home to more than 24-million migrant workers, making up 40% of the labour force – the highest share of any region, according to the Global Slavery Index. Lebanon has at least a quarter of a million from Africa and Asia.

Crises exacerbate the vulnerabilities of workers under the Kafala system and the aftermath of the Beirut port explosion was a case in point.

“Many of the people in the affected areas were vulnerable women, and while Lebanese had other places to go to, they didn’t,” says Ghina Al-Andary, an officer at Kafa, an NGO that helps domestic

migrant workers in Lebanon.

In the affected area, in-house help had become a status symbol.

Viany De Marceau, a Cameroonian who came to Lebanon as a domestic migrant worker under the Kafala system in 2015, explained this in an article for the Migrant Worker Action group: “Along the port of Beirut, two maids per apartment are not enough. The more maids you have, the better you are regarded. There are two Filipinas for the cooking, two Ghanaians to take care of the children, an Ethiopian or a Cameroonian for the cleaning.”

After the 2020 blast, most of the help Lebanon received was prioritised for locals. One MP, George Atallah, proposed a law to explicitly exclude families of non-Lebanese victims from compensation.

Marceau wonders who remembered the Africans who died on 4 August 2020. She wrote: “Even in death, for you, we do not count. They retrieved the bodies but did not mention the presence of the Black women, our presence.”

In the aftermath, some migrant workers decided to leave Lebanon for good. Others chose to stay. They healed with the help of some organisations, the community, and their family back home.

But the scars are still there – scratched each time Israeli jets break the sound barrier, as they have done several times since the Hamas attack on 7 October 2023.

The Israeli state responded to the attack not only by bombarding Gaza (where over 41,000 people have since died), but also stretching the hits, or threat of them, to parts of Lebanon, Syria and even Iran, in pursuit of Hamas allies like Hezbollah. ■

Be your own data analyst. Here's how ...

Over the past three years, Afrobarometer's "Data" page in *The Continent* has brought you more than 100 graphics reporting on Africans' views and experiences of everything from religious leaders and climate change to social media and toilets.

But we haven't shown you what people surveyed in your country consider to be

their number one problem.

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But we *will* show you how to find that out on your own – along with responses to scores of other survey questions we've asked more than 385,000 people in 42 African countries over the past 25 years.

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1 Go to www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis/

2 Pick a survey round

(anytime between 1999 and 2023)

R1 1999/2001

R2 2002/2003

R3 2005/2006

R4 2008/2009

R9 2021/2023

3 Pick a country or countries

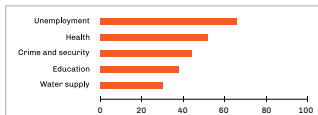
- | | |
|--------------|----------|
| Algeria | Angola |
| Benin ✓ | Botswana |
| Burkina Faso | Burundi |
| Cabo Verde | Cameroon |
| | |
| | |
| Zambia | Zimbabwe |

4 Pick the survey question(s) you're interested in

- A Socio-demographics & sample...
 - B Interview conditions
 - C Democracy, freedom, and citizen...
 - C_01 Rights and freedoms**
 - C_02 Demand for democracy
- Freedom to say what you think
- Freedom to join any political organisation
- Freedom to choose who to vote for

5 Click – you're a data analyst! And a data visualiser

(it produces a graphic to go with your findings!)



- Selected samples
- Cross by some variable
- Table display options
- Chart display options
- Question translations

You can break your results down by gender, age, rural-urban location, education level, and other variables. You can examine how they've changed over time. You can spend hours (or not) exploring what Africans think. And use your findings for your next advocacy campaign, news article, school paper – or cocktail party.

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



Photo: Film Still



Then and back again

The scenes in a restored film about a bygone South Africa feel eerily familiar.

Line Sidonie Talla Mafotsing

As anti-apartheid protests and boycotts gathered energy in 1980s South Africa, the government escalated its violent suppression, raids and mass detentions. As he says himself, Oliver Schmitz made a film that “really captures the resistance that really came to form in the 80s”.

The 1988 film *Mapantsula* opens with police transporting the black protesters they have arrested. This is where we meet our antihero: Themba, also known as “Panic”. He has been rounded up and put into a cell with eight other men.

In apartheid South Africa, audiences hardly got to meet Panic. The government’s censorship board banned the film after its first screening. But now, 30 years after the fall of that government, a newly restored version of *Mapantsula* will hit the big screen again.

Panic’s story is an interesting character to centre a story of that time around. A small-time thief, he only joined in the township riots for his own interests. But while in custody, an encounter with a white police chief changes him. He then has to choose between saving himself and joining a larger movement.

Panic has no regard for anyone or any

cause but himself. In the jail cell, when the other detainees refuse to eat as an act of protest, Panic picks up the plate and eats the rice, even as his eyes show uncertainty. But as his saga progresses, we see how even those who weren't political could find themselves part of the resistance.

Schmitz wrote the script in collaboration with the late Thomas Mogotlane, the actor who plays Panic. During the making of the film, Schmitz was drafted into military service for the apartheid regime. He resisted by fleeing to Germany and completed the script with his collaborators via letters. "It was a weird, long process but it worked," he told *The Continent*.

The making of *Mapantsula* was resistance itself – to avoid censorship before its completion, the collaborators developed a fake script and prepared cover stories to tell the police if intercepted.

By realistically portraying what life was like for black South Africans living in the townships, it is a faithful document of the time. But comparing what one sees of that time to today's South Africa, where unemployment is nearly 33%, does raise sad questions about the completeness of that revolution. "There is still a divide and disjunction in society," says Schmitz. "There are still poor people who don't feel like their lives are significantly better or different in economic terms."

In one scene locals confront the mayor about rent prices at a community meeting. An activist says people are already struggling to support their families because of a shortage of jobs before asking



how they can afford a rent increase. That status quo still rings true today.

On its second coming, Schmitz hopes the questions *Mapantsula* raises echo beyond South Africa's past, present, or even its borders: that the film will prompt us to confront inequality across the continent. "I think it is important to make these links," he says. ■

THE QUIZ

0-3

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

4-7

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

8-10

"The Obelisque is impressive, but wait till you see the Asterisque."

Photo: Thibault Camus/POOL/AFP



1_ The Obelisque de Louxor at the Place de la Concorde (pictured) is located in Paris. Which country was the obelisk taken from?

2_ A billionaire from which country has recently become Africa's richest person, according to Bloomberg's Billionaires Index?

3_ Which country is the billionaire who was previously Africa's richest person from?

4_ In which country was one of the world's largest diamonds recently mined?

5_ Which currency is used in The Comoros?

6_ Libya gained its independence from which country in 1951?

7_ Which country is the easternmost on the continent?

8_ Which country's name comes from the Portuguese phrase "Rio dos Camarões"?

9_ Kirundi is an official language of which country?

10_ Salif Keïta, the "Golden Voice of Africa", is from which country?

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

Rethinking how to address 'irregular' migration from Africa

International responses need to be informed by evidence – not ideological rhetoric – and must account for the migrant's agency.

Linguère Mously Mbaye

Irregular migration from Africa has been a growing concern since the mid-2000s and continues to dominate news headlines. Last year 40,868 migrants attempted the dangerous sea crossing from West Africa to the Canary Islands, according to the International Organization for Migration. Of these, 39,910 reached their destination, more than double the number recorded in 2022.

While most African migration occurs within the continent, Europe-bound irregular migration is notable for the severe human-rights violations, loss of life and economic inefficiencies it causes in migrants' home countries, transit, and destination countries.

In home countries, political instability, macroeconomic shocks, violent conflict, and a lack of opportunity have long fuelled the migration pressure. In recent years, these issues have been compounded by climate change, which has increased food and water insecurity and destroyed lives and livelihoods. With rising debts now

squeezing African governments' already-strained budgets and undermining poverty-reduction efforts, young Africans are likely to continue risking perilous journeys in search of a better life abroad. At the same time, increased connectivity has made young Africans more aware of opportunities elsewhere, raising their expectations and demands.

In addition to seeking economic opportunity, people also migrate in search of social justice and freedom. Young people, who make up most of Africa's population, frequently find themselves economically and politically marginalised by older generations, which can generate frustration and social tensions that lead many to view migration as a form of emancipation.

To prevent the perilous journeys from starting at all, creating economic and political conditions for a fulfilling life in Africa is critical.

A policy research document from the African Development Bank estimates that Africa will need to add nearly 1.7-million jobs a month until 2063 to accommodate



Deliverance:
Medics in Tenerife
help a migrant who
arrived in a small
wooden canoe.
 Photo: Desirée
 Martin/AFP

its growing population and keep unemployment rates from rising. Africa's population, 70% of which is under the age of 30, represents an immense opportunity for a demographic dividend. But this opportunity will materialise only if young people have good jobs, adequate social-protection systems, and decent living conditions.

Investing in Africa's young people is a priority for the African Development Bank Group for the next 10 years, at least. Its Jobs for Youth in Africa Strategy and Youth Entrepreneurship Investment Banks initiative represent a positive step. Both aim to create jobs and foster entrepreneurship thereby providing young Africans with the opportunities they need to thrive at home.

Too often, destination countries devise migration policies without considering migrants' agency and backgrounds.

Discussing, designing, implementing and supporting evidence-driven policies would be more effective than ideologically-driven rhetoric.

Here on the continent, leaders must ensure that the concerns of young people are heard and that their ideas, creativity, and experiences are valued. By harnessing younger citizens' potential to drive positive change, African governments can create vibrant and resilient communities, mitigating the factors that drive risky migration journeys.

If successful, these policy shifts could transform migration from an act of despair into a deliberate choice that benefits all: migrants, their home countries, and destination countries. ■

Linguère Mously Mbaye is principal fragility and resilience officer at the African Development Bank Group.

Terror victims win landmark compensation

A long-awaited decision to redress the harms of terrorism has come at a pivotal time for Kenya.

Brian Mwaniki

The tragic events of 2 April 2015, when armed militants attacked Garissa University College, left an indelible mark on the Kenyan nation. The 148 people killed in the attack were primarily students. Kenya's Supreme Court recently awarded Ksh 3-million (about \$23,000) to each of the affected families on the basis that the state had failed in its duty to protect them. The ruling not only acknowledges the suffering of the families but sets precedence on which future victims of terrorism and similar atrocities can claim redress.

The victims' families claimed state agencies failed to set up adequate security measures at educational institutions, despite warnings about potential terrorist threats. They also highlighted what they saw as a slow and inappropriate response from the security forces: a lengthy siege around the university during which it is believed many inside were killed.

The court's verdict affirms three important points about state accountability, victim rights and national security. First, that governments have a duty to protect people from harm and can be held legally accountable when they fail to. Second, the suffering of victims and their families is a legitimate harm for which they can seek justice through legal means. Third, the verdict may prompt a harm-reduction approach to how state security forces respond to such crises and reduce the risk of similar rulings against the state in the future.

The decision can also be seen as part of a broader social justice movement advocating for victims' rights within Kenya. This reflects growing awareness among people about the importance and feasibility of holding authorities accountable for failures in a range of areas.

Governments have a duty to protect their people from harm and can be held legally accountable when they fail to.

As the recent youth-led mass protests against the government's unpopular 2024 Finance Bill have demonstrated, this awareness is already changing Kenyan politics in the most profound of ways. ■



Brian Mwaniki is a freelancer and a legal researcher in Kenya. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa

THE BIG PICTURE

Be leaf: Children in Amanikro, Côte d'Ivoire craft masks in **Olivier Khouadian's** *Mi Ti*, 'Head' in Baoulé, which sees the spirit realm blurring into our own. It is part of the World Press Photo/NOOR Foundation exhibition *Celebrating Communities*, which opens on 14 September at Fondation Donwahi in Abidjan.



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