

with Mail & Guardian

The Continent

**At climate
talks,
Africa is on
its own.**

*It's time to act
like it*





Cover: In the hypocrisy of climate geopolitics, the trade-off is simple. African countries are expected to toe the global north's line, in exchange for cash. But the cash never arrives, even as Africa is forced to do as it is told. Ministers smile for the cameras at climate negotiations before going home to countries that cannot develop. This dynamic must change. African countries need to do it their own way. Fast. (p17)

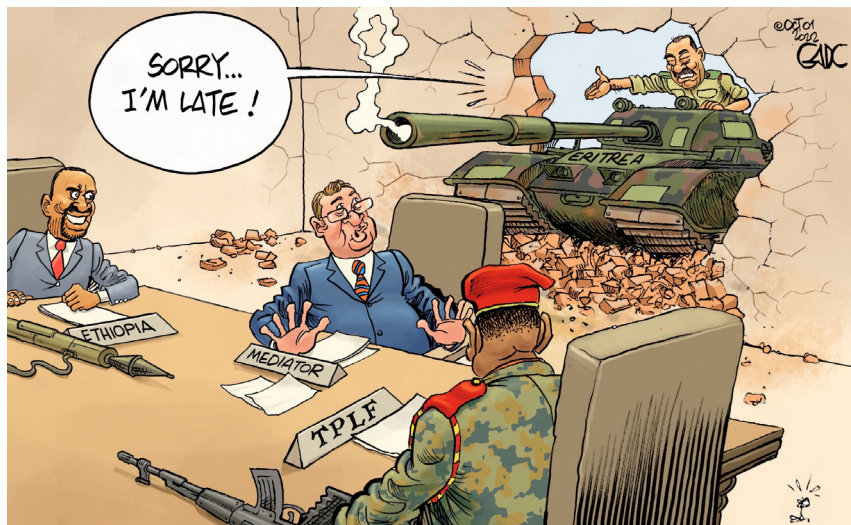
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Bye for now!

Sometimes, news can be overwhelming – to read as well as to report. We all deserve a break. That's why The Continent takes regular publication pauses where we gather our thoughts and our sanity, to make sure that we can keep doing this for the long haul. Look out for our next edition and a new season on 6 November 2022.



WARMONGERING

Putin ally confirms Russian mercs were deployed in Africa

Yevgeny Progozhin, an ally of Russian president Valdimir Putin, confirmed this week that he created the Wagner mercenary group and deployed them across the world, including in Africa. The admission confirms years of media reports that Russian mercenaries were active in Libya, the Central African Republic and Mali. Progozhin, who has sued journalists for linking him to the group, said: "I cleaned the old weapons myself, sorted out the bulletproof vests myself and found specialists who could help me with this."

BURKINA FASO

Another coup as Sahel insecurity continues

A new group of soldiers took to state TV to announce the removal of Paul-Henri Dambia, who did the same thing just nine months ago. The leader of this coup, army captain Ibrahim Traore, said the government would be dissolved. The move comes after an escalation of violence in the country this week, with at least 11 people killed after militants attacked a 150-vehicle convoy on Monday. And that follows the death of 35 people in a similar attack earlier in September. Dambia pulled off his coup with the promise to bring stability.



NATURE

Dinosaurs' fate is for the birds

One in eight of the world's bird species are threatened with extinction, and 49% of all species are in decline. That's according to the *State of the World's Birds* report, which is released every four years by non-profit group BirdLife International. Another study by the Yale School of Environment found that 91 African carnivores which are currently labelled as of "least concern" by the International Union for Conservation, actually warrant more concern because human and climate pressures are contracting their feeding ranges.

SOMALILAND

Election body rules out November poll

Somalia's breakaway region of Somaliland has postponed its presidential election until next year. In August, it saw protests demanding that the election be scheduled for November, when the current president's term ends, But the country's electoral body this week ruled that out, citing "technical and financial challenges". The vote was seen as a crucial step for a state trying to secure the international recognition needed to open doors to global lenders like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

WEST AFRICA

Rain brings ruin, floods wreak havoc

Flood waters have destroyed homes and fields across Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger and Chad. Nigeria's emergency management agency said last month that over 14,000 farms have been devastated in one state alone. In each country, flooding has come after months of unprecedented rainfall. In East Africa drought has made famine ever-more likely. With climate change destroying large parts of the world, the countries responsible for the pollution driving that change are still refusing to take responsibility.

MALI**Brawl is life**

The International Basketball Federation is investigating a brawl between two Mali players, Salimatou Kourouma and Kamite Elisabeth Dabou, that was

caught on camera after their team lost to Serbia in the women's world cup. In apologising, Kourouma said they were "frustrated because of the loss." Mali took part unexpectedly, as a replacement after Nigeria's president pulled his country's basketball teams out of all competitions.

**LESOTHO****General elections penciled in for Friday**

Lesotho will hold general elections on 7 October, to elect 120 legislators. In this mountain kingdom of about two million people, 65 political parties are fielding candidates, according to the electoral body. The prime minister will come from the party with the most members in parliament. The three main parties include the ruling All Basotho Convention party, the Democratic Congress and the Revolution for Prosperity, the party founded by Lesotho's richest man: Sam Matekane.

OUTBREAK**Ebola over in DRC, spreading in Uganda**

As Uganda works to contain Ebola cases, the Democratic Republic of Congo has declared the end of its latest outbreak, in which one case was identified. The DRC has seen 15 outbreaks since Ebola was discovered in 1976. The World Health Organisation said over 500 people were vaccinated in this outbreak. Uganda's outbreak had by Monday caused "18 confirmed cases, 18 probable cases, five confirmed deaths and 18 probable deaths" according to its health ministry.

SPACE

Nasa plays billiards with big space rock

In a first-of-its-kind experiment, the American space agency Nasa on Monday deliberately knocked a small moon orbiting an asteroid off course by smashing a spacecraft into it. It posed no threat to Earth but was meant to test whether it is feasible to change the path of an asteroid on a collision course with Earth (thereby saving all life on the planet). It seems it worked. With that external avenue of destruction solved, humans can now focus on not destroying the planet themselves.

TANZANIA

Back at the Oscars after two decades

For the first time in 20 years a Tanzanian film has been shortlisted for an Academy Award in the Best International Film category. *Vuta N'kuvute*, which translates to “hard struggle”, follows an Indian-Zanzibari woman who navigates a star-crossed romance against the backdrop of the final days of British imperialism. The film also became the first Tanzanian feature film to be screened at the Toronto International Film Festival last year. The country’s first (and last) foray into the Oscars was in 2002 with the film *Maangazi: The Ancient One*.



Photo: Twitter/EliudKipchoge

KENYA

Kipchoge beats his own record

Kenyan Olympic medalist Eliud Kipchoge set a new world record last week at the Berlin Marathon – by beating his own personal best. The marathon is 42.195km long and Kipchoge completed it in 2:01:09 – 30 seconds faster than his previous record. After the race, Kipchoge said that he didn’t start off with the goal to break the record. “My legs were running very fast and I thought, ‘Oh, let me just try to run two hours flat.’”

Somalia

Al Shabaab dislodged from 30 towns in under 30 days

Sabotaging food aid during famine may be the group's biggest unforced error in recent years

Liban Mahamad in Mogadishu

Ma'awisley, an ethnic militia group in Somalia's central region of Hiraaan, dislodged Al Shabaab from more than 30 towns in September. It is stoking speculation that Somalia's most enduring militant group, Al Shabaab, is on the verge of defeat. "For the first in a long time, Somalia is witnessing a genuine, organic groundswell of rebellion against Al Shabaab," said Rashid Abdi, an analyst on Somali affairs.

Described as the largest offensive against Al Shabaab in over five years, Ma'awisley's fight is supported by the Somali national army and the United States. It started in early September after Al Shabaab militants reportedly

stopped vehicles carrying food aid from the provincial capital Baladweyne and executed 21 people aboard. Locals are already on the brink of famine.

The government hails this latest campaign as a Somali-owned security initiative, in contrast to African Union troops, which despite spending billions of dollars from the EU and US over the years, have not ended Al Shabaab's capacity to strike and kill thousands even in the capital, Mogadishu.

But sceptics worry about several risks.

First, said Abukar Arman, a widely published Somali analyst, the Ma'awisley advance could create "priceless cover" for all the other groups, both domestic and foreign, with interests in the country, by taking attention away from them.

Second, the central government could fail to keep any recaptured territory, as has happened in the past.

"Somalia is witnessing a genuine, organic groundswell of rebellion."

And last, by aligning itself with an ethnic militia, Arman warned that the central government could trigger a return to the tribal politics which dominated Somalia in the 1990s and early 2000s, with clan militia warlords clashing against each other. ■

Rwanda

Alleged génocidaire on trial

Félicien Kabuga is accused of using his media house to call for the mass killing of the Tutsi in 1994

Samuel Baker Byansi in The Hague

For 26 years, Félicien Kabuga, an alleged financier of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, was one of the world's most wanted men. This week, his trial at an international court in The Hague began. It is “one of the biggest and the last case regarding the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi,” said Serge Brammertz, the chief prosecutor.

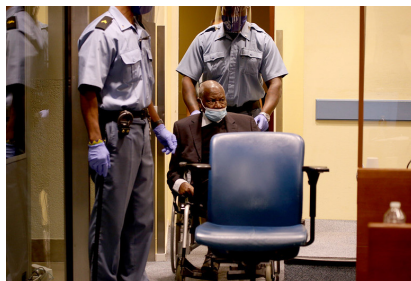
Kabuga is being tried for direct and public incitement to commit genocide; conspiracy to commit genocide; persecution on political grounds; and murder. He was arrested in France on 16 May 2020.

In their opening statements at the court on Thursday, prosecutors said that “Kabuga had a central role in provoking hatred of Tutsis” by operating Radio

Télévision Libre des Mille Collines, on which hate speech calling for the killing of “Tutsi cockroaches” was regularly broadcast. They also accused him of financing, arming and supporting the Interahamwe militia who did the killings.

The court's gallery was full with press, Rwandan diplomats and representatives from Ibuka, the genocide survivor's umbrella group. There was one notable absence in court: 86-year-old Kabuga himself, who chose not to attend. He issued a statement saying that the court had refused to let him choose his own lawyer and he has no confidence in his current legal representatives.

Sixty other leaders of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi were sentenced by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, then based in Arusha, Tanzania, before it closed down in 2015. ■



No show: Alleged genocide financier Félicien Kabuga at his first appearance in The Hague in 2020. Photo: Leslie Hondebrink-Hermer/ UN-IRMC

Guinea

Moussa Dadis Camara's date with destiny

Conakry's generals have put a former junta leader on trial for orchestrating a massacre, but they are still suppressing protests against their own rule

Sidy Yansané

In Guinea, the date of 28 September has deep political resonance. It was on this day in 1958 that Guinean voters rejected a new constitution imposed by France, paving the way for a declaration of independence just days later.

It was on 28 September 2009 in the capital Conakry that 157 opposition supporters were killed in what is one of the country's worst-ever massacres. The massacre was conducted by soldiers loyal to Moussa Dadis Camara, who had seized power in a coup a year earlier. It took place in the Stade du 28 Septembre.

And it was on 28 September 2022, just a few days ago, that the trial against Camara and 10 other members of his junta began.

They are being prosecuted for their

alleged role in orchestrating the massacre – the first time that a former head of state is being held to account for crimes committed during their tenure.

“Today is a break in impunity, it's a decisive step,” said Maître Halimatou Camara, a lawyer for the victims.

Moussa Dadis Camara, who survived an assassination attempt just a few months after the stadium massacre and was subsequently ousted, has returned to Conakry from exile in Burkina Faso, saying he intends to clear his name.

He returns to a country ruled by the head of another military junta, which seized power last year. Colonel Mamadi Doumbouya has said that “justice will be the compass of the transition [to civilian rule]”.

He returns to a country ruled by the head of another military junta, which seized power last year.

The junta that he leads has been under increasing pressure in recent months, as demands for a return to civilian rule grow louder from civil society, and regional economic bloc Ecowas, which imposed new sanctions last month.

In response, the junta has banned protests on main roads, and imprisoned leading activists, while police have killed some demonstrators. ■

Mali

Bargaining with Ecowas

The junta-led country has been using its recent capture of UN peacekeepers to leverage its position in West Africa, after years of sanctions

Colonel Assimi Goïta celebrated his second year in charge of Mali in August, after seizing power in a coup in 2020. The coup was swiftly followed by expulsion from Ecowas — the West African economic community — and sanctions.

Ecowas did not take kindly to a new military junta, despite some of its members having taken less than democratic paths to power themselves. It has been consistent in insisting that the military give a “reasonable” timetable for elections, not longer than two years. The junta said earlier this year that such a transfer of power would take three years.

Thanks to support from neighbours like Burkina Faso, which has been run by successive juntas since January, and Russia, the regime in Bamako has survived sanctions.

And in July it secured an extra source of leverage, with the arrest of nearly 50 soldiers from Côte d’Ivoire. That country says they were part of the United Nations peacekeeping force in Mali – the world’s third largest, which has been in the country since 2013.



Frexit: After the coup Mali’s ruling junta expelled France’s military mission amid reports Russian mercenaries had begun operating in the country.

Mali called them “mercenaries” and wants to trade for their release.

In mid-September, Ecowas gave Goïta and his generals until 22 October to give a timetable for elections. This week, the regional community held an emergency meeting in New York, while at the UN General Assembly. On Thursday a delegation including the presidents of Ghana and Gambia went to Mali to negotiate the release of the soldiers.

Goïta remains in power. ■

South Africa

Jacob Zuma was let out of jail because he was terminally ill. Now he's back in the game.

Kiri Rupiah

Former South African president Jacob Zuma says he is available for the position of national chairperson of the African National Congress.

“I will not refuse such a call should they deem it necessary for me to serve the organisation again at that level or any other,” he said in a statement posted on Twitter by his daughter Dudu Zuma-Sambudla. The former president, who was in charge when the country’s institutions were torn apart to profit a few, in what has come to be known as “state capture”, says the ANC is facing serious organisational challenges. His solution is to back former African Union chairperson Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, who is also his former wife, as party president, to replace the current president, Cyril Ramaphosa.

The octogenarian was recently granted medical parole two months into a 15-month prison sentence for contempt charges linked to a corruption inquiry.

Zuma had followed a “Stalingrad defence” strategy – stalling proceedings with technical and medical delays and

appealing every ruling. In this case it involved running down the clock until the Zondo commission of inquiry into state capture ran out of time and resources. He avoided corruption charges, but was sentenced to prison for contempt of court.

His subsequent early release was authorised by prisons boss Arthur Fraser, who once served as Zuma’s spy chief, on the grounds that his former boss was suffering from an undisclosed terminal illness.

A return to an elevated role like ANC chair would provide yet another shield from the country’s already gutted justice system, as well as a platform from which to conduct any future manoeuvres. ■



Stalling granddad: Ex-prez Jacob Zuma.
Photo: Siphwe Sibeko/Reuters

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Who is Peter Obi, and why is he making the Nigerian establishment so nervous?

There were supposed to be two clear favourites heading into next year's election. But the Labour candidate makes it three.

Socrates Mbamalu in Los Angeles

It is not easy to get 2,000 Nigerians to sing the national anthem as if they actually mean it.

On a Monday evening earlier this month, at the iconic Beverly Hilton Hotel in Los Angeles, Peter Gregory Obi did exactly that. He was there to give a speech on the role of the Nigerian diaspora in civic leadership, as part of a global tour which included stops in Frankfurt, Rome, Toronto, Houston, Charlotte, Washington DC, Atlanta and New York.

But the audience was not really there to listen to his address, which was frequently interrupted by chants of "Obi, Obi, Obi!". They were there to get a glimpse of the politician they believe could be the next

president of Nigeria; of the man who they, and a growing number of others, think could turn the country's fortunes around.

Nigeria's presidential election is in February next year, and campaigning officially began this Wednesday. The frontrunners are Bola Ahmed Tinubu from the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC), the former governor of Lagos; and Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), a former vice-president. Both are ageing veterans of Nigeria's political establishment.

But a surge in support for 61-year-old Obi, running on the ticket of the Labour Party, has analysts and voters wondering about the potential for a major upset.

In Los Angeles, Pat Utomi, a prominent academic and a Labour Party stalwart, tells each audience member to call five people in their village to tell them about Obi and his plans to transform Nigeria. "This is a movement, not a political party," he declares. The movement, and its adherents, have a name: the Obidients.

A political resurrection

Obi's background is in banking. He first entered politics in 2003, when he contested for the governorship of Anambra State in the south of the country. At the time, he was ridiculed and nicknamed "Obi the boy". From village to village, Obi spoke to the Anambra youths who were tired of bad governance and godfatherism politics in the state. A quiet political revolution took place. After a lengthy legal tussle, he was eventually declared the winner in 2006, and served two terms.

His time in the governor's residence

in Anambra has become the foundation of his political appeal today. In his trademark black native attire, and with just a few aides walking beside him, Obi's public image was not that of a typical Nigerian politician. He would often be seen in airports carrying his own luggage and queueing. Even more atypical were the state's finances under his watch: unlike almost every other governor in the country's history, Obi actually saved money during his tenure.

In 2014, when he left power in Anambra, he was granted a chieftaincy title: Okwute – the rock.

After a period running the Nigerian Securities and Exchange Commission, Obi returned to politics for the 2019 election as running mate to Atiku Abubakar. They lost to incumbent Muhammadu Buhari. As late as March this year, Obi was publicly campaigning against Atiku for the PDP's presidential nomination. When it became clear that Atiku was going to win, Obi defected to the Labour Party – a party that had become known as a graveyard for politicians attempting to resurrect their careers. The consensus among political analysts at the time was that Obi had dug his own political grave.

The consensus was wrong.

A third way

In October 2020, young Nigerians took to the streets in their thousands to protest against the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a unit of the Nigeria Police Force notorious for illegal detention, torture, extortion and extrajudicial killings. They demanded an end to police brutality, but



Obihave: In 2019 Peter Obi was Atiku Abubakar's running mate. Next February, they will be both be running again – this time as opponents. Photo: Luis Tato / AFP

found themselves on the receiving end of state violence, culminating in the reported killing of at least 12 protesters by soldiers at Alausa and Lekki Toll Gate in Lagos. The government would later deny that any massacre took place.

The government may have quelled the protests, but they had ignited a political consciousness long dormant among Nigeria's youthful population. With 70% of the population under the age of 30, this has the capacity to be an extraordinarily powerful political force for any politician who can harness it.

Enter Obi. With his reputation for good governance and his disdain for the trappings of office, he represented a far more plausible candidate for change than either Tinubu or Atiku, both of whom are mired in corruption allegations. Helped by his evident social media savvy, Obi has positioned himself as the political alternative for which so many of the #EndSARS generation have been clamouring – and they have embraced

him accordingly.

If the Nigerian election was decided on Twitter, Obi would already be president. But this online support is translating into the real world too. Over the past few weeks, Obidients have taken to the streets: flying the Labour Party flag over Lagos, funding billboards emblazoned with Obi's face, and donating offices across the country to be used for campaign planning and co-ordination. Logistical support too has come from the Nigerian diaspora – which is why events like the one in Los Angeles are so important to his campaign.

His main rivals remain far better funded and organised. Both the APC and the PDP have national reach and a grassroots support structure, developed over years, and can call on almost all of the country's political heavyweights in support of their respective causes.

Obi is unfazed, he insisted in June when he received the Labour Party nomination to run for president. "The 100-million Nigerians who live in poverty will be the



Thrice as tall: The Labour Party used to be dismissed as a political graveyard, now young Peter Obi supporters are flocking to its banner. Photo by Kola Sulaimon/AFP

structure. The 35-million Nigerians who don't know where their next meal will come from will be the structure," he said.

Serious threat

There is a verse in the Bible that reads: "Obedience is better than sacrifice." Obi's supporters have tweaked it for their slogan: "Obidience is better than sacks of rice," they say, referring to one of the tactics traditionally used to buy votes.

This fervour has propelled Obi from fringe candidate into the mainstream, but it has also masked potential weaknesses. Last year, *Premium Times* revealed a web of shell companies in tax havens that were controlled by Obi. He admitted that he had not declared these assets to the Code of Conduct Bureau, as required by law. "I am sure you too will not like to pay inheritance tax if you can avoid it," he said.

Nor is there much clarity on how exactly he plans to turn Nigeria around.

In an interview with Arise TV on Wednesday, Obi said that solving the country's chronic insecurity would be his number one priority if elected – but he would not say how he would go about it. A few short months ago, such policy vagueness didn't really matter, because no one thought that Obi had any chance of actually taking power. But a Bloomberg poll this week found that of voters who had decided how to vote, some 72% were voting for Obi.

This poll comes with a major caveat: it was conducted via an app, which excludes nearly two thirds of the population who don't have access to smartphones.

But it does prove that, at the very least, Obi and his loyal followers have already forced the country to take him – and the youthful constituency he represents – seriously.

Ominously for the old guard, his campaign is only just getting started. ■



Pipe dreams: The EU is in a hurry to develop its own gas infrastructure, like the Balkan Pipe pictured here, but says African countries can't do the same. Photo: EU

At COP27, African leaders are on their own. It's time to act like it.

Five hard truths ahead of the delicate but all-important climate negotiations

Gyude Moore and Todd Moss

The shadow of Europe's energy crisis – and the rich world's resurgent hunger for fossil fuels – looms over COP27, the annual international climate negotiations, which are being held in Egypt in November. As the first COP on the African continent in more than a decade, expectations are high that the summit will finally deliver for a region where energy shortages are a chronic obstacle to economic development. Debates are raging over the adequacy

of climate finance, the responsibilities of high emitters to the most vulnerable countries, and investment rules for natural gas.

This should be Africa's year to get the best deal possible. But it is evident that African and European views are sharply diverging over the shape and ambition of the continent's energy transition.

African negotiators are now at great risk of making a major tactical mistake if they cede ownership of their technology choices – particularly over the use of local gas – in exchange for vague new pledges

of climate cash.

In May, 10 African energy ministers declared gas to be a transition fuel, helping countries move from coal and diesel power to renewable energy, and increased their goal of how much electricity each person needs. In July, the African Union Commission adopted a similar, assertive common position on the energy transition. But some African climate activists and negotiators have pushed back out of a concern that a fight at COP over gas financing would distract from other issues, like pledges for more climate finance and compensation for climate-related damage. Gas is also a potent polluter, even if African plans for gas would add little to global emissions.

For African leaders, giving up control over their energy future would be a moral and strategic surrender. Here are five hard truths that explain why:

1. Rich countries will always prioritise their own energy security over climate

All countries have to balance multiple national goals, but when push comes to shove, energy prices and domestic jobs have always superseded emissions cuts – a phenomenon that political scientist Roger Pielke in 2010 dubbed the “Iron Law” of climate policy.

That explains why, just months after pledging aggressive timelines for reaching net zero emissions, Germany restarted its coal plants, Norway ramped up gas production, and other Europeans scrambled to secure long term gas contracts. Germany’s chancellor even

traveled to Senegal, in part to secure his country’s access to West African gas. Whatever is pledged at climate summits, rich countries themselves are not yet abandoning gas.

2. Rich countries will continue to object to Africans accessing financing for gas projects on climate grounds

Before Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February this year triggered the energy crisis in Europe, the remaining tolerance for financing gas projects in Africa had been growing thin. The World Bank stopped investing in projects to get oil and gas out of the ground in 2019, while agreeing to allow exceptions for some projects that refined oil and gas, but under stringent conditions.

In 2021, influential European shareholders proposed getting rid of all these exceptions by 2025. Of course, none of these policies – designed deliberately to dissuade poor countries from building infrastructure for gas-fired power, fertiliser production, or cooking gas – applied to rich countries.

But despite the energy crisis and despite Europe’s African gas shopping spree, all of the policies intended to hold back gas infrastructure on the continent remain. The naked hypocrisy has not been lost on anyone.

In a candid moment, the European Union’s climate czar Frans Timmermans explained: “Many of our citizens in Europe will not buy [the moral] argument today because their worries are linked to their own existence in this energy crisis.”

3. The promised windfall of new climate finance for poor countries is not happening

At the 2009 COP, rich countries promised to find an additional \$100-billion per year in climate finance for poor countries. Not only has that figure never been reached, little of the billions reported as climate funding is actually new. Most of this involved relabelling standard aid projects as climate-related. Aid, even genuinely additional aid, is mainly controlled by donors – and they are not giving up control of how it is used. That’s why African leaders trading away policy flexibility for new promises makes little sense. Big climate cheques are not coming.

4. Rich countries will never agree to pay for loss and damages

The “polluter pays” principle means the case for massive transfers from wealthy emitters to vulnerable poor non-emitters is ethically strong. Huge amounts of resources are needed for African countries to grow their economies, repair damage, and to build climate resilience. But rich countries have already made clear that they reject the notion of legal liability for climate reparations. At the African Ministerial Conference on Environment in Dakar earlier this month, the United States’ special climate envoy John Kerry, declared that: “Mother Nature does not care where those emissions come from.” Some token compensation programmes, like Denmark’s recent \$13-million pledge, may be announced, but nothing of any scale – and little, if anything, will go directly to governments.

5. Africa giving up control of its own policies in exchange for big payouts is a recipe for failure

The pattern at climate and development summits has become familiar: moral arm-twisting, agreeing to a large aid number, a flurry of relabeling, missed targets, finger pointing, rinse, repeat.

Conclusion: A strong common position is the only way to counter the divide-and-conquer tendencies of the Global North

Some of the larger economies like South Africa and Egypt are negotiating their own energy transition packages with the major economic powers. Such deals may help those specific countries but will provide nothing for the others and could have the effect of splitting the continent and watering down demands. Africa needs a common position on the energy transition that asserts its own agency to set policies and pursue development, even if it means some countries will experience short term increases in emissions. Anything less would only widen the global inequality gap and create even worse climate injustices.

Africa’s leaders must be clear-eyed about what they can get at COP27 and not trade away their peoples’ future development for more empty promises. ■

Gyude Moore is a senior policy fellow at the Center for Global Development and formerly served as Liberia’s Minister of Public Works. Todd Moss is the executive director of the Energy for Growth Hub and a former US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs

Cameroon

The women defying the odds to combat food insecurity

With so many men out of work, women are pooling their time, skills and cash – and they're flourishing

Beng Emmanuel Kum in Yaoundé

Cameroon's Far North region is a breadbasket, growing crucial food in an area that has been hit hard by floods this year, exacerbating chronic food insecurity for its five million inhabitants. At the heart of that growing are women, who grow up to 70% of all the foodstuff consumed in the region.

Alima is one of these. The 30-year-old mother of three did not share her surname with *The Continent*, sharing her story instead. Each weekday, she walks an hour and a half along the often cold stretch of road from her home to her farm in her native Balewa village.

Six hours a day are spent cultivating

a mix of tomatoes, groundnuts, okra, beans and sesame before she makes the trip home with enough food to feed her three children.

On Saturdays, she heads to the local market to sell some of her harvest so she can buy a wider mix of food.

She said men are conspicuously absent from farming in her area: "Most men now are without jobs and they don't know what to do. They have to rely on what their wives make from agriculture to survive."

According to statistics from Cropsec, a farmer's cooperative based in the regional capital Maroua, women contribute at least 70% of the foodstuffs consumed in the region.

Farming has given women more power in a society where they are exposed to early marriage, gender discrimination and laws that entrench divisions. Providing food has made them indispensable.

Madame Djam Lamou epe Bakari, a retired nurse, has moved on to a more lucrative part of the value chain and started a small dairy business, based in Maroua. This produces at least 50 litres of milk a day, as well as processing cheese, yoghurt and butter, which she sells at her local market.

She said: "Women understand that this is no longer the time when we all stay and wait for our husbands to make the first step. Every woman must fight because it is also up to her to ensure the well-being of



Growth market: In Maroua, local farmers come to the market to sell some of what they have harvested and stock up on the supplies they do not produce themselves.

Photo: Beng Emmanuel Kum

her family, especially her children.”

Women in agriculture in the area are being supported by co-operatives, which in turn are also often run by women. They pool resources, like farming equipment, as well as money to help farmers. This is especially important as climate extremes mean crops – and that vital income – can be lost to flood and drought. The co-operatives also help with training.

Women in agriculture are being supported by cooperatives, which pool resources, like farming equipment, as well as money to help farmers.

The combination of tools, training and money mean that in the areas

surrounding Maroua, farmers are able to work on strengthening each stage of their agriculture business, from nursing to planting, harvesting and then selling to markets.

Joel Maman, a social scientist and journalist in the area, said the state needs to appreciate this local entrepreneurship and create policies that support women. “If women who are already organised locally are put at the centre of the government action in agricultural production issues, the fight against food security will only be a sad memory for this region.”

This also depends on climate change. Cameroon’s north is good for growing crops, with rich soil and frequent rainfall. But climate projections – which are already playing out – are for intense rainfall that floods fields and homes. ■

Comic Con

African artists can really draw a crowd

The pop culture festival returned after a two-year pandemic-induced hiatus

Wynona Mutisi in Johannesburg

Comic Con Africa is back as an in-person event, and it's bigger than ever. Literally. Such was the demand that organisers booked out the Johannesburg Expo Centre, the largest exhibition space in Africa, for the four-day festival of comics, gaming and pop culture.

The usual suspects were all there, with both Marvel and DC Comics heavily represented in both the exhibits and the costumes of the attendees. Jamie Campbell Bower – of *Stranger Things* infamy – was the big celebrity appearance.

But the heartbeat of the festival is the Artist Alley, where established and upcoming artists and creators display and sell their work. One of them, Kudakwashe Rwizi, a Zimbabwean animator, comic book artist and illustrator was exhibiting at Comic Con Africa for the first time.

His stall had on display his original comic, *Mutupo*, accompanied by a trailer



for a series based on the comic. *Mutupo* – which means “totem” in Shona – is set in a world where everyone has a totem animal that gives them power – but not everyone can harness that power. For those who can, it is illegal and dangerous, so they fight in an underground tournament sponsored by a very wealthy individual, which runs them into some trouble with the police. The mystery unfolds as the story seeks to find out why the wealthy individual is sponsoring the fights. *Mutupo* sold out, despite concerns visitors would only look for what they already knew.



Top left: Crowds gather to watch a sketch battle between exhibiting artists. Bottom left: An all-African panel discussing various projects they've worked on. Right: Jamie Campbell Bower played Vecna in the latest season of *Stranger Things*.

Bill Masuku, a renowned African comic book artist who has written for *The Continent* and a regular attendee of Comic Con Africa was invited as a spotlight guest. His most popular work is *Captain South Africa*, which also sold out. Conventions can be a vital part of an artist's career. Masuku told *The Continent*: "Once other people and creatives see me in my work, they build a community around the work and they want to help me come up because they know how hard it is." In addition to his personal work, he also recently worked on *Iwájú*, the animated Lagos-based science fiction series that is Disney's first-ever collaboration with an African studio.

In theory, Comic Con Africa is meant to showcase the work of artists from across

the continent. In practice, it has been criticised for being overwhelmingly South African. Zaid Motala, a representative of the event, told *The Continent* that even though the platform is available to everyone, it can be a challenge to get here from many places in Africa, "in terms of transportation and visas." Getting a stall, which start at about \$165, is also a huge expense for an illustrator just starting out.

Smaller conventions do take place on the continent, including Comexposed Converge in Zimbabwe, Lagos Comic Con in Nigeria, NaiCon in Nairobi and LS Con in Zambia. Bringing all that talent together into a single festival might be too much to hope for, and would need a bigger venue. But just imagine if it did happen. Right? ■

Which is better against Covid-19, a shot or a prayer?

About 22% of Africans are fully vaccinated against Covid-19. What about the rest?

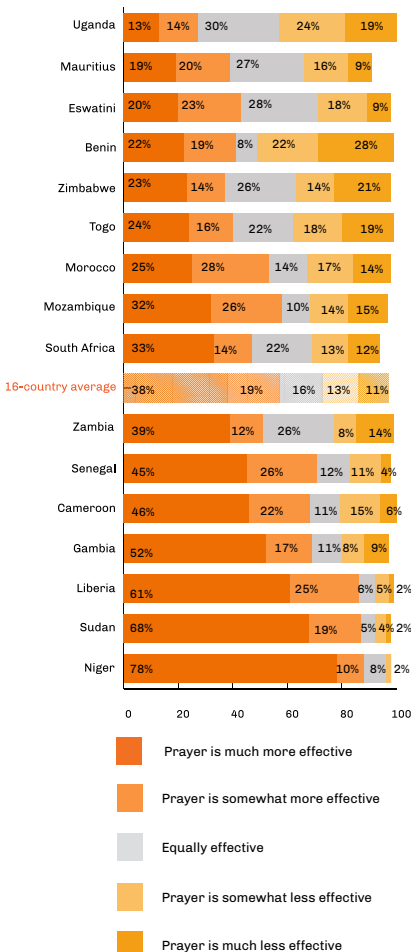
Many of them would say they're better off saying a prayer.

On average across 16 African countries that Afrobarometer surveyed in 2020/2021, a majority (57%) of adults said they believed prayer was more effective than vaccines in preventing Covid-19 infection. Only 24% said prayer was less effective than vaccines, while 16% saw the two as equally effective.

Preference for prayer was almost universal in Niger (88%), Sudan (87%), and Liberia (86%). Benin (50%) was the only surveyed country where as many as half of adults believed more in the efficacy of vaccines. Faith in prayer was stronger than average among the poor (61%), among those with no formal schooling (71%), and among Muslims (70%, vs 52% of Christians). Unsurprisingly, people who saw prayer as more effective were less likely to say they would get vaccinated.

But we neglected to ask about a third option that some might consider the strongest protection of all – a prayer *and* a shot. ■

Prayer vs. vaccines: Which is more effective against COVID-19? | 16 African countries | 2020/2021



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.



Photo: Film still.

Bless her reign down in Africa

With *The Woman King's* stellar cast, stunning action and deft direction, you can almost forgive its accents

Wilfred Okiche

There is a direct line to be traced between the billion-dollar success of *Black Panther* to the arrival of *The Woman King*, an action epic that centres the Agojie, a well-muscled band of female soldiers who once defended the Dahomey kingdom, now in present-day Benin Republic.

The Woman King, directed by Gina Prince-Bythewood, follows the playbook established by the Marvel blockbuster, marshalling a robust team from across the African diaspora to realise an

eye-popping vision of a West African kingdom, centuries past.

Oscar-winning American actress Viola Davis leads both cast and crew – she also produces – in this bloody yet thoroughly entertaining fictional account of the Dahomey warriors and their battle against the rival Oyo Empire, situated in present day Nigeria. Davis plays Nansica, a battle-tested general who has the dual responsibility of protecting her kingdom from enemy threat and ensuring there is a continuous supply of trained young women to join the Agojie ranks.

She is joined by South African



Fon fact: Viola Davis leads both cast and crew of *The Woman King*. Photo: Film still

favourite Thuso Mbedu, who puts up yet another revelatory performance (for those who missed *The Underground Railroad*) and holds her own against the seasoned veteran. As for Lashana Lynch, Sheila Atim and John Boyega, their families are from Jamaica, Uganda and Nigeria respectively, via the United Kingdom. Representing the Republic of Benin in a cameo onscreen – and on the soundtrack – is the country's most famous citizen, Angélique Kidjo. Lebo M, whose work on *The Lion King* movies has since moved into iconic territory, can be heard on the score, and the film was shot in South Africa, employing scores of local talent.

The very American decision to film *The Woman King* in English thus presents practical and authenticity challenges. Patience will be needed to get past the cocktail of accents the actors are working with, with some trying harder than others. In one scene, Boyega's cultured King Ghezo, demanding a show of respect, insists on conversing with a guest in

the kingdom's native tongue. Anyone expecting some Fon or Ewe to follow would be disappointed to find that English is the stand-in for the mother tongue.

Nevertheless, the actors are clearly connected to the material, and although Prince-Bythewood is working on a scale that has never been afforded her in the past she more than meets the moment. Her understanding of spectacle is complete, but the bombast does not overshadow the intimate feel.

The Woman King's cluttered screenplay, credited to Dana Stevens, doesn't always work, though, as it often switches wildly from muscular drama to mawkish soap opera, even finding room for a clunky romantic subplot.

As history, *The Woman King* is unreliable and anyone going in expecting a faithful rendition of real events should maybe seek out a documentary instead: it's attuned to the history of Dahomey but feels no compulsion to be restricted by it. The complicity of the Agojie in Ghezo's reign is a major thematic concern, but *The Woman King* spends less time dwelling on this, and more outlining a progressive agenda that highlights ideals of freedom, resistance and self-sufficiency.

In drawing parallels to contemporary concerns, the film injects moments – like the overdone speech that Ghezo gives at the end – that are unearned at best and clumsy at worst. Yet even these drawbacks take a back seat once the film hits its stride. Prince-Bythewood delivers high action, breathtaking visuals and jaw-dropping stunt work.

Maybe that's enough for now. ■

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

"If you put canoes in volcanoes, you can have your kayak and heat it."



- 1_** How many presidents has Kenya had since independence?
- 2_** Name them in successive order.
- 3_** Which country was the last in the world to make the switch from leaded petrol?
- 4_** Nyiragongo is Africa's most active volcano, located in which country?
- 5_** Which African country is the only one that shares a land border with the EU?
- 6_** What is the name of the red wine grape that is South Africa's signature wine variety?
- 7_** In which African country will COP27 be hosted this year?
- 8_** How many African countries does Uber operate in?
- 9_** In which year did Eliud Kipchoge break the two-hour marathon time mark?
- 10_** What does the acronym Eskom stand for?

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 read@thecontinent.org

Eritrea is Africa's worst jailer of journalists. Something must change

David Kode

The 23rd of September has come and gone again. For relatives and friends of disappeared Eritrean journalist Dawit Isaak, this date marked 21 years of pain and anguish of not knowing about his precise whereabouts and the status of his health – or indeed whether he is still alive.

Dawit was forcefully disappeared by the regime of President Isaias Afwerki. His only offence? *Setit*, the newspaper he worked for and co-owned, which was Eritrea's first independent newspaper, published an open letter from a group of politicians and other critics that called for democratic reforms and criticised Afwerki.

Dawit was arrested with 11 politicians and others who authored the letter, as well as nine other journalists. They have now been held incommunicado for 21 years and none has been allowed visits from relatives. Information from former prison guards and others suggest that several of them have died in detention but this has never been independently confirmed.

Several reports indicate that Dawit was unexpectedly released from prison in 2005 for medical treatment only to be rearrested two days later. Nothing has been heard from him since.

Since Dawit's arrest, Eritrea has cemented its position as one of the world's most authoritarian regimes. The only recognised political party is the ruling party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice. There is no Parliament and no elections have been held since Eritrea gained independence from Ethiopia in 1993, after decades of war.

The arrests of Dawit and the authors of the letters calling for democratic reforms were immediately followed by the closure of all independent media outlets. Eritrea is now one of the worst jailers of journalists in the world.

The rule of law and due process is largely absent as the judiciary is tightly controlled by the president, who continues to arbitrarily arrest and detain Eritreans, including those who attempt to flee the country.

The absence of the rule of law and the militarised nature of the Eritrean society is exemplified by the compulsory military conscription policy that forces young Eritreans to undergo indefinite military service. The practice is characterised by human rights violations, torture, sexual abuse and forced labour. Even though in principle compulsory military service is supposed to be limited to 18 months, in



Silenced: 21 years later, the family of journalist Dawit Isaak do not know if he is still alive.

practice it is indefinite. The first conscripts who started in the mid-1990s are not yet free.

Afwerki used the country's conflict with Ethiopia as a justification for compulsory military service. The peace deal with Ethiopia in July 2018 has removed that rationale, but the practice continues regardless. Many Eritreans in the diaspora cite compulsory military service as one of the main reasons why they fled. Human rights groups report that out of a total population of about five million people, 10% – more than half a million – have escaped the country.

What can the international community do? For more than two decades, the Eritrean authorities have rejected findings from reports by international human rights experts.

The country continues to ignore recommendations made by United Nations Special Rapporteurs on Eritrea, including requests for country visits.

The upcoming USA-Africa Summit, which President Joe Biden says will

“reinforce the US-Africa commitment to democracy and human rights”, should be used to raise serious concerns over the state of human rights in Eritrea. President Biden's administration should press the Eritrean authorities, including the country's diplomats in the United States, to account for all those arrested in 2001, and cancel the practice of indefinite military service.

Eritrea's international partners, including the European Union, which provides funding for infrastructure projects in the country, should make respect for human rights and accountability a core condition of their future support. The many in jail, the many forced to flee Eritrea, and the many left wondering what happened to their imprisoned relatives will be looking for a sign that the international community takes their plight seriously. ■

David Kode is advocacy and campaigns lead for CIVICUS, a global civil society alliance

Dire economic straits mean no fresh start for Malawi

Breaking the cycle of generations of poor performance is proving particularly difficult for the president

Golden Matonga

Malawi's economy is in trouble. Its long fuel queues may be disappearing, but that doesn't mean its challenges are over. Resurgent electricity outages, rising costs and the failure of President Lazarus Chakwera's government to broker a deal with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), mean there is no prospect of recovery.

Why is breaking out of the country's cycle of poor performance so difficult?

Decades of dependence on a failing agriculture industry dependent on tobacco exports have left the economy in the doldrums.

Chakwera promised change, but has struggled to deliver genuine reform, and corruption scandals and coalition tensions have rocked his administration. Failure to arrest the current economic

slump will make it much harder to secure re-election in 2025.

An opinion poll by Afrobarometer – conducted in February but published in August – highlights the peril he faces. In the survey, just 26.4% of people said they would vote for Chakwera's Malawi Congress Party (MCP), the lead partner in the ruling Tonse Alliance. The MCP's main partner, the United Transformation Movement (UTM) fared even worse, with just 8.9%. Meanwhile the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), castigated as corrupt and out of touch just a few years ago, was found to enjoy a healthy lead of 41.2%. Given that the economic situation has gotten worse since the poll was done, while the UTM could defect from the Alliance to join the DPP at the next election, Chakwera's position is perilous.

The president still has time to turn things around before 2025, of course. He can build legitimacy by delivering on key promises, demonstrating prudent management of meagre resources and cutting a deal with the IMF.

But given that a majority of Malawians polled appear to think that corruption is increasing – contrary to Chakwera's election promise – the former pastor may be left praying that a favourable global economic climate returns. ■

Golden Matonga is an investigative journalist and columnist for Malawi's Nation Publications Limited. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa



The Big Picture

Photo: Tony Karumba /AFP

Into shadow: Women from the pastoral Turkana region in northern Kenya, where famine is threatening to devastate communities for the second time in a decade, wait with their children in the shade of a tree at Sopel, near the county capital Lodwar, during an integrated outreach provided at a medical clinic by Unicef – the United Nations Children's Fund – and the Kenya Red Cross.



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