

with Mail & Guardian

The Continent

**Cooking
with Africa's
top TikTok
creator**

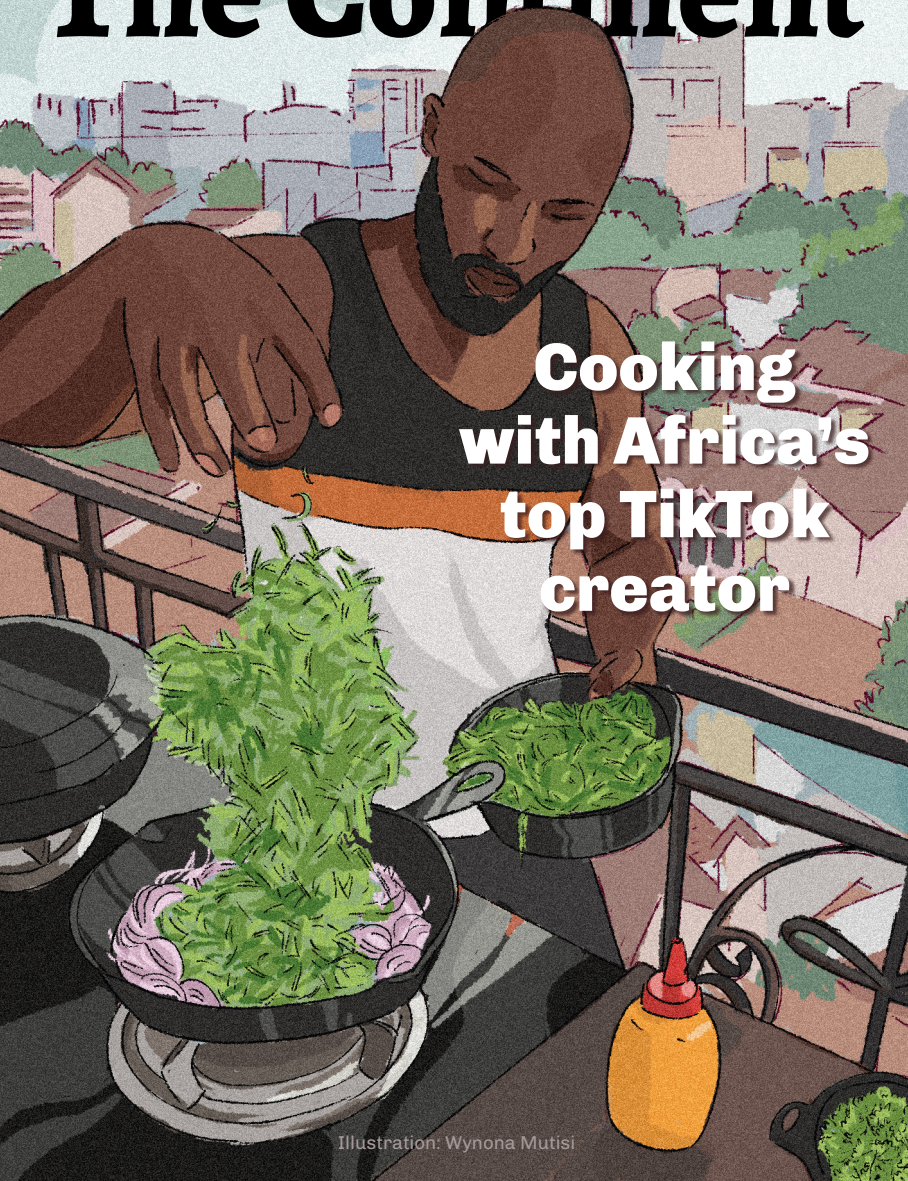


Illustration: Wynona Mutisi

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Cover: 'The Roaming Chef' is TikTok's top content creator in sub-Saharan Africa. Sourcing ideas from friends and family, he uses each video to make the evening's supper on his balcony in Nairobi. Millions watch. We speak to former rugby sevens star Dennis Ombachi about his second act. (p15)

PRESS FREEDOM

Ugandan journalist Andrew Arinaitwe is in jail this weekend because he was investigating allegations of sexual abuse at one of Uganda's most prestigious boarding schools. He went to the school to try and get comment from its headmaster, who didn't like this and called the police. Arinaitwe has been charged with "criminal trespass". *The Continent* will publish that story when it is finished. Power will be held to account.

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TUNISIA

Trash-talk does not come cheap

President Kais Saïed's crackdown on political opponents and black African migrants is hobbling Tunisia's bid to secure billions of dollars in critical loans and grants. World Bank president David Malpass told staff this week the bank would pause work with Tunisia as it was concerned the president's recent claims – that black African immigrants are part of a plot to change the country's demographics – had triggered “racially motivated harassment and even violence”. Earlier, the International Monetary Fund delayed final approval of a \$1.9-billion loan that was negotiated last October.

UNITED STATES

Wanted: Cyberspook to spy for Uncle Sam

The United States is looking for service providers to help it weaponize disinformation, according to a report in *The Intercept*. In a procurement notice, the United States Special Operations Command is reportedly courting companies for “influence operations, digital deception, communication disruption, and disinformation campaigns”. This includes “deep-fake or similar technology” and the ability to “take over internet-of-things devices”, to learn about people and “craft and promote messages that may be more readily received by local populace in relevant peer/near peer environments.”



UGANDA

The criminalising of basic humanity

Ugandan lawmakers have introduced legislation to Parliament that proposes criminalising anyone identifying as LGBTIQ+. If passed, sexual minorities in the country where same-sex relations are already illegal could face jail terms of up to 10 years. Speaker of Parliament Annet Anita Among referred the bill to a house committee for scrutiny, the first step in the parliamentary process for passing a proposed bill into law. Addressing Parliament, Among invited public comment, saying: “Let the public come express their views, including the homos, allow them to come.” The law would also ban the activism to advocate LGBTIQ+ rights funding and jail landlords who rent premises to LGBTIQ+ people.

THAILAND

Merchant jailed for disseminating defamatory ducks

A calendar featuring rubber ducks has landed a Thai man in hot water after he was found guilty of selling material that defamed the country’s monarch. Bangkok’s criminal court ruled that the calendar for 2021 depicted yellow ducks in poses that resembled and ridiculed Thailand’s King Maha Vajiralongkorn, diminishing his reputation, the Thai Lawyers for Human Rights group said in a statement on Wednesday. The court has reportedly sentenced the man to three years in prison – commuted to two years without parole.

GHANA

Military says sorry-not-sorry

Ghana’s defence ministry and army have apologised for their use of violence in a recent operation, where nearly 200 people in Ashaiman in the south were roughed up and arrested. The operation came after a soldier was stabbed to death but the army said their arrival with a helicopter and armoured vehicles “was NOT to avenge the killing”. The defence minister apologised “if decent, innocent residents were caught up in these operations”. There was no apology for the operation itself.

SENEGAL

Macky Sall accused of funding racist French politician

A former prime minister of Senegal, Cheikh Hadjibou Soumaré, spent Thursday night in jail over an open letter he wrote to the current president, Macky Sall, asking him if he donated \$12-million to a French politician whose party is best known for “hatred and rejection of others.” Although unnamed in the letter, the French politician was largely understood to be Marie Le Pen, who visited Sall in January and whose



Sall-out? Senegal's President Macky Sall is alleged to have donated millions to a far-right French politician.

far-right French political party rode on anti-immigration sentiments to become a serious power contender in that country.

NIGERIA

Have you tried turning democracy off and on again?

On Saturday, many Nigerians were supposed to vote again in elections to choose governors in 28 of 36 states. That election has been delayed by one week. That's because the electoral commission was not able to programme the electoral machines in time, following a court challenge by the country's two leading opposition parties. Opposition parties have challenged the results of last month's presidential election; among their allegations is a claim that the voting machines deployed for the elections did not work properly.

DRC

Françafrique won't fly, it's got to be our way or the désolé

Emmanuel Macron has been having a tough time of it in Africa. At a press conference this past week, DRC President Félix Tshisekedi told his French counterpart: “Look at us differently by respecting us, by considering us as true partners and not always with a paternalistic look with the idea of always knowing what is necessary for us ... Françafrique no longer exists. We must establish a policy of equals.” Presumably African firms will now get to drill for oil in France, strip it of resources, avoid taxes, all in the name of civilising the French?

GEORGIA

Walking it back in Georgia

Following days of demonstrations, Georgia's governing party said it would withdraw a draft law from parliament criticised for curbing media freedom and

civil society. Citing the need to reduce "confrontation" in society, the Georgian Dream party said on Thursday it would "unconditionally withdraw the bill we supported without any reservations". The controversial bill would have required Georgian organisations receiving more than 20% of their funding from abroad to register as "foreign agents" or face fines.



SOUTH AFRICA

Lion on the loose, not voiced by Ben Stiller

Failing to help dispel assumptions that wild animals roam the streets of African cities, South Africa has been dealing with a spate of wild animals on the loose. Earlier this year it was a tiger (yes, a *tiger* tiger) and before that a hippo. This month it's a lion, spotted near Pretoria in an area frequented by hikers. The animals might argue that before humans left their cradle, just west of Johannesburg, this was their home.

BURUNDI

Two dozen charged with LGBTIQ+ crimes

Seventeen men and seven women were on Thursday charged with "homosexual practices and incitement to homosexual practices" by a Burundian court and face three months to two years in prison, if convicted. The 24 people were arrested on 23 February at a meeting of an NGO that works to combat the spread of HIV in a region where stigma prevents LGBTIQ+ people from seeking health services.

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Uganda

The Continent journalist arrested on assignment

**Andrew Arinaitwe was
investigating allegations of
abuse at one of Uganda's
most prestigious schools**

As you read this, Ugandan journalist and regular *The Continent* correspondent Andrew Arinaitwe is in jail.

Arinaitwe was commissioned by *The Continent* to investigate allegations of sexual abuse at Ugandan boarding schools, including King's College Budo, an elite institution just outside of Kampala.

On Sunday, he visited the school's campus in an attempt to obtain comment from the head teacher, John Fred Kazibwe.

Instead of responding to Arinaitwe's queries, Kazibwe called the police, and accused him of trespassing. He was detained at a police post on the school premises overnight, and ordered to report to the police on Thursday.

On Thursday, in the presence of *The Continent's* news editor Lydia Namubiru

and two legal representatives, Arinaitwe was charged with "criminal trespass" with prosecutors saying that he had entered the school "with intent to commit theft".

He was remanded in prison until a hearing on Tuesday 14 March.

In a statement, the Committee to Protect Journalists said: "Arinaitwe's only crime was trying to pursue a story of crucial public interest – allegations of sexual abuse in schools. He should be freed unconditionally ... His imprisonment raises questions about what truths are being swept under the carpet."

Chapter Four Uganda, a Kampala-based civil society organisation, said: "This is an obvious abuse of the court process to harass a journalist for doing his work."

The Continent will publish Arinaitwe's investigation, should he choose to pursue it after his incarceration.

At least one Ugandan journalist has offered to continue his work, should his unjust detention go on for longer. ■



**Jailed:
Journalist
Andrew
Arinaitwe**

Zimbabwe

The documentary no one has seen – but everyone is talking about

The trailer for an explosive new Al Jazeera documentary has prompted a furious response from government

Jeffrey Moyo in Harare

Broadcaster Al Jazeera has yet to release its documentary about corruption in Zimbabwe's gold mining sector. So far, only snippets have been glimpsed by journalists such as Hopewell Chin'ono and the Newshawks investigators. But even these teasers have been enough to prompt a furious response from the government – and an astonishing admission of corruption from its spokesperson.

In one teaser, gold trader Ewan Macmillan was secretly filmed recounting how he smuggled the mineral out of Zimbabwe using private airlines, with help from politicians. He claimed to have Central Bank chief John Mangudya on speed dial, in case there was any trouble; and referred to one “Chiwenga” – believed to be Vice-President Constantino Chiwenga – as a “dunderhead”.

Another shows top government officials meeting with Kamlesh Pattni, a Kenyan businessman charged and

later acquitted in connection with the Goldenberg scandal, a gold trading scam that cost Kenyan taxpayers hundreds of millions of United States dollars.

The Zimbabwean government's response has been chaotic. At one point, government spokesperson Nick Mangwana tried to downplay the documentary's revelations. On Twitter, he said: “FACTS: Is there corruption in Zimbabwe? Yes. Is there smuggling of minerals and forex out of the country? Yes. Is there money laundering in Zimbabwe? Yes (including by NGOs). Is the Govt fully committed to getting rid of all the above ills? That's a fact!”

The documentary's timing has major political implications given that presidential elections are scheduled for later this year. “The documentary is politically destructive to the ruling elites as it has the potential to de-campaign many of them ahead of polls,” said Bekezela Gumbo, the principal researcher at the Zimbabwe Democracy Institute. ■



Tunisia report strikes painful chord in Africa

Why is saying the bigoted part out loud so on trend?

Last week, *The Continent* reported on the racist comments made by Tunisia's President Kaïs Saïed – a “low budget pharaoh”, as reader Luna Bawa described him – and the resulting escalation of violence and discrimination aimed at black people in Tunisia.

The cover story was one of our most impactful yet, demonstrating the simple power of calling things as we see them. “It blew up! You hit them where it hurt!” one Tunisian journalist told us. On Twitter alone, the report drew a million views.

“When it's done in China, I write to

criticise,” wrote Tobi Oshodi, a lecturer in political science at Lagos State University. “When it happens in the US, I highlight the cracks in ‘God’s own country’. When it is done in Europe, I recall colonialism, its legacies and Nkrumah’s call for Africa’s unity. But when it occurs in Africa ... I’m dumbfounded and ashamed,”

Adam Habib, a South African political scientist and vice-chancellor of the School of Oriental and African Studies, commented: “The face of racism today!”

For Nigerian filmmaker Imoh Umoren, the story made him reassess the region as a whole. “I always wanted to go see the magnificent ancient structures in North Africa, but with their increased racism I’ll just watch on TV.”

“When it comes to colonisation and our recent history, North Africans share so much more with the rest of Africa than either of the two landmasses we’re connected to,” said Yasmine Jibril, a Libyan writer. “Building bridges of solidarity across the former colonies is what’s going to truly liberate us, not breaking them.”

This week, the World Bank suspended talks with Tunisia over a proposed \$520-million loan, attributing the decision to President Saïed’s comments.

In an attempt at damage control, the president hosted his counterpart from Guinea-Bissau, Sissoco Embaló, during which he described himself as “a proud African” who can’t be racist because he’s got friends from sub-Saharan Africa.

Haven’t heard that one in a while, have we? Ouch. ■

Malawi

Russia's helping hand comes with just one tiny catch

The cost of petrochemicals rocketed after Russia invaded Ukraine, making ammonia for fertiliser a lot more expensive – if you can even find any. This has been devastating for farmers around the world. Now Russia is offering free fertiliser to Malawi – in exchange for support for ending the global sanctions imposed upon it.

Golden Matonga in Lilongwe

Peter Chapola's maize crop in Malawi's central district is almost ready for harvest. But his family is hungry and has already started eating the green corn – either roasting or boiling it. It will still be weeks before they can dry the corn to make maize flour, the staple food in Malawi.

The season just before harvest is called the lean season for a reason. Food is scarce in an agrarian society. And agriculture makes up some 80% of all jobs and 30% of Malawi's economy, according to the World Bank.

It was only last week that Chapola, in his late 50s, got a bag of fertiliser from the government as part of its programme to support the poor and vulnerable with farming resources.

"It's too late," he tells *The Continent*. "I

will keep it and perhaps use it next year."

Because Malawi's farms are rain-fed, farmers have to wait for the rains before planting crops. So if farmers get fertiliser late, they store it for the next rains – but then the risk is that it expires. Farmers like Chapola might also sell the fertiliser to get through the lean season, then have to buy more fertiliser later, at a higher price.

That cycle only gets broken when countries develop irrigation systems, so farmers can get water when they need it, particularly during droughts and in a world with more rainfall variability thanks to climate change. But fertiliser will stay important as a hotter world saps more nutrients out of the soil.

For Malawi, the fertiliser shortage started before Russia's invasion. The government had started cracking down on fertiliser cartels, according

to Betchane Tcherene, an economist at the Malawi University of Business and Applied Sciences. “While they were doing that, the war in Ukraine disrupted the supply chains.”

With exports from Ukraine cut, and Russia under sanctions, Malawi was caught unprepared, and over the past few years, the cost of fertiliser has more than doubled.

The poor charm offensive

And Moscow sees an opportunity for a diplomatic charm offensive. Malawi this week received 20,000 tons of fertiliser. A total 260,000 tons will be distributed across the continent.

Handing over the fertiliser in Lilongwe, Russia’s ambassador Nikolai Krasilnikov made it clear that the gift came with expectations. Bemoaning sanctions on his country, Krasilnikov said: “We are very confident that it’s high time we stopped the blockade on Russian goods and fertiliser. We are ready to support the developing countries with the agriculture products but we need your voice to support us.”

He suggested that countries should help Russia “for the benefit of building strategic alliances” on the continent.

President Vladimir Putin, he further announced, has also invited Malawi’s president to the Russian-Africa summit to be held in St Petersburg. Russian health experts were also ready to assist Malawi in fighting its ongoing cholera outbreak.

Yet Malawi has been noticeably outspoken in its condemnation of the

invasion of Ukraine, and in its voting in support of UN resolutions condemning Putin’s belligerence. Russia also has no real history with Malawi, which aligned itself with the West during the Cold War.

“We are very confident that it’s high time we stopped the blockade on Russian goods and fertiliser. We are ready to support the developing countries with the agriculture products but we need your voice to support us.”

And on a macro level the free fertiliser offered is little more than small change.

Nic Cheeseman, from the Democracy in Africa think-tank, said the power play “will work to an extent” but then countries will look at how much money it represents. “Russia seems to have limited resources, so if it cannot back the fertiliser up with greater investments in other areas. It will not displace the US and China as the most influential international partners in Africa.”

Malawi is also still heavily dependent on foreign donor support – World Bank data show this amounted to a billion dollars in 2020, with the economy as a whole creating seven billion dollars. Money from Western donors is crucial for services such as education, healthcare, energy supply and others.

Russia’s fertiliser is too late for this season, and too little to nourish the hopes of a new friendship. ■

Cameroon

Family of slain journalist call for justice for 'Le Maestro'

'In this country, I won't let you be; your only option is to kill me,' said Martinez Zogo in his final radio broadcast before he was tortured and murdered

Louvier Kindo Tombe in Yaoundé

In Cameroon, one of the most popular radio talk shows is *Embouteillage* – loosely translated into English as “gridlock” – which is aired on the private radio station Amplitude FM. The anchor of the talk show was Mbani Zogo Arsène Salomon, better known as Martinez Zogo or “Le Maestro”.

On 17 January, reports began to trickle in of Zogo's kidnapping. He remained missing for five days before his naked body, in an advanced state of decomposition, was discovered on the outskirts of the capital, Yaoundé.

According to Rene Emmanuel Sadi, Cameroon's communications minister,

Zogo's corpse showed signs of torture. Autopsy results provided to *The Continent* by his family show the extent of his injuries included a broken leg and missing fingers, among other traumas.

The 51-year-old father of four had garnered a reputation as an outspoken critic of private and public sector malfeasance. At the time of his death he was investigating business tycoon and media guru Jean Pierre Amougou Belinga. In one of his last broadcasts, Zogo claimed to have incriminating evidence detailing how Belinga and his allies in the government had allegedly syphoned billions of CFA francs from the state's coffers.

This was not the first time that Zogo had upset powerful people. He had previously been suspended from the air and imprisoned as a result of critical comments he made on air.

Cameroon is a dangerous place to do journalism. Another journalist, Samuel Wazizi, was arrested and detained in August 2019 for criticising the government's handling of a separatist revolt in the country's English-speaking north-west and south-west regions. He was later reported to have died in custody, but his family has yet to see his body.

“Press freedom in Cameroon is controversial,” Charlie Aimé Tchouemou, editor-in-chief of Amplitude FM, told *The Continent*.



Public outcry

At the opening of the first ordinary session of Cameroon's National Assembly on 3 March 2023, the head of the provisional bureau, Koa Mfegue Laurentine Epe Mbede, condemned Zogo's killing, inviting government officials and others to prove their patriotism and humanity.

For the first time in Cameroon, President Paul Biya set up a commission to investigate the murder. According to the secretary general at the presidency, Ferdinand Ngoh Ngoh, the probe has led to some arrests and many others are still being sought. Their identities have not been made public.

Reporters Without Borders revealed the arrests of about 20 members of Cameroon's General Directorate for External Investigation, including its boss, Maxime Eko Eko, and its special operations director, Justin Danwe. On 6 February 2023, the businessman Belinga, who owns the newspaper *L'Anecdote* and the TV channel Vision 4, and his wife Melissa Belinga were also arrested.

Zogo's wife, Diane, has written a letter to Biya and other world leaders demanding justice and protection for her

family. "My husband was killed like a pig, let justice take its course." Zogo's family has declined to receive his body until after the killers have been arraigned in court.

Keeping his memory alive

For close to a month before he was killed, Zogo had become increasingly aware that his life was in peril, but had vowed to expose those "killing" the state.

His sister MOUNGOU Crespence told *The Continent* that "Martinez used to tell us that he will die for his people".

Zogo's colleagues are hopeful that since the investigations were ordered by the president, his killers will actually be brought to justice. But the commission has an arduous task ahead of it, as there have been accusations that senior government officials were complicit in the murder.

On 4 March, the state prosecutor presented to some of the suspects the charges levelled against them, and immediately placed them in pre-trial detention at the Kondengui maximum security prison in Yaoundé. The key detainees are Maxine Eko Eko, Justin Danwe, Jean Pierre Amougou Belinga among others. The charges range from kidnap and torture to complicity in kidnap and torture, but none of them has been charged with murder.

Since Zogo's death, Equinoxe Television, a private TV station in Cameroon, has begun its 8pm show with a tribute to Zogo.

Hashtags like #JusticeForMartinez and others have also been created, among other initiatives from journalists to keep his memory alive. ■



Illustration:
Wynona Mutisi

'The Roaming Chef' Dennis Ombachi protects his sauces

Rugby player, self-taught chef, and now TikTok's top content creator in Africa? Done!

Samira Sawlani

Few would have thought that a balcony, in an otherwise unremarkable Nairobi apartment block, could become one of the city's most recognisable landmarks. Yet this is now the case, thanks to the incredible social media success of Dennis Ombachi: the former rugby sevens star turned amateur chef, father of two and winner of TikTok's top content creator in sub-Saharan Africa award for 2022.

With more than two million followers on TikTok, one million on Instagram and tens of thousands more on Facebook and Twitter, Ombachi – also known as “The Roaming Chef”, has taken the world by storm with his short, snappy videos which feature him cooking up mouth-watering dishes on his now iconic balcony, repeating his signature catchphrase “Done!” after every step.

As a regular feature on the World Rugby Sevens Series, and part of the Kenyan team that went to the Rio Olympics in 2016, Ombachi was already a household name. But the journey from international sportsman to content creator was not always straightforward.

“It's had its challenges!” he says, laughing, in an interview with *The Continent*.

His cooking adventures began during his rugby-playing days when he would try to replicate dishes he had eaten abroad. This, coupled with a love for baking, led friends to encourage him to start a blog.

“I called it ‘We-men should cook’” Ombachi says, “but I soon realised that I was more of a visual person and writing blog posts was not for me.”

So he purchased a camera and began posting food pictures on his Instagram account. When he noticed that videos seemed to be the more popular medium he took the plunge and began shooting videos instead. “At that point I was still playing rugby, so this was more of a side hobby.”

Cooking with gas

It was when his rugby career entered its twilight that he began to think about what a transition into normal life would look like – and how to keep paying the bills. It was also around this time that he noticed a rise in Kenya's influencer marketing scene. Brands were investing in advertising on social media through partnering with individuals with large audiences, and this piqued his interest.

Initially he began offering his services as a chef for parties. “There was a lot of demand!” Ombachi says. “I was travelling

all over the country, which is where the name ‘The Roaming Chef’ comes from.”

Then the pandemic hit, pressing pause on both the cooking gigs and the rugby. Next began a stint making and selling homemade sauces at the home he shares with his partner, Svetlana. At the time they had a baby son, and cooking inside the house was becoming increasingly difficult, so he went out onto the balcony instead. He tapped into his passion for woodwork and built the entire cooking station – itself a work of art – himself.

He resumed filming, and hasn’t really stopped since.

His videos are short, just 90 seconds long, and feature him cooking everything from kimchi-fried rice to coconut bean stew. He isn’t exactly sure what has made them so irresistible to so many people – or else he isn’t letting on. “I think it’s my personality, style of editing and that the videos are entertaining.”

Creativity is central to Ombachi’s content, and this is formed by his unique approach to cooking.

“Most people focus on following recipes. I recommend using your senses, obtaining an understanding of the principles and techniques of cooking and the five main flavours: sweet, sour, bitter, umami and salty. Then look at recipes and create your own version of dishes”.

Ultimately his aim is to motivate people to get more involved in the kitchen.

As for choosing what to cook in his videos, he’ll ask his family what they want to eat on any given day, then he’ll think up a new way to make it, and get filming. “That way, my content is done – and so



is dinner.”

That’s the plan, anyway. “Sometimes the flavours don’t work, or I’ll put too much chilli in or leave something on the stove for too long. That is the fun of cooking! Of course we don’t waste food, so my family ends up eating the experiments. At that point my mistake is all our mistakes,” he laughs.

One recipe at a time

The prime method of generating income from content creation in Kenya is by partnering with brands. Ombachi has worked with big names including KFC, Carrefour and Kenchic. He will produce videos relevant to them and their campaign (recently, he posted a guacamole recipe to go with KFC’s fried chicken and tortilla chips).

“The more engagement you have, the

higher your rate card.”

Despite his fame, he still gets approached to work “for exposure”, sometimes even by big brands. “My response is always: ‘Maybe we can work together in the future – when you have a budget for this.’”

The fact that even creatives with an audience as large as his still get asked to work for free shows that there are still those out there who don’t understand the amount of effort, concentration and time required to create high-quality content, and refuse to acknowledge that this is a job – one that Ombachi must balance with his family life.

“There was a point where I was too preoccupied with the work and realised I was not spending enough time with my kids. For me family comes first, so if it means I spend time with them in the day and stay up late to finish editing videos, then so be it.”

Ombachi has spoken about being diagnosed with bipolar disorder and ADHD, which he manages with medication and therapy.

“I always say mental health is not a destination, it’s a journey, a continuous process,” he says. “If I’m overwhelmed, going to therapy makes me feel like I’ve pressed the reset button.”

Many content creators will be the first to admit that they can easily become obsessed with checking numbers, likes and comments and gaining a sense of worth from this. Ombachi is no different.

“I recognised it was me wanting validation. That’s when I realised that my aim should not be to impress people, but



Photo: ombachi13

to produce content I like and would like to consume,” he says.

“Now, even if a video has only 5,000 views, I tell myself half of those may be people who are seeing me for the first time, and so it’s a win. I also had this perfectionist within where if I thought something was not good enough, I would not post it. That’s when I would tell myself, okay, just do one shit video at a time until you get it right.”

Perhaps that explains Dennis Ombachi’s enduring appeal: his authenticity; his courage to learn and then master an entirely new career; to be visible, to show up (imperfectly at times), to start over as often as it takes.

And maybe to remind us all that, with just a little sprinkle of self-belief, we too can yell, “Done!” ■



One foot in front of the other: A novice hiker climbs Mount Kenya

'You are going to freeze to death on this mountain,' my body keeps saying. 'It is better you just muster enough energy to go back.'

Tigist Hailu

I am lying in my sleeping bag in a foetal position, frozen cold. I am trying to catch some sleep, which is not happening because my body is struggling to get warm. And I have never felt more fatigued and in need of sleep. The miserable cold gives real meaning to the Ethiopian saying that I grew up hearing: "This cold makes you

want to cuddle a leper". Ethiopians have a proverb for every occasion.

My long-awaited Mount Kenya hike started yesterday; that evening I completed the first brutal stretch of a 12km hike from Old Moses camp to Shipton's Camp – the second and last campsite along the Sirimon Route towards Point Lenana Summit, which is Mount Kenya's third-highest peak.

This morning is supposed to be the

morning I'll attempt the Summit to Point Lenana. The first and second peaks – Batian and Nelion – are for experienced rock climbers. My group is supposed to be up in another hour to be ready to start the summit at 2am. The summit from Shipton's Camp takes at least seven hours to and from the camp. And the terrain leading up to Point Lenana looks like it was a set up to kill, as I will soon find out.

At this point my doubts about this whole idea – which developed as we reached Shipton's Camp, tired and miserable the previous evening – quickly turn into deep convictions that attempting this summit will be a fatal error. I have never felt so challenged in my life. Doesn't help that I read somewhere that each year trekkers to Mount Kenya's summit die in the attempt.

I resort to prayer as I lie in my sleeping bag, counting the hours. I earnestly pray that my guide and the group would somehow oversleep.

Unfortunately, my earnest prayers are not answered. God had other plans. "Tigist, let's go. It is time." I pull my head out of the sleeping bag and whisper back, "I am not sure if it is a good idea today. I seem to have no energy for it, I am freezing and have not slept even for a minute."

My guide is sympathetic but firm. "You have come so far; you cannot quit even before you try. Let's start it and we'll get back if it gets too hard."

I'm not going to be the weak link.

"Okay," I say. "Let's try."



So I pack my day bag, grab a quick cup of coffee, a few bites of boiled arrow roots for sustenance, put on my headlamp, pick my hiking pole and I'm good to go.

The ascent is brutal. It's freezing and the terrain treacherously steep and slippery. Just five minutes in my body starts screaming, and I stop the guide. I cannot do this. Please let me go back to camp.

"Let's keep trying, take as many breaks as you like," he says.

This is when I start to fight.

I put one foot in front of the other, though my mind and my body have already quit. I keep going, slowly, as my mind screams obscenities about how irresponsible I am to not listen to what my body is telling me.

I keep going. I keep going even though I have already quit. I didn't even know there was such a thing.

I take many breaks, closing my eyes each time to recharge. Later, one of our porters will tell me he thought I was actually dozing off.

I make it to one kilometre. A



Photo: Tigist Hailu

kilometre and a half. Two kilometres. Three. I imagine dying on the mountain.

But I do not stop.

I do not turn back.

At last, Lenana peak rises into view. My spirits rise with it: the impossible was now a possibility.

The last bit of the summit is even harder – it involves scaling huge, icy rocks, almost on all fours. For much of this experience I am supported, lifted, even dragged by the guide or one of our porters.

But we make it! Finally, we reach the vertical iron bar steps to the little plain which marks Point Lenana at an altitude of 4,985m.

At the top, we exchange emotional hugs. The sense of accomplishment and wonder is indescribable.

We take our moment. We take it all in. And then we go back.

The descent is just as treacherous and dangerously slippery – but a deep

sense of accomplishment conspires with the warmth of the sun to energise and revitalise me.

The worst is over.

There are memorable moments during the descent as we give ourselves permission to slow down and rest, looking out over spectacular views of the Batian and Nelion peaks, and Mount Kenya's gorges, valleys and lakes.

We finish the descent and the 12km hike back to Old Moses Camp in seven hours. During the last two kilometres of the hike to Old Moses I would struggle to outpace a tortoise.

I may have made it to the top of the world, but Mount Kenya still gets the final word.

I am finished. ■

A few things that experienced hikers don't tell you enough about summiting Mount Kenya

- *It's tough but too beautiful an experience to be missed. Train physically and mentally.*
- *Get an experienced guide and be honest and transparent with them.*
- *You will not get quality rest – get some before you come. (Two hot water bottles and a thick lined sleeping bag will help.)*
- *Get. The. Right. Gear. (Also, a flask of tea saved my life.)*
- *Enjoy the little moments – cooking, laughing, views and quiet moments.*



Do you want to show us around your town or city?

Send an email to read@thecontinent.org and we'll be in touch!

Let's not forget that we are (mostly) free

Sometimes the bad news is so overwhelming, so relentless, that we forget to stop and count our blessings.

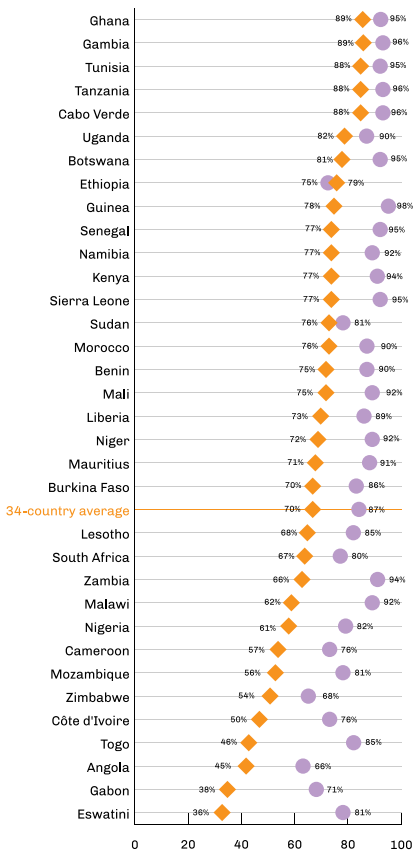
So let's stop and count: Most of us feel free to say what we think and vote the way we want.

In surveys in 34 African countries, Afrobarometer found that on average, 70% of Africans felt generally free ("somewhat" or "completely") to express their views, ranging up to 89% in Ghana and the Gambia.

And almost nine out of 10 Africans (87%) said they felt free to vote for the candidate of their choice without feeling pressured. Angolans were least confident of their freedom to vote, at 66%. In all but three countries, at least three quarters of citizens felt free.

None of this means that everything's fine. Indeed, in four countries, fewer than half of citizens felt free to say what they think: Togo (46%), Angola (45%), Gabon (38%), and Eswatini (36%). That's bad news – and a challenge to those of us who are free to speak up. ■

Free to say what we think and vote the way we want | 34 African countries | 2019/2021



◆ Somewhat/Completely free to say what you think

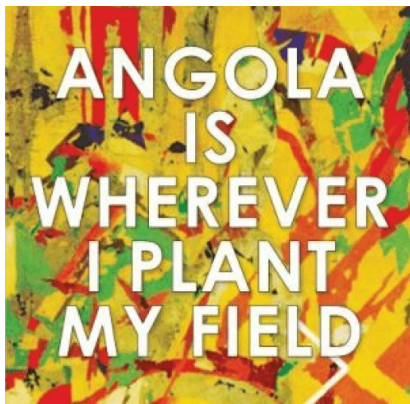
● Somewhat/Completely free to vote without feeling pressured

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.



Revolutionary ducks and toothless aunties

***Angola is Wherever I Plant My Field* is a quick but multilayered read that shines brightest when its satire takes centre stage**



Jacqueline Nyathi

In this collection of skilfully crafted stories, ranging from stream of consciousness narrative to short vignettes of life in Luanda, João Melo – the writer, journalist, poet and Angolan government official – proves himself to be the author’s author of postcolonial literature.

Many of Melo’s stories are about the failure of liberation and independence to bring about a better life for Angolans – something most postcolonial Africans can relate to. In Melo’s stories are big-bellied men and young people living on the street. There are women in precarious situations, and there is violence. But there is also much humour: a group of Portuguese women demand government support to rescue their men from the seductive clutches of Angolan women. An intrepid Nordic engineer eats market food, and the expected happens. There is a war of wills between a priest and a man with scores of children over baptism.

Themes in the book include Portuguese colonialism, war and trauma, refugee life, “race” – with its implied caste system, and postcolonial politics, with that institution’s seemingly inevitable corruption. The title story holds the whole collection together: a man, displaced, disaffected, and bereaved, leaves the past behind, and looks to the future in the refugee camp that is now his home.

There are a few stories in the collection that are mostly Melo showing off his writerliness – a character looking for a writer, a tale set in Haifa and a story with three endings – but these are perhaps a little weaker compared with Melo’s satirical commentary on Angolan life.

Melo’s style does tend towards wordiness, and the wryness risks becoming a bit much at times; but this collection was nevertheless a quick, enjoyable and recommended read. ■

Las Vegas

African podcasting comes of age

Josephine Karianjahi

On Tuesday, at a ceremony in Las Vegas, the Podcast Academy handed out its annual awards, the Ambies. These are the Oscars or the Grammys of the podcasting world: they are exceptionally competitive, and recognition forever elevates the status of a podcast.

This year, for the first time, an African podcast was among the nominees: Cape Town-based Radio Workshop's *I Will Not Grow Old Here* was nominated in the short documentary category. It didn't win, but just being nominated is a major victory, especially in an industry that is not known for being globally representative.

In the three-part series, Mary-Ann Nobeles tells her own story as a 23-year-old who lives and works in Alexandra, a low-income suburb in Johannesburg that few outside of the city know about. The podcast explores how Mary-Ann's big dreams persist amid the uncertainties and realities of life in Alex.

One of those dreams has now come true: Nobeles travelled to the Ambies awards ceremony in Las Vegas.

As Radio Workshop's podcast editor Lesedi Mogoathe tells us: "In the story, she created a vision board where she said she wanted to travel to America and around the world. Little did she know that she was going to do just that through her storytelling."

Radio Workshop bet on community-driven podcasting for stories that are otherwise hard to capture – and the award nomination shows that this bet paid off.

This is good news for the African podcasting community, many of whom are motivated by a desire to build community and take advantage of the inclusivity and accessibility of podcasts, according to research by Africa Podfest.

The research also shows that podcasting is the fastest-growing medium for consuming content on the African continent, with the fastest growth coming from Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa – so we can expect plenty more Ambies nominations in years to come.

In the meantime, grab a pair of headphones and listen to *I Will Not Grow Old Here*, and follow it up with *Nipe Story* (Kenya), *Inside Wants Out* (South Africa) and *Adventures From the Bedrooms of African Women* (Ghana) for more great examples of narrative podcasting from Africa. ■

Josephine Karianjahi is the co-founder of Africa Podfest.

Rise up! Coach Aliou Cissé is hoisted aloft after Senegal's Afcon 2021 win. Photo: Visionhaus/Getty Images



The golden age of Senegalese football

A decade of investment in facilities and talent is paying off for both men's and women's football

Beng Emmanuel Kum

Senegal is football mad and fans seem to consider anything less than silverware a loss. Yet, over the years, they have had many “losses” to cry over. The quarterfinals exit from the 1992 Africa Cup of Nations (Afcon) which Senegal hosted, for example. Becoming only the second African country to reach the World Cup quarterfinals in 2002 only

to leave without any medals. Or losing the 2002 Afcon final to Cameroon in a penalty shoot-out. Clearly gifted with prodigious footballing talent, Senegal was nevertheless earning a reputation as a serial underachiever.

Another case in point: the humiliating group stage exit from the 2008 Afcon. “It was frustrating because we could not pride ourselves in being a continental heavyweight when we had not won a



Fortune & glory: Coach Aliou Cissé raises the trophy in Dakar after Senegal's Africa Cup of Nations victory last February. Photo: John Wessels/AFP/Getty Images

single title,” says Saikou Seydi, a high profile sports journalist.

Then that record flipped.

Memorably, the men’s football team won the 2021 Afcon title, ending a 60-year wait. Eight months later in Mozambique, Senegal emerged winners of the Beach Soccer Africa Cup of Nations for the fourth time in a row. Recently, the Teranga Lions won their first ever Chan trophy, the African Nations Championship reserved for home-based players. With this treble, Senegal became the undisputed king of soccer on the continent.

The renaissance of the country’s women’s football team has also been astonishing. Once flourishing in the 1970s, women’s soccer in Senegal lost

steam and its national team paled in comparison with those of Nigeria, Ghana and Congo. But the team recently made it to the semi-finals of the intercontinental playoffs for the World Cup and had a decent run at the women’s Afcon, reaching the quarterfinals.

To the outsider, it may seem like a sudden resurgence but, says Seydi, Senegal is reaping the fruits of hard work that started as far back as 2009, when the country’s football administrators, led by Augustin Senghor, started investing in training facilities like the Jules François Bocandé Technical Development Centre and Centre Guerreo.

“These centres are well equipped and meet international standards, and help

coaches properly prepare their teams,” Seydi explains.

Just as significant is the influence of Aliou Cissé, who has coached the men’s team since 2015. He was the team’s captain in 2002 when Senegal came so close yet not close enough for fan’s satisfaction at both the World Cup and Afcon. “I think his longevity in the team contributed to the success. They grew in strength and maturity,” says Seydi.

But it wasn’t always clear that these investments would pay off and fans got impatient. “At some point they were fed up and wanted the executive led by Augustin Senghor to step down.”

Building consistently over time is also why the women’s team is resurging, according to Seyni Ndir Seck, president of the women’s football commission

in Senegal. “We have players who have played for more than four years together. That helps to build an inseparable bond. The results are reflected on the field.”

Especially for women’s football, external funding has also played a crucial role. “There is a stark contrast between what women’s football in Senegal used to be and what it is today. When I was a player, there was nothing,” says Seck.

“Today, with the support from FIFA [Fédération Internationale De Football Association] through the federation, clubs are thriving,” she says. “They can now pay players,”

Seck says the next step will be to set up a local women’s football league. “We may have achieved a lot but there is still a lot to be done. We want to really develop youth football, and launch a championship.” ■



Senegal: Supporters celebrate Senegal's 2021 Afcon win. Photo: AFP/Getty Images

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

"Of course I know where Lake Assal is, don't in-salt my intelligence."



- 1_** Lake Assal (pictured), Africa's largest salt reserve, is located in the middle of which country?
- 2_** Which West African country celebrated independence day this week?
- 3_** Lingala is the official language of Congo-Brazzaville. True or false?
- 4_** The Simbas are which country's national men's rugby team?
- 5_** What currency is used in Namibia?
- 6_** In which country is the Nile Delta formed?
- 7_** Ange-Félix Patassé was president of which country from 1993 to 2003?
- 8_** The colonial territory of Ruanda-Urundi later became which two independent states?
- 9_** Who is the all-time top scorer for Côte d'Ivoire's men's football team?
- 10_** The Abyei Area is an area on the border between which two countries?

HOW DID I DO?

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

Cruel heads prevail



Continental Drift

Samira Sawlani

This week saw companies, governments and organisations mark International Women's Day. Yes our social media feeds were filled with quotes about women (how strong women are, how brave, how courageous), alongside special discounts and offers on products and services. Because one thing about capitalism – it's going to capitalism.

Yes, the plaudits were sweet, but a reminder that rather than tweets, women would prefer equal pay, zero tolerance for misogyny, access to abortion and reproductive healthcare services, adequate maternity and sick leave, and they would appreciate it if governments would get out of their uteruses.

Investment in programmes which offer support for survivors of Gender Based and Domestic Violence, like counselling and shelters, is also important.

Overall, we would like policies and systems in place that protect *all* women – along with a conscious, deliberate effort to dismantle all the structures that oppress women.

If you are not doing that, well... keep ya tweets!

The Women's Day messages had us wondering if our favourite leaders marked Women's Day by gifting the women in their lives anything nice. A tear-gas scented perfume perhaps. Or maybe a ministerial position? A whole government department just for them? A taxpayer-funded trip to Paris for a new wardrobe? Or is that more of a For Him situation?

Eschewing such advice, authorities in Zambia decided instead that International Women's Day was the perfect time to put a group of women in jail.

Three members of the Sistah Sistah foundation and a supporter were detained after they held "Women's March Zambia" – an event that called for action against sexual and gender-based violence. Images from the march show people peacefully marching as they hold up placards saying things like, "Listen to Women", "It's a dress not a yes" and our favourite, "Fuck the patriarchy."

According to authorities in Zambia, the march was used to support homosexuality, saying that "government is concerned that the group decided to use the permit that was given in good faith by police to raise awareness against women and girls sexual and gender-based violence, but used it to champion illegal and criminal causes."

Real classy on the part of the government, which went on to talk about

the need to desist from any behaviours that are “inimical to our Christian values.”

The four have been released on bond.

It does seem that “questions” around LGBTIQ+ rights have become something of an obsession at the moment.

In the latest episode of *Keeping Up With The Kenyans*, the supreme court issued a ruling stating that Kenyan authorities were wrong to stop the National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission from registering as an organisation.

Since the decision, all hell has broken loose as our favourite Billy Ruto took to the podium to say, “our culture does not allow same-sex marriages” and suddenly all members of the political class have been chiming in with their, often offensive, degrading, dehumanising and cruel, views on the matter.

The country’s first lady, Rachel Ruto, has called for prayers against “LGBTIQ+” saying – at a church service no less – that it is “forbidden in African culture”, seemingly oblivious that her talking points are imported straight from the far right of the West’s culture wars.

Never mind that Kenya is grappling with a severe drought which has seen children unable to go to school in parts of the country because parents cannot afford school fees, millions are facing starvation while many struggle to make ends meet.

Uganda meanwhile has been singing from the same hymn sheet, introducing an anti-homosexuality bill in Parliament that Human Rights Watch says would criminalise identifying as lesbian, gay,



Photo: Dibyangshu Sarkar/AFP

bisexual, transgender and queer.

And then there’s Tunisia.

African migrants have continued to be subjected to mistreatment in the country, as many prepare to leave Tunisia following President Kaïs Saïed’s racist comments and crackdown on migrants.

But what’s this? Why, it’s Guinea-Bissau’s President Umaro Mokhtar Sissoco Embaló! There he is stepping up for Saïed, telling his Tunisian counterpart that there’s was no way he can be racist because “you yourself are African”. A sentiment Saïed now says he agrees with, despite everything else he’s said. Ooookay.

We end with the United Kingdom where Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, a man of Asian descent with roots in Kenya and Tanzania, stood behind a “Stop the Boats” sign to unveil his plans to ban people crossing to the UK in small boats from applying for asylum, meaning they would be summarily detained and deported.

So much dangerous rhetoric. So much *cruelty*. Just to score political points, create scapegoats, woo back voters who their economic policies are crushing, or build on some dodgy colonisers’ amoral high ground? Nah, fam. Just... no. ■

The miseducation of Tigray

An often forgotten metric for the catastrophic effects of war is the loss of schooling opportunities of children. Tigrayan children are being dishonoured.

Kisanet Haile Molla

Close to 2.4-million children in Tigray are out of school, according to data from the Tigray Bureau of Education, and more than 88% of its schools need repair, maintenance, rehabilitation, reconstruction, and water, sanitation and hygiene facilities.

The conflict in Ethiopia's northern region has severely disrupted the education system, leaving thousands of students without access to education. Schools have been destroyed, educational personnel displaced and children forced to flee their homes.

The situation has left an entire generation of Tigrayan children at risk of losing their right to education, with far-reaching consequences for society, the country's stability, economic growth and development.

Urgent interventions are needed to compensate for the lost academic years. One way to do this is to condense the Ethiopian curriculum and provide it to Tigray students to help them cope and catch up. Additionally, all students who complete their preparatory classes must be assigned to universities available in Tigray to ensure better workflow and

compensation.

The federal and regional governments, in partnership with local and international organisations, need to provide immediate assistance, including scholastic materials, school feeding, dignity kits for girls and back-to-learning campaigns.

Investments are needed to scale up complementary teaching methodologies, such as media, digital education, and distance and community-based teaching models. The financial need for this intervention is enormous, with \$619-million in immediate funding needed to kickstart schooling, according to the education bureau.

The international community, governments, and individuals must come together to support this critical intervention to ensure that the children in Tigray do not miss out on education.

Investing in education is not only a moral imperative but also a smart investment.

By supporting the education of the children in Tigray, we are investing in a brighter future for them, their families, their communities and their country. ■

Kisanet Haile Molla is the founder of InspiringHub.

Can Tinubu solve Nigeria's 'restructuring' problem?

Nigeria, once again, needs a lot of reform – and the new president-elect is about to learn the difference between governing a state and a whole country

Omowumi Olufunmbi Elemo-Kaka

A big buzzword in Nigerian political discourse is “restructuring”, which has come to refer to the embrace of “true federalism” by devolving autonomy to state or local governments, empowering them to set their own policy priorities and independently mobilise revenue.

Many Nigerians are frustrated that the defeat of “change” candidate Peter Obi in the recent general elections will undermine the prospects for “restructuring”. Yet president-elect Bola Tinubu may be better placed to facilitate the change they crave. It was Tinubu, as governor of Lagos State, who most challenged the national government.

In 2003, he created an additional 37 local government councils, as part of an ongoing dispute with then-president Olusegun Obasanjo, who rebuffed the move as unconstitutional and withheld the Lagos councils’ monthly allocation.

Tinubu’s response was telling. First, to make up for lost income, he reformed the Lagos State Internal Revenue Service to streamline tax collection and engage in civic education about the benefits of

taxation to society. Second, he challenged Obasanjo in the supreme court, which ultimately ordered the release of 25-billion naira of local council funds.

The impact of these changes was profound. Since 2004, Lagos has generated over 50% of its revenue from internal taxation – in 2020, this translated to \$9.2-billion. In turn, fiscal autonomy facilitates the Lagos state government’s ability to set its own policy agenda.

Now operating at the national level, Tinubu may not want to empower the states. It is also unlikely he will enjoy the same latitude and control he was able to assert within one state.

Given that Nigeria is one of the most heterogeneous countries in the world, the demand for “restructuring” will not go away. The future success and stability of the central government will depend, in part, on how Tinubu responds now that he is president rather than governor. ■



Omowumi Olufunmbi Elemo-Kaka is an assistant professor at James Madison College at Michigan State University. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa

The Big Picture

Photo: Guillem Sartorio/AFP

Ore place or mine? Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni visited South Africa last week. After meeting with President Cyril Ramaphosa, he said: "It is a betrayal of Africa to allow the export of unprocessed raw materials. The opportunities are plenty ... We only have a shortage in the area of processing." He said he and Ramaphosa would champion "deliberate" efforts to boost trade between their countries.



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