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# The Continent

## Meet your government's loan sharks





**Cover:** If the cost of living crisis has got you down, and the banks won't lend you any more money, you might have to pay a visit to a loan shark – despite high interest rates and looming threats of violence. When countries find themselves in a similar position, they often turn to the world of private finance, and have little choice but to accept punishing terms. But as one gold mine in Senegal illustrates, the exploitation does not start there: sometimes, those finance firms are invested in, and profiting from, the extractive companies that left the country broke in the first place (p11).

# Inside:

- **Climate:** The rising temperatures don't lie (p7)
- **Artificial Intel:** Unwittingly training Russia's surveillance state (p14)
- **Analysis:** Let Africa CDC take the lead (p17)
- **South Africa:** A heritage site in ruins (p19)
- **Basketball:** Meet the NBA's hottest global prospect (p23)
- **Review:** Retracing Wole Soyinka's youth (p26)



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**Escapegoat: Collins Khalusha's lawyer says he confessed after being tortured.** Photo: Simon Maina/AFP

## KENYA

### 'Serial killer' blamed for quarry bodies escapes custody

Thirteen prisoners escaped from a Nairobi police station on Tuesday, among them Collins Jumaisi Khalusha – an alleged serial killer. Five police officers have been charged in connection with the escapes. Khalusha was arrested in late July following the discovery of nine mutilated bodies at Mukuru quarry near Nairobi River, initially suspected to have been victims of the brutal crackdown on protesters. Police said Khalusha confessed to having killed them and 33 others, including his wife. But his lawyer John Maina Ndegwa claimed the confession was made after torture.

## CITIES

### The future is getting ever-more crowded

Africa's cities are getting bigger and more densely populated, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit. By 2035, Luanda and Dar es Salaam will join Cairo, Kinshasa, Jo'burg and Lagos as "megacities" with over 10-million people. Other cities will sprawl and connect to create "city clusters" that, collectively, provide an urban ecosystem supporting tens of millions of people. The biggest example is the West African corridor linking Lagos to Abidjan, via Porto-Novo, Lomé and Accra.

## UGANDA

### High-ranking Kony leader convicted of 43 war crimes

Thomas Kwoyelo, who was once the third most senior leader in the LRA – the Lord's Resistance Army of Joseph Kony – has been convicted of 43 war crimes, including murder and kidnap. He is the first LRA fighter to be tried in Uganda – others are wanted or have been prosecuted by the International Criminal Court. Kwoyelo was himself kidnapped and conscripted into the brutal army at the age of 12, a conundrum that divides opinions on who is accountable for the brutal acts of former child soldiers.

**BOTSWANA****Big day for big rocks:  
2,492-carat diamond  
unearthed in Karowe**

Karowe mine in northern Botswana has produced its third extraordinary stone – and it's bigger, shiner and more valuable than those that came before it. The 2,492-carat stone weighs half a kilogram and is potentially the second-largest ever – after South Africa's Cullinan diamond. It is the largest ever found in Botswana. Previously, Karowe mine produced a 1,111-carat diamond that sold for \$53-million, according to *The Guardian*, and a 1,758-carat stone that was sold for an undisclosed amount.

**MIGRATION****Spain widens transit  
restrictions to cover  
Mauritanians**

Starting on Wednesday, people who carry Mauritanian passports will not be allowed to board planes if their route includes a stopover in Spain – unless they have a visa allowing them to walk in Spanish airports. The new transit visa requirement imposed on Mauritanians is familiar to other African citizens. A similar restriction was slapped on Senegalese people in February, and is already in place for people from Nigeria, Ghana, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo.



**Watch this, space: Senegal's satellite, launched this week, will track water resources and weather patterns.**

**SENEGAL****Government puts  
eye in the sky to help  
tackle climate crisis**

Elon Musk's SpaceX launched a rocket last Friday. On board was the Gainsat-1A – a new satellite that was designed and built by Senegalese engineers, and owned by the Senegalese state. "This advance marks a major step towards our technological sovereignty," said President Bassirou Diomaye Faye. The satellite will primarily be used to monitor water resources and the weather – providing crucial data to help the government make smart decisions on climate change.

## NIGERIA

## Tinubu lands a brand new plane, but not everyone is on board

Nigeria's newest presidential plane is a luxurious Airbus A330, kitted out with a bedroom and office space, purchased for an estimated \$100-million. The country's fleet of presidential planes is already among the world's largest: at least 11 aircraft, according to *Punch* newspaper. In his new toy's inaugural flight, President Bola Tinubu travelled from Abuja to Paris, to meet his French counterpart. The government claims that the new plane is necessary to save on fuel costs, but Nigerians – struggling to pay for fuel themselves, thanks to Tinubu's drastic subsidy cuts – are sceptical.

## LIBERIA

## Cut undersea cable spells digital doom for Liberian internet

Internet service in Liberia was severely disrupted on Wednesday due to damage to a segment of the Africa Coast to Europe undersea cable. The Liberia Telecommunications Authority said that the local MTN mobile service was particularly affected. The cable segment that was affected serves several West African countries but, according to industry news outlet *Developing Telecoms*, "all except Liberia have multiple subsea cable links to fall back on – Liberia has none". A 2018 project to lay a second undersea cable is reportedly at least another two years away from completion.



## AVIATION

## Brushing up Africa's receding airlines

Africans account for around 18% of the world population, but just 2.1% of global airline passenger traffic. This means it is the aviation industry's greatest untapped market, which may explain why Qatar Airways is making a major continental play. On Tuesday the Gulf carrier announced the acquisition of a 25% stake in Airlink, a South African carrier, and it is expected to complete the purchase of a 49% stake in Rwandair in coming months.



## ZAMBIA

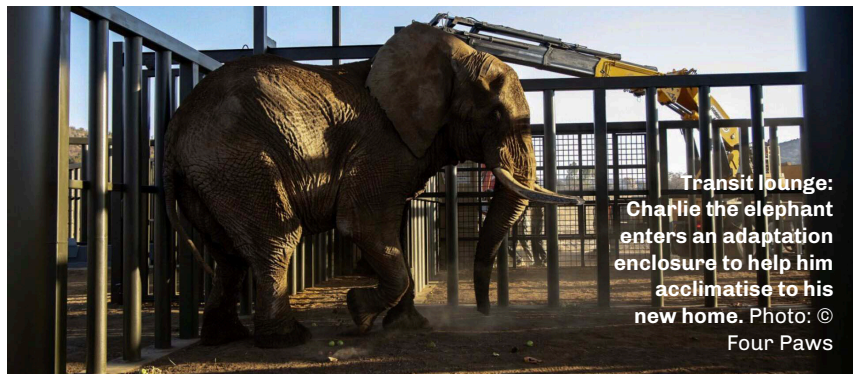
## Minister warns of contaminated maize

Local broadcaster *Diamond TV* broke the story: dozens of dogs were dying after eating locally-milled dog food. This sparked a government probe and a solemn statement from the health minister. It turns out the number of dead dogs was closer to 400, and some maize meal intended for people – milled by the firms that make the dog food – tested positive for toxins. The government has not named the firms involved, nor said how widespread the contamination is.

## FOSSIL FOOLS

## Greenwashing won't wash, says watchdog

French oil giant TotalEnergies is one of the world's largest emitters of carbon dioxide – one of the main drivers of climate change. Yet it has been trying to pass itself off as a champion of the environment in adverts touting a new deal with South African National Parks. But that PR campaign hit the skids this week when South Africa's advertising regulator ruled that TotalEnergies cannot describe itself as “committed to sustainable development”.



Transit lounge: Charlie the elephant enters an adaptation enclosure to help him acclimatise to his new home. Photo: © Four Paws

## SOUTH AFRICA

## Back to the wild

The last of the elephants at South Africa's national zoo has been reintroduced into the relative wild of a private game reserve. The 42-year-old, called Charlie (pictured

above), was taken from Hwange National Park in Zimbabwe in 1984 as a calf, sold to a South African circus and then transferred to the zoo in 2001. This week, the EMS Foundation, which advocated for the elephant's release, said that it had “been informed that the zoo's elephant ‘exhibit’ will be permanently closed”.

# Planet A

## Edging ever closer to cataclysm

**With July likely the Earth's hottest-ever month, our world is on borrowed time.**

**Sipho Kings**

**E**very month since June 2023 has broken a global temperature record. Ten countries have seen temperatures of over 50°C. And this July was, in the words of the scientists documenting a world spinning out of control, “more likely than not” the hottest month ever recorded.

More heat means more extremes.

The southern African regional bloc, SADC, said this week that 68-million people – one in five in the region – need food aid because of the intensity of the current drought. In the south, Cape Town had its wettest month on record. In the north, temperatures in Marrakesh hit 47.6°C – another ominous record.

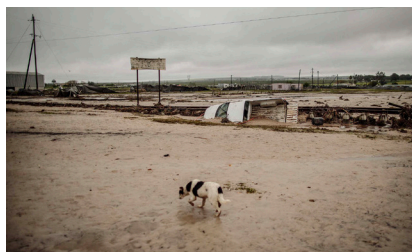
Extremes are now common.

A decade ago, the United Nation's climate agency changed its language to warn about this reality. Words like

“irreversible” and “overwhelming” made it into reports. The goal was to “jolt” politicians into action. In 2015, the Paris Climate Agreement was signed. Countries committed to do all they could to keep global heating below 2°C. The worst-case scenarios no longer seemed likely.

Then came Covid, the war in Ukraine, faltering economies, lobbying, corruption and isolationism. Commitments from oil companies to pollute less fell away, while record profits slipped into the offshore bank accounts of people building bunkers to insulate themselves from the future.

Scientists now expect the world to heat by 2.7°C – if every country fulfils every promise it's made. History suggests these promises will not be met. In July, UN secretary-general António Guterres warned: “Earth is becoming hotter and more dangerous for everyone, everywhere.” ■



**Tourist paradise: A dog walks by a car damaged by the recent floods in Cape Town.** Photo: Gianluigi Guercia/AFP

# Zimbabwe

## Life was gruelling, then we ran out of gruel

Rural mothers are trying to keep children alive with communal porridge clubs, but the El-Niño drought is cutting that lifeline short.

Jeffrey Moyo in Mudzi

In almost every village of Mudzi, a district in Zimbabwe's Mashonaland East province, women have formed porridge-cooking clubs to keep their children alive. That is because up to 50,000 of the 69,000 children in the district are malnourished, according to the area's medical officer, Kudzai Madamombe. It's one of the worst-affected districts in the El-Niño-linked drought that has hit Zimbabwe.

The groups used to gather daily to make a maize-meal porridge, but this year, as the impact of the drought worsened, most of them cook only once a week and have switched to an indigenous type of porridge known as maoresa (a blend of baobab powder and beans). The maize

harvests failed. "We harvested nothing from our fields this year because of the drought," says Susan Mafigu, a mother of four in Mudzi's Kurima village.

Mafigu is still able to feed her children at home – but only sometimes, and often on wild fruits. "My children eat porridge in the morning and have to wait until dinner time if we are lucky to have it. Sometimes we eat once a day," said Mafigu.

Many other mothers rely entirely on the community porridge cook-outs. In Kurima, these happen at Stella Kanhimba's homestead. Her husband Nyson is the village headman.

"Many villagers flock to our homestead to beg," Kanhimba told *The Continent*. "But even at the headman's household, food is a challenge for us too. If they find us with ready food, we share it, and if there won't be anything to eat, we tell them and they resort to wild fruits to survive." ■



**Dying land: El Niño brought drought to Zimbabwe, leaving wells dry and fields barren.** Photo: Jekesai Njikizana/AFP



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**The Continent**

# How Wall Street fleeces African countries coming and going

Companies owned by global investment firms mine Africa and take the profits. Cash-strapped governments then borrow from the same firms at high interest.



## Jaume Portell Caño and Lydia Namubiru

Life in Kédougou in Senegal is a paradox: poverty in the land of gold. Of the 17 tonnes of gold Senegal exported last year, more than half (9.13 tonnes) came from Kédougou's Sabodala mine. Yet, in the same area, one barely gets the most basic of services.

“Gold exploitation leaves pollution for the population, but scarcely any benefits,” says Ahmad Dame Seck, the headteacher at the Dindéfelo school in Kédougou.

He says that his students graduate (or drop out) into unemployment and struggle in the informal sector, or migrate to Europe, despite the money-making machine in the area.

The United Kingdom-based company which bought Sabodala mine in 2021, Endeavour Mining, has earned at least \$598-million from it since.

In its latest financial statements, Endeavour Mining values the Senegalese mine as an asset worth more than \$2.5-billion. Its other assets are mines in Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso and Mali, which it values at nearly \$3-billion.

Endeavour Mining keeps 90% of the profits from its Senegalese operations – sharing them with its shareholders, of course. The Senegalese government takes the remaining 10%.

Inequitable resource extraction deals are one reason why Senegal struggles to raise enough revenue to run the country. When its coffers run dry, the government is driven to borrow from the international money markets. In a bitter irony, it often



**Ore inspiring: An artisanal miner pans for gold at the Karakaene mining site in Senegal.** Photo: John Wessels/AFP

turns to the very same firms that are taking the lion's share of the revenue from the Senegalese gold mining industry.

New and exclusive analysis by *The Continent* shows that 40% of the shares in Endeavour Mining are owned by 17 investment firms that are also trading in Senegal's sovereign bonds. The Senegalese government owes them more than \$271-million.

When Senegal pays annual interests on those bonds – up to 7.75% depending on the bond note – the firms that are already taking much of the money from Senegalese gold, earn from the country being cash-strapped. This dynamic – lining pockets to borrow from them – repeats itself in many countries. African states have issued dozens of international bonds, borrowing at least \$84-billion from global investment firms like BlackRock, Fidelity, HSBC, Schwab, etc.

These firms also often own millions' worth of shares in the multinational companies extracting local resources.

| Firm                                  | Endeavour Mining shares | Senegal bond holdings (\$ millions) |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| BlackRock Group                       | 17.2%                   | 73.955                              |
| The Vanguard Group                    | 3.8%                    | 56.431                              |
| Fidelity                              | 1.4%                    | 40.961                              |
| Wellington Management                 | 0.5%                    | 21.740                              |
| UBS Group                             | 0.8%                    | 17.934                              |
| Aberdeen/abrdn                        | 0.4%                    | 16.755                              |
| Legal & General Investment Management | 1.0%                    | 11.825                              |
| HSBC Global                           | 0.6%                    | 9.080                               |
| Invesco                               | 0.8%                    | 7.275                               |
| Ninety One Ltd                        | 1.4%                    | 6.115                               |
| American Century                      | 0.4%                    | 2.800                               |
| RBC Global                            | 0.8%                    | 2.458                               |
| Schroder Investment Management        | 0.6%                    | 1.567                               |
| State Street Global                   | 0.8%                    | 1.450                               |
| Van Eck Associates                    | 9.0%                    | 0.637                               |
| Northern Trust Global Investments     | 0.3%                    | 0.163                               |
| <b>Total</b>                          | <b>39.8%</b>            | <b>271.146</b>                      |

## The worst kind of national debt

Private creditors' loans, of which bonds are but one example, tend to be the harshest kind of national debt to accumulate – interest rates are high, there are no grace periods, and lenders listen only to the markets. When states default on interest payments, economic chaos ensues.

Zambia, Ghana and Ethiopia failed to pay interest on their bonds, after the Covid pandemic and other economic shocks undercut the growth their borrowed money was projected to spur.

These defaults pushed their leaders to turn to the International Monetary Fund for bailouts, whose requirements include hard-nosed economic policy changes like floating national currencies and hiking taxes. The pain of some of these policy

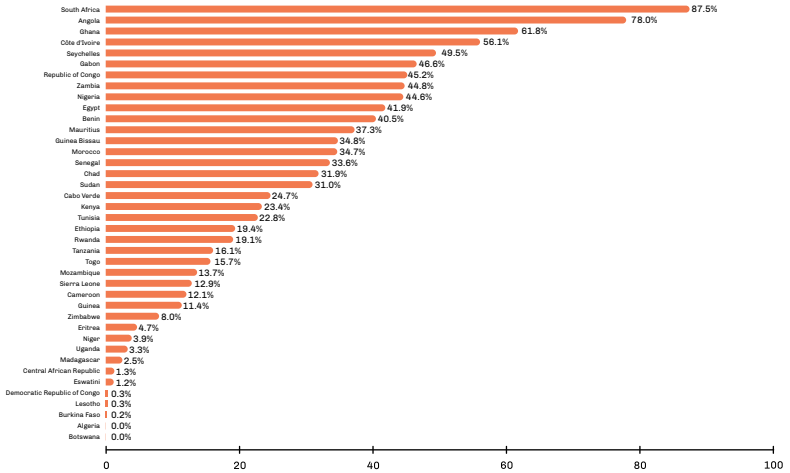
changes has driven citizens to the streets in protests that are sometimes fatal, and always costly to local economies.

Yet African governments have continued to dig deeper into this kind of debt. According to data from the United Nations Trade and Development agency, African governments owed more than \$777-billion to private creditors by the end of 2023. Private creditors now hold about 44% of Africa's national foreign debt, compared to 30% in 2010.

It's not an evenly distributed risk. Middle income countries are often ineligible for low-interest lending from institutions like the World Bank and turn to the private creditors more often.

But enthusiasm for that risky path is not equal. In South Africa and Angola,

### Percentage of national debt held by private creditors in 2023



private creditor loans make up 88% and 78% of national debt. In Algeria and Botswana, it's negligible, even though their economic health is comparable.

### Like government, like citizen

Issaga Diallo does not know the details of global capitalism and its circular extraction. But he knows that his own fortune will not come out of the fancy Sabodala mine that is plush with global money. He works as an artisanal miner in Bantakokouta, near Kédougou, where a gram of gold can earn up to \$50, \$20 less than the global market price.

The Bantakokouta village extends only about two kilometres beyond a mountain of displaced rocks that surround the gold pits in which artisanal miners dig. Diallo has lived there for almost eight years now, after dropping out of school in 2016.

Every day, he pays for fuel to run a generator for his equipment, but he

sometimes works for months without finding any gold. When that happens, he accumulates loans, promising to pay creditors back when he finds gold – much like national leaders do when they issue bonds on the global money markets.

In the long run, if Diallo is lucky more often than he is not, he hopes he will make enough money to start a business in the more urban Kédougou. On his phone, he likes to watch videos of miners who discover more than 100 grams – this keeps his hopes alive.

In the long term, if the Senegalese government is luckier than Zambia, Ghana and Ethiopia have been, it will make enough money to diligently pay bond interests until its own resource sector meaningfully pays into the domestic coffers. In the short term, however, the people profiting from that sector, and from those interest payments, are not your average Senegalese citizen. ■

# Serving Putin – without even knowing it

**African gig workers are shocked to learn that they may have unknowingly trained the systems Russia uses against protesters.**

## Marché Arends

**A** year ago, Kenyan software engineer Felix\* quit his 9-to-5 job in search of something more flexible. A simple Google search for “how to earn money online” led him to a company called Toloka – a crowdsourcing and microtasking platform similar to Clickworker and Remotasks.

Freelance gig workers from around the world log on to the Toloka platform and perform tasks to train Artificial Intelligence.

With quick clicks, they teach the machine which images to associate with social concepts like family, adult-only entertainment, LGBTQIA+ people, joy and so on. For a bit more money they transcribe audio and translate texts.

For anything from 10 cents to \$8 per task, Felix and other freelancers, mostly located in the Global South, are shaping the voice of this powerful technology. But they do not know the ends served by their tedious but seemingly innocuous tasks.

A 2023 investigation by The Bureau of Investigative Journalism (TBIJ) revealed one of those ends: Toloka was helping to

develop the facial recognition software that the Russian government uses to track protests and arrest protesters.

Essentially, by signing up to Toloka and completing available tasks, gig workers were – without their knowledge or explicit consent – bolstering an authoritarian regime’s efforts to repress dissent.

**For anything from 10 cents to \$8 per task, Felix and other freelancers, mostly located in the Global South, are shaping the voice of this powerful technology.**

Five past and present African freelancers on Toloka, speaking to *The Continent* on condition of anonymity, confirmed that they did not know what their work was being used for. Some were shocked by the revelation that their work could be linked to Russian surveillance of protesters.

“We were just given the tasks from the ‘clients,’” says Laura\* from South Africa. “We weren’t told who the clients were or why they needed it done.”

“No one ever knew what the end





**Nyet benefit: 'Click-work' offered to African freelancers could be linked to the training of the AI used by Russia to surveil protesters.** Photo Kirill Kudryavtsev/AFP

product would be,” says another South African freelancer, Thembiwe\*.

Felix calls the revelations from the TBIJ investigation “dumbfounding”, adding that “nothing is revealed to freelancers beyond what they need to know about the tasks”.

Toloka disputes the findings of the TBIJ investigation, saying it does not do business in Russia and has no Russian clients. “We have never done business with sanctioned entities,” a representative of the platform told *The Continent*.

### **From Russia without love**

Toloka is owned by the Netherlands-based Nebius Group, which until last month was called Yandex NV. Founded in Russia in 1997, the firm was best-known for the search engine commonly referred to as “Russia’s Google”: Yandex Search.

Three of Yandex’s former directors are currently under EU sanctions, including Alexey Komissarov, co-chair of the All-Russia People’s Front, a political coalition started by President Vladimir Putin in 2011 when he was prime minister. The

front is reportedly providing support to Russia's war in Ukraine.

Yandex's billionaire co-founder Arkady Volozh was removed from the European Union sanctions list in February this year after saying he intended to cut ties with Russia. In July, Yandex sold all of its Russian assets, worth around \$5-billion, to a consortium of Russian investors – the biggest corporate withdrawal from the country since the invasion of Ukraine.

Toloka says Nebius Group divested from its Russia-related businesses.

### **Between a rock and a hard place**

Even putting aside TBIJ's revelations about Russia, Toloka's African freelancers are unhappy with their treatment by the company.

Felix is paid per task with the potential to make up to \$7 per hour. The emphasis here is on "potential".

"Each task is less than a dollar and if it gets rejected you don't get paid," Laura explains. "So, you could spend five hours working on a task, putting in all this effort and detail, and then end up not getting paid anything."

Thandiwe admits that gig work is not known for its high pay, but says the company led people to believe their earning potential was much higher. "You're not going to make what they say you'll make unless you work 12-16 hours a day," he says. Toloka claims that it is possible to make \$100 per month from its click-work.

"Over two months I came away with about \$7," says Laura. "I have a full-time job, so I thought this would be a good way

to make extra money. It wasn't worth it."

Toloka maintains that its rates are competitive and fair, and are determined by analysing data from Glassdoor, LinkedIn, and Mercer's Comptryx. It says that all its gig workers are able to see the tasks and fees before participating, and can start and stop work at any time.

But Felix says that in his experience, most gig workers can't simply stop, even though all of those he knows are unhappy with the levels of exploitation in the industry. He says they feel they have "no choice but to keep working since most are breadwinners, myself included".

Toloka is not alone in its alleged ill treatment of workers. Many other tech companies are cashing in on freelancers' desperation in the Global South.

**Thandiwe admits that gig work is not known for its high pay, but says the company led people to believe their earning potential was much higher.**

In July, *The Continent* reported on the experiences of Kenyan gig workers employed by Sama, an outsourcing firm which provided services to Open AI and Meta.

Their accounts echo those of Toloka's freelancers, and highlight a disturbing pattern in big tech's playbook – paying peanuts to workers in the global south while turning huge profits. ■

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\*Names have been changed to protect sources

# Mpox declaration marks a key shift in global health

*Africa asked for more say in global health decisions after Covid. It now has that. The mpox declaration is a test of this new power. African leaders now have to own the solutions to African problems – but that comes with a risk of friction with global health players.*

**Charles Ebikeme**

**I**n the past two decades, the World Health Organisation has declared eight public health emergencies of international concern. Last week's mpox declaration had a twist: the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) officially declared it first. This is a major milestone for the regional body, which is pushing for a new public health order.

Africa CDC's announcement "represents Africans recognising their own problem and taking steps to promptly address it," said Professor Dimie Ogoina of the Niger Delta University Teaching Hospital. The infectious diseases physician was the first to describe sexual transmission of mpox in Nigeria in 2017.

"A global outbreak occurred in 2022 largely because the 2017-2019 outbreak in Nigeria was ignored by the global community," he said.

The lessons were not learned and it is leading to the same outcome this year.

"We warned everyone about it," Placide Mbala, an epidemiologist at the

National Institute of Biomedical Research in the Democratic Republic of Congo told *Science* earlier this month.

The DRC declared a national outbreak in December 2022 and largely had it contained until late last year. Now, the outbreak has spread to Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda. In 2024, nearly 3,000 cases and 517 deaths have been confirmed in at least 12 African countries.

In the past few days, cases have been reported further ashore in Sweden, Thailand and Taiwan, with a new sexually transmissible strain driving the spread.

Africa CDC's mpox emergency declaration came a day before the WHO's and is the first chance to test if the power to declare a health emergency will make a real difference. African countries demanded that power in the wake of the Covid-19 crisis.

Optimists expect it will. "A mandate such as this allows the Africa CDC to accelerate the release of resources by African governments in response to an African public health emergency," said Dr Ebere Okereke, the former chief executive



**Say Argh:**  
A patient has a saliva sample taken for testing at a centre in Goma in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Photo: Guerchom Ndebo/AFP

of Africa Public Health Foundation.

Spring Gombe, a strategist who has advised international agencies on health policy, expects this allows for more nuanced responses by each country. “Heavily affected countries, like the DRC, will need, and will get, different solutions to those on the brink, like Burundi or Kenya or South Africa.”

But a more powerful mandate also places the Africa CDC on a collision path with global health policy movers, in particular the WHO.

In 2022, the UN agency was accused of lobbying against more autonomy for the African body. At an African Union meeting, about a dozen African health ministers appeared to regurgitate talking points from a document prepared by the WHO’s Africa office, to argue for reining in Africa CDC, *Devex* reported.

Friction between regional and global public health players, especially during an active emergency, would be consequential. Declaring a public health emergency is only ever one step. Routes of transmission need to be stopped, treatments developed, awareness raised – and all this needs coordinated actors and countries working together.

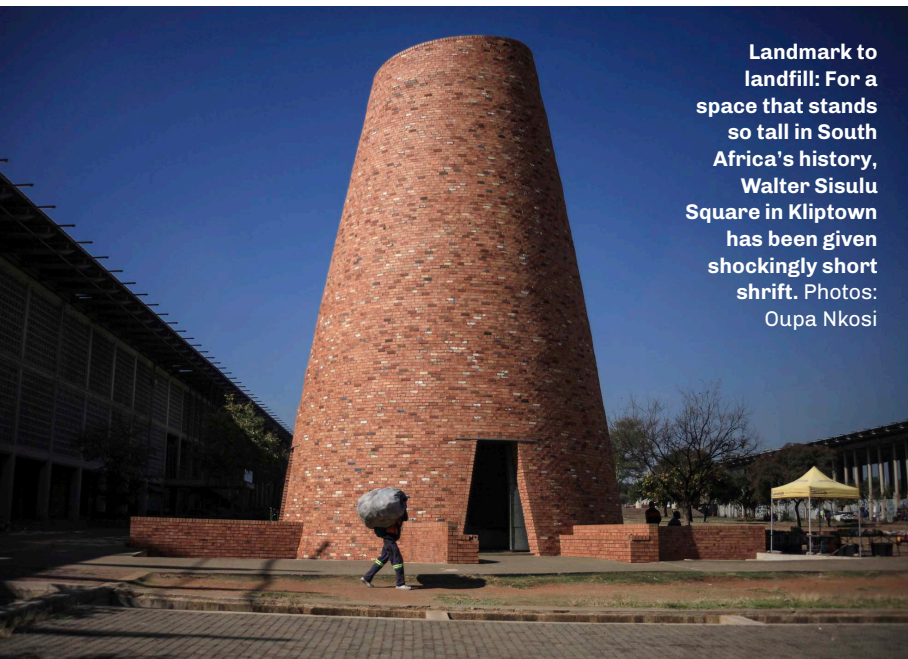
In the best of both worlds, a more autonomous and initiative-taking Africa CDC could lead African leaders to “take full ownership and show full commitment to addressing outbreaks on the continent without waiting for handouts from the global north,” said Ogoina.

But they will still need to try to do this without stepping too hard on the bigger toes, which mobilise most of the money needed to marshal a coordinated global response. ■



# Dereliction of duty

The central square in Kliptown witnessed one of the most significant moments in the history of South Africa. Today, it lies in ruin.



Landmark to landfill: For a space that stands so tall in South Africa's history, Walter Sisulu Square in Kliptown has been given shockingly short shrift. Photos: Oupa Nkosi

## Oupa Nkosi in Kliptown

**I**n 1955, more than 3,000 people gathered in the central square in Kliptown, south of Johannesburg, in defiance of the apartheid government. Over two days, they listened as speakers read out what became known as the Freedom Charter: a manifesto for a democratic, non-racial,

equitable South Africa.

“South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white”, the text began. On the second day, shortly after the charter had been read out in full, the police descended to break up the gathering. Famously, Nelson Mandela escaped their attentions by disguising himself as a milkman.

The Freedom Charter became the



**Sorry site: An abandoned shop lies looted and vandalised at the historic site of the Walter Sisulu Square in Kliptown, where the Freedom Charter was first read aloud.**

foundation for the new South Africa's Constitution, and the new government declared the Kliptown square a national heritage site, naming it after the anti-apartheid activist Walter Sisulu.

At a cost of R436-million (\$24.5-million), the site was developed into a tourist attraction, complete with monuments, a conference hall and a hotel. But after years of mismanagement and neglect, it has fallen into disrepair, hosting more drug addicts than tourists.

The hotel and museum are now temporarily closed. Large parts of the building's corrugated roofing have been ripped off and stolen, along with metal

fixtures, cables, light switches, doors, windows frames and paving. Shops have been looted and vandalised, including the entertainment hall. The underground parking is flooded with water because of the poor drainage system.

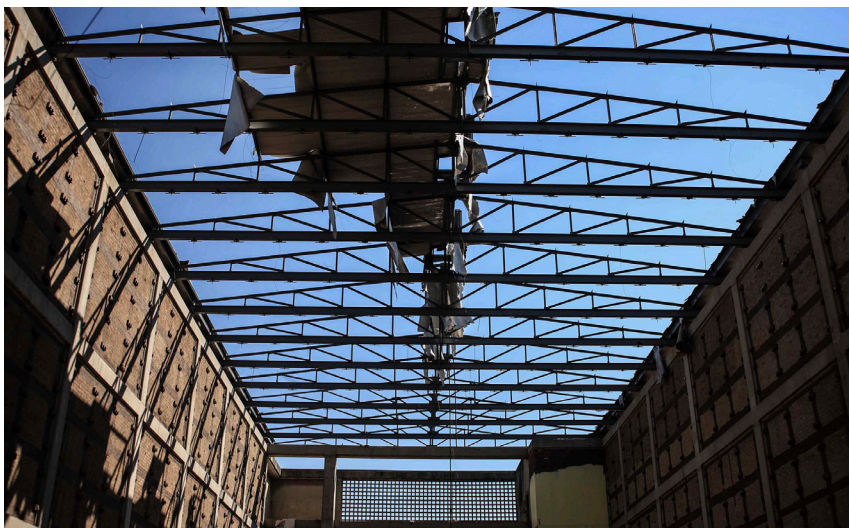
For residents of Kliptown – who continue to live in dire poverty without proper housing, roads, sanitation or job opportunities – the derelict square is an all-too-real symbol of how the promises of the Freedom Charter have yet to be met.

“It's really hurting,” says Thulani Mhambi, a self-employed security guard who stands duty on the square. “It hurts deep.” ■

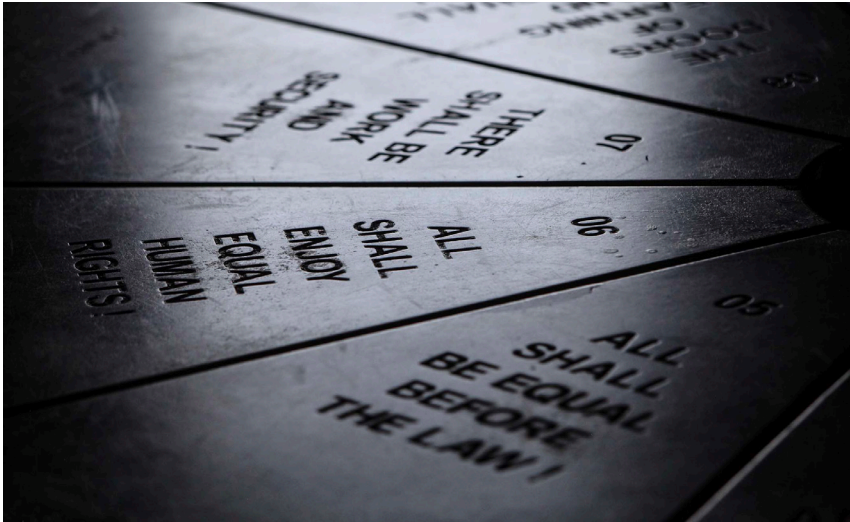




**Scraped bare:** The square's buildings and infrastructure have been stripped and vandalised by thieves thanks to poor security and neglect by the municipality.



**Open to the elements:** The roof of the historic site's once-grand hall has been stripped of its corrugated iron panels, exposing its interior to hail, wind and rain.



**Written in stone:** The core principles of the Freedom Charter, inscribed in the tower at Walter Sisulu Square in Kliptown.



**Drowning:** The flooded underground parking lot at the historical landmark helps tip the condition of the historic square from one of mere neglect into actual squalor.

# Ulrich Chomche is cut from a new African cloth

Never mind being the next Pascal Siakam or Joel Embiid, he is already the first of his name.

**Daniel Ekonde**

**E**ighteen-year-old Cameroonian Ulrich Chomche has not played an official league game in the United States yet. But the 2.11m-tall centre player has already made history in its National Basketball Association – the NBA. In June he became the first player from the NBA’s global academy to move directly into the league.

Selected in this year’s draft by the Memphis Grizzlies, he was immediately transferred to the Toronto Raptors and signed a two-year contract. He is the seventh Cameroonian to join the league and the youngest NBA player currently, only turning 19 at the end of December.

It’s quite an achievement for a player who was running around his village, Bafang in western Cameroon, just a few years ago. At 13, he left for Saly in Senegal, where where he spent four years at the African branch of the NBA Academy.

He played for Cameroon’s Forces Armees et Police in the inaugural season of the BAL – the Basketball Africa League – in 2021 and made another appearance with Rwanda Energy Group in 2023. He also helped the Cameroonian men’s team get to its first Olympic qualifiers in 16

years, though it didn’t make it to Paris.

## A raw talent

“Ulrich is a rare talent,” Alfred Aboya, Chomche’s coach at the academy and Cameroon national team, told *The Continent*. “He is a young, long and athletic player who can do a lot of things. He can shoot, he can pass and most importantly, he is a sharp blocker and great defender.”

Movers in the sport have been watching this talent keenly.

“We’ve been following Ulrich for a long time,” Patrick Engelbrecht, the Raptors’ director of global scouting told *The Continent*. “We’ve seen that the African player is getting access to high level competition at earlier ages.”

Early exposure to elite training and competition has been extremely rare for African basketballers yet it is often decisive in getting players into the professional leagues where talent isn’t rare.

Typically, young players who join the NBA are coming in with American college basketball experience which eases them into the hyper-competitive and hyper-visible professional life. Chomche doesn’t have that but has embraced Toronto and it’s warming up to him. “What I’m really



**High society: Global stardom is firmly within Ulrich Chomche's reach. Not much isn't, tbh.** Photo: Candice Ward/Getty Images

really impressed with is that he's learning really quickly, adjusting to [his] new style of life. He's gonna be a great addition for us in Toronto," Raptors' head coach Darko Rajaković told *The Continent*.

NBA fans were treated to flashes of Chomche's defensive, passing and scoring game in the first two games of the league's preseason tournament: the Summer League in Las Vegas. "I am so excited for him," said Jama Mahlalela, Raptors assistant coach.

Mahlalela admits that as a coach, he still needs to move Chomche around a bit. His height gives him real potential for close shots and his defensive talent is undeniable – he averaged three blocks and one steal per game in last year's BAL. He may need "two or three years to be perfect" noted FAP head coach Kevin Ngwese, but no one doubts his ability to get there.

The team will certainly look to

incorporate Chomche's blend of height and athleticism into their rim-protection strategy. But Chomche might also want to follow in the tracks of contemporary centres like Joel Embiid and Nikola Jokić, who have revolutionised their defensive roles through their incredible shooting.

But whatever he chooses or turns out to be in the league, Chomche has opened a whole new path from Africa to the NBA: being drafted directly from the continent without having to move to the US first.

"It's a new day. It's a game changer," said Engelbrecht, who hopes the next generation of African kids who dream of being basketball stars will see that "we have the full ecosystem here on the continent" – elite youth academies and a professional continental league, the BAL, where they can catch the eye of global scouts. ■

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*Additional reporting by Refiloe Seiboko*



# Preparing for a new pandemic: would more money help?

**M**pox is not a pandemic. But with over 500 deaths, cases confirmed in more than a dozen countries, and a new form of the virus spreading, it is a global health emergency, the World Health Organisation announced last week.

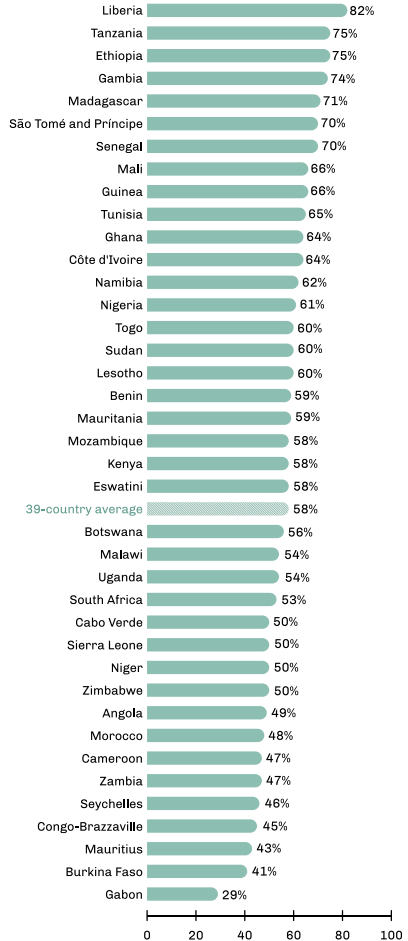
With Covid-19 still fresh in memory, only 51% of Africans think their government is prepared for future health crises, as we reported earlier this month.

What should we do? In Afrobarometer surveys in 39 countries, almost six in 10 Africans (58%) say their government should invest more in preparations for future health emergencies like Covid-19, even if that would take away resources from other health services.

Half or more of respondents support this approach in 30 countries, including 82% in Liberia and 75% in Tanzania and Ethiopia. Gabon (29%) is the only country where support for greater spending drops below four in 10.

Or maybe we could invest more in preparations without taking away from other health services. After all, health ranks near the top on Africans' list of priorities for government action, second only to unemployment. ■

## Should we invest more in preparations for health emergencies? | 39 African countries | 2021/2023



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



## The artist nonchalantly captured – in a moment long gone

It is always good to document for posterity – but that doesn't guarantee an exciting document.

**Wilfred Okiche**

**A**n old photo of the acclaimed Nigerian playwright, Nobel laureate and cultural icon Wole Soyinka seated on the front steps of his former home at the University of Ibadan is the impetus for *Ebrohimie Road: A Museum of Memory*.

Struck by this photo, which appears –

wrongly as we later come to understand – on the cover of *Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years*, one of Soyinka's memoirs, director Kólá Túbòsún goes on a journey back in time to present a portrait of the artist as a young man.

The film was made possible by funding from Open Society Foundations and its release was timed for this year's celebration of Soyinka's 90th birthday.

With talking-head contributions from Soyinka's family, including ex-wife Olaide and at least four of his children, Túbòsún's film zeroes in on this particular moment in his life, shedding light on some of the conflicts that he was dealing with at the time. What emerges is a moderately interesting documentary.

It comes alive most in the arguments made for conscious preservation of cultural artefacts like 9 Ebrohimie Road. The film is therefore more interesting as academic discourse than creative achievement. No surprise here as Túbòsún made his name as a poet, linguist and publisher before turning to film.

Soyinka himself, who has since assumed larger-than-life status, participates in the project. But from a considered remove that gives off the impression that he is only doing it as a polite favour to the filmmaker.

For a man who is perfectly capable of documenting his own colourful life and indeed has spent considerable time doing just that, there must be little excitement in observing an outsider dig through the bones of what was left off. ■



# 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 we're sending things off into space, can we add a few politicians?"



Photo: John Wessels/AFP

- 1\_** Which African country launched Gaindesat-1A, its first satellite?
- 2\_** True or false: There is one permanent African member of the UN Security Council.
- 3\_** Name the three African countries that are currently members of the UN Security Council.
- 4\_** Red Sea State is a state in which African country?
- 5\_** UGX is the currency code of which country's currency?
- 6\_** In which year did Angola gain independence: 1965 or 1975?
- 7\_** Which two oceans meet at the southernmost tip of Africa?
- 8\_** The People's Republic of the Congo existed in which present-day country from 1969-1992?
- 9\_** Name the Nigerian playwright and novelist who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986.
- 10\_** The Saloum Delta (pictured) is a Unesco World Heritage Site in which country?

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# Nigeria's police are violent brutes – no matter who rules

**A court ordered the state to respect protesters' rights. Just weeks later, security forces killed 21 of them.**

**Francis Mwai Daka**

Last month, a West African regional court issued a damning verdict against the Nigerian government: In *Obianuju Catherine Udeh & 2 Others v Federal Republic of Nigeria*, judges with the ECOWAS Court found that it had violated its obligations under the African Charter for Human and People's Rights.

These violations were committed by security forces as they violently suppressed the popular #EndSARS protests of 2020, when tens of thousands of Nigerians took to the streets to demonstrate against the unlawful behaviour of a rogue police unit.

The three individuals who lodged the legal complaint – all of whom had participated in the protests – were awarded 10-million naira each (\$6,355). They provided evidence of physical, mental, emotional, and psychological torture due to the disproportionate actions of government agents. The court also found Nigeria failed in the duty of the state to investigate human rights abuses.

At the time of these violations, the government was led by Muhammadu Buhari. Now Bola Tinubu is in charge, but nothing seems to have changed. Weeks



**Standing tall: A protestor rings a bell to mobilise supporters during the 2020 #EndSARS demonstrations in Nigeria.**

Photo: Pius Utomi Ekpei/AFP

after this judgment, Nigerian security forces again responded to popular protests – this time in relation to sharp increases in the cost of living – with extreme brutality. At least 21 people were killed, according to Amnesty International.

The ruling by an African court, using African legal instruments, should have been an energy boost to African human rights defenders. Instead, it is clear that Nigeria's current government has as much respect for the court as it does for the basic human rights of its citizens: very little. ■

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Francis Mwai Daka is an associate editor at *Democracy in Africa*

# Namibia's uneven legal playing field

The upcoming elections are likely to be undermined – and then contested – yet again.

Marisa Lourenço

Since Namibia became a democracy in 1990, the outcome of every general election has been legally challenged by opposition parties. This year, when the seventh parliamentary and presidential polls take place in November, is unlikely to be any different.

Namibia is often hailed as an African democratic success story but its political landscape bears the hallmarks of many of its repressive counterparts in the region.

The South West Africa People's Organisation (Swapo), the country's former liberation movement, has dominated the political landscape for decades, dictating policy direction with its president in office. It has also passed laws that make it difficult to challenge the status quo – specifically involving elections.

The country's Constitution says that any challenge to the presidential election result must be before the Supreme Court. Treating the highest court in the land as

the first resort for such challenges “means if the case is thrown out, there is no right to recourse,” investigative journalist John Grobler told *Democracy in Africa*.

The flaws of that set up were evident when opposition politician Panduleni Itula challenged the use of electronic voting machines in the 2019 elections after several of them went missing from the electoral commission. While the Supreme Court noted that some voting machines were without a verifiable paper trail, making them invalid, it upheld the election results. Itula told *Democracy in Africa*, “this is still causing an issue on how unconstitutional elections could have been conducted”.

Grobler also notes that there is “inadequate time to prepare” and file an election challenge: two weeks from the announcement of the election results.

Despite this, Swapo's path to victory is not guaranteed. Popular frustration is high amid growing unemployment and government corruption. Itula and his party, Independent Patriots for Change, alongside the Popular Democratic Movement, Landless People's Movement and Affirmative Repositioning parties and their respective leaders, all represent real threats to the status quo. ■



Marisa Lourenço is a political analyst based in South Africa. This analysis was produced in collaboration with *Democracy in Africa*

# THE BIG PICTURE

Preparing the way: A procession of the faithful from Porto Novo carry a statue of John the Baptist on a 23km pilgrimage on the island of Santo Antãoís, Cabo Verde, in a demonstration of faith and gratitude.

Photo: Queila Fernandes/AFP



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