

The Continent

A close-up, profile view of a man with dark skin and short hair, looking through binoculars. He is positioned in front of a window with severely damaged, cracked, and shattered glass. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights on his face and hands, and deep shadows elsewhere. The overall mood is somber and contemplative.

Sudan's distant peace

Photo: Amaury Falt-Brown/AFP



Cover: The Sudanese Armed Forces are on the offensive in Khartoum. They say they are about to retake the Republican Palace – the symbolic heart of the Sudanese state. Does that mean the civil war is nearing its end? Not so fast (p11). Meanwhile, some Sudanese refugees who escaped across the border find themselves in an equally dangerous part of the world (p14).

Inside:

- **Ukraine:** South Africa offers Zelenskyy its own olive branch (p7)
- **Cartoon:** Dizzilyingly difficult problems for new AU head (p9)
- **Museum of Stolen History:** *Okukor* comes home to roost (p15)
- **Borderlands:** *The Continent* visits the Goma-Gisenyi crossing between DRC and Rwanda (p21)
- **Review:** Young, Famous, African ... and predictable (p26)
- **Afrobarometer:** Lived poverty is at its worst level in 25 years of surveys (p19)

We are so, so close!

We wanted to hit 30,000 subscribers by our 200th issue in May this year.

We are nearly there – *two months ahead of schedule.*

That is entirely due to you, wonderful readers, who have been sharing this newspaper far and wide. Thanks to your hustle (William Ruto would be proud), we only need 647 new subscribers before we reach our target. Let's keep the momentum going by sharing this edition of *The Continent* with one or two new people this weekend!

MALI

Souleymane Cissé joins the ancestors

One of Africa's most incisive filmmakers, Souleymane Cissé, has died in Bamako, his daughter Mariam said on Wednesday. He spent 50 of his 84 years making films, starting in 1975 when his first classic, *Den Muso*, was shot. Government censors sent him to prison, where he wrote his second, *Barra*. Cissé's *Yeleen* won the jury prize at the 1987 Cannes Film Festival, its first to an African filmmaker. Cannes honoured him again in 2023 with the Carrosse d'Or, for directors who leave a mark on cinema history by being audacious, intransigent, and having exacting standards.



Photo: Stefano Rellandini/AFP

CHICKEN

KFC shows Kentucky the middle finger

The Kentucky Fried Chicken chain is moving its headquarters to Texas, where taxes are lower. It follows Chevron, SpaceX and others. The company has promised Kentucky one spruced-up restaurant to honour their 95-year history together. Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear is not happy with that divorce settlement offer. "It has marketed our state's heritage and culture in the sale of its product. My hope is that the company will rethink moving Kentucky Fried Chicken employees out of Kentucky."

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

France hands over sole military base

French Defence Minister Sebastien Lecornu handed over the 43rd Marine Infantry Battalion camp to his Ivorian counterpart, Téné Birahima Ouattara, at a ceremony on Thursday. It was the only French military base in Côte d'Ivoire, and the handover was not demanded as forcefully as were the French exits from Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso and Chad. Some 100 French soldiers will even stay in the country as trainers. Ivorian authorities have renamed the base to Camp Thomas d'Aquin Ouattara, after the first local army chief of staff.



On the rocks: Marmolada mountain in the Italian Alps will lose its glacier by 2040. Photo: Pierre Teysot/AFP

THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Global warming defrosting peaks at furious pace

Mountain glaciers are melting faster than they ever have, which means sea levels are rising faster and further, destabilising weather patterns and increasing the risk of flooding and drought. A major new study published Wednesday in the journal *Nature* says that global glaciers, other than the continental ice sheets in Antarctica and Greenland, have lost 5% of their volume since 2000. Sea levels are expected to rise by up to half a metre in this century.

SOUTH AFRICA

ANC forced to recall it's part of a coalition

Just hours before reading the annual budget, Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana was obliged to halt proceedings until next month. He had been poised to raise value-added tax from 15% to 17% – until the ANC's largest coalition partner had a meltdown. The ANC holds two thirds of the cabinet positions, including defence, finance, minerals – enough strength to run things without much deference to its partners. Not this time.

GERMANY

Europe's juggernaut sputters to the polls

Voters in Europe's biggest economy head to the polls on Sunday in an election dominated by the economy and immigration. The election comes after the current coalition government collapsed. Once hailed as an economic miracle, Germany is now in its second year of recession. The largest centre right opposition party is expected to win but will need a coalition to govern. The extremely right-wing AfD will likely come second. Other parties have committed to not work with AfD – a lesson learned from the parties that tried to work with the Nazi party but ultimately helped usher in catastrophe.

ENVIRONMENT

Senegal counts cost of its dwindling pride

Lions are Senegal's national emblem (bonus trivia: the shield of arms also has a baobab). Gris-gris, the local custom of writing religious text on pieces of lion

skin, means there is significant demand for their pelts. People also wear lion furs to bring good luck or ward off curses. Consequently, dead lions are so valuable that live ones are critically endangered, with just two sanctuaries left in West Africa. According to the *AP*, smuggling networks reach into eastern and southern Africa to bring lion skins to Senegal.



Fading roar:
Performers in
traditional costumes
at the Fake Lion Show
in Dakar. Photo: John
Wessels/AFP

SOUTH AFRICA

Where justice isn't as swift as it is damp

Intense storms hit Pretoria this week, battering its crumbling infrastructure. With no dominant political party, the capital has been led by a revolving mush of politicians, delaying decisions on fixing things. The storms led to electricity substations exploding and the high court closing its doors. This is the same country that took Israel to the International Court of Justice for its genocide in Gaza. A country of extremes.

BUSINESS

It's a hard knock life hey, big spender?

Africa's richest man, Nigeria's Aliko Dangote, made his wealth from heavy industry. Dangote Cement is one of the largest producers on the continent, and in Ethiopia it has a country doing a lot of building. It also needs to get ahead of competition from Chinese companies. This week Dangote was in Addis Ababa to announce a \$400-million investment in doubling the capacity of his production plant there.

NIGERIA

**More bronzes return
(not from UK obvs)**

Piece by piece, the Benin Bronzes that British soldiers looted in 1897 are being returned. This time it's the Dutch State Collection, which noted that "cultural heritage is essential for telling and living the history of a country and a community". The Nigerian National Commission for Museums and Monuments says it's the single largest return of Benin antiquities looted in 1897. Britain insists on keeping the loot it's still holds.



Photo: Wereld
Museum

HORN OF AFRICA

**Calm seas ahead for
Ethiopia's 'any port
in Somaliland' storm**

Ethiopia is the world's most populous landlocked nation. This vexes a leadership that wants the country of 120-million people to trade more and flex geopolitical power. So last year they signed a deal with Somaliland to get a port, in return for recognising it as a country. That didn't go down well with Somalia, which claims sovereignty over the territory. Türkiye, which has a large military base in Somalia, offered to mediate and the parties agreed to talks. The first of these took place on Tuesday, with a hint that Ethiopia might get its port – if it doesn't recognise Somaliland.

AFRICAN UNION

**Bye, Western bias:
AU's loan arranger
gets ready to ride**

The AU says it will launch the African Credit Rating Agency in June. This, according to Kenya's President William Ruto, will "reflect Africa's reality correctly". At present, only two African countries are rated as investment grade. The other 53 have to pay a premium to get loans to build critical infrastructure such as roads and hospitals. The three agencies that decide these ratings are all American, and entertain assumptions that weigh down their ratings. Research by the UN and AU puts the cost of this biased grading at \$75-billion in excess interest and loans not given.

South Africa

Zelenskyy to get state visit

The Brics country says peace talks can't happen without Ukraine taking an equal seat at the table.

After three years of keeping Ukraine at arm's length, South Africa now says it would like to welcome President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on a state visit.

The *Mail & Guardian* reported this week that the formal invitation was extended on 15 January. This followed meetings last year between Zelenskyy and South Africa's president, Cyril Ramaphosa, at the United Nations General Assembly and World Economic Forum.

The newspaper quoted Ramaphosa's spokesperson, Vincent Magwenya, saying: "The president wants that visit to happen as soon as possible."

Such a public embrace is out of keeping with South Africa's recent history. When Russia invaded Ukraine it issued a condemnation which was then quickly deleted. As an ally of Russia through Brics it seemed to be at pains to sit things out.

Now, Magwenya says Ramaphosa is "more than happy" to facilitate

negotiations between Ukraine and Russia. "No peace can hold unless all parties are involved and they have to be involved equally in the process. That is the only way in which you can resolve a conflict in a manner that is long-lasting."

That choice of wording came as the United States and Russia met in Saudi Arabia in an attempt to unilaterally decide on the future of Ukraine. By retreating from Ukraine and Europe, the US can afford tax breaks for billionaires, get gas contracts in Siberia, and focus its military on China.

The state visit also comes as US leaders have focused their megaphones on South Africa, spreading lies about a non-existent white Afrikaner genocide, while cutting all aid and threatening a trade war. ■



No rush: Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa.
Photo: Ukraine presidency/AFP

Rwanda

You can't dump me if I dump you first

A diplomatic row over the DRC war has escalated with Kigali suspending aid coming to it from Belgium.

Kiri Rupiah

Brussels has been unabashed in its criticism of Rwanda's support for the M23 fighters who seized two cities in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. In response, Rwanda has killed a \$99-million aid deal with Belgium.

Signed in January last year, the bilateral co-operation programme was supposed to run until 2029, with Belgium supporting Rwanda in agriculture, health, urbanisation and public finance management. But when M23 rebels seized the DRC border city of Goma, with Rwanda's support, Belgium spearheaded a push to get the European Union to sanction Kigali by suspending an even bigger deal: a €900-million agreement for Rwanda's mineral exports.

On Tuesday, the Rwandan foreign ministry accused Belgium – the former

colonial power of both Rwanda and the DRC, of having taken sides in the conflict and trying to politicise development. "Rwanda will not be bullied or blackmailed into compromising national security," read its statement suspending the bilateral deal.

On X, the deputy prime minister of Belgium, Maxime Prévot, implied the Rwandan government had jumped before it was pushed. "Following Rwanda's violation of the territorial integrity of the DRC, we were in the process of reviewing our co-operation with a view to taking decisive measures in response to this situation."

This week, the United States sanctioned Rwanda's Minister of Regional Co-operation James Kabarebe for being the co-ordinator of Rwanda's M23 support.

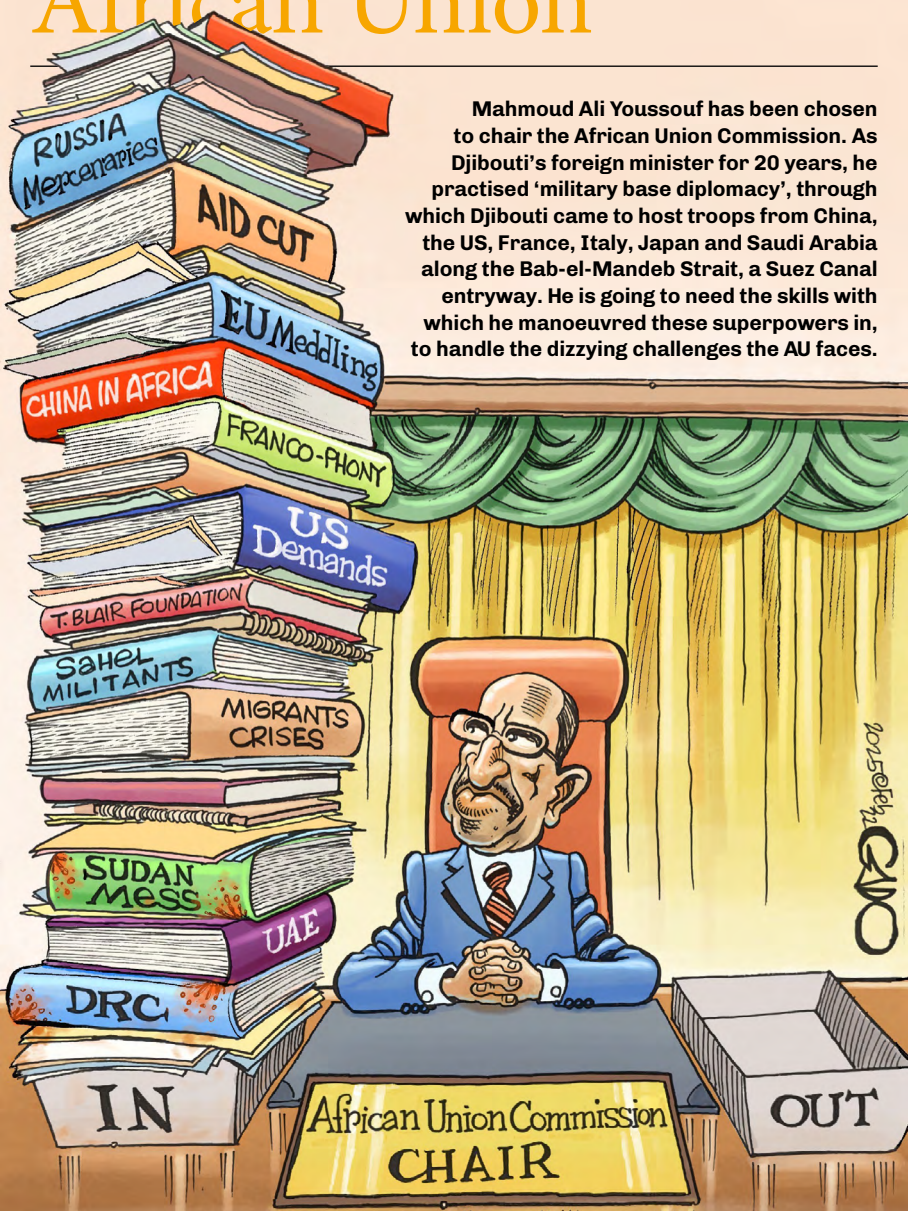
On the war in the DRC, Rwanda's government has gone from years of insistent denial that it supports the M23 rebels to President Paul Kagame telling *CNN* earlier this month he didn't know whether or not Rwanda troops were present there.

Tuesday's statement went a touch further, justifying Rwanda's hand in the situation by saying that all Kigali authorities want is a secure border.

Rwanda's border with the DRC is now entirely controlled by the M23 rebels, after their seizure of a second city: Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu. ■

African Union

Mahmoud Ali Youssouf has been chosen to chair the African Union Commission. As Djibouti's foreign minister for 20 years, he practised 'military base diplomacy', through which Djibouti came to host troops from China, the US, France, Italy, Japan and Saudi Arabia along the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, a Suez Canal entryway. He is going to need the skills with which he manoeuvred these superpowers in, to handle the dizzying challenges the AU faces.



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The Continent



Compound interest:
Sudan's Republican Palace
is under siege. Photo: Abd
Almohimen Sayed

A poisoned palace in a violent stalemate

Despite dramatic shifts in the frontlines,
neither side is anywhere near the 'total military
victory' wanted by Sudan's warring generals.

Lydia Namubiru

The symbolic centre of the Sudanese state – what's left of it, anyway – is the Republican Palace, a compound on the banks of the Blue Nile in Khartoum.

It is currently under siege. Units fighting for the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), commanded by Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan, are just a few blocks away, after advancing rapidly through parts of the

capital city. In the Khartoum context of the civil war, the palace's current occupants – the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a paramilitary group – are on the back foot.

All political transitions in Sudan – including the Mahdist Uprising, the first post-independence flag-raising, and multiple revolutions – run through the palace. “The palace is more than just a building,” said Omer Mohamed

Gorashi, a photographer and artist, in an interview with architecture magazine *KoozArch*. “It stands as both a testament to Sudanese resilience and an obstacle to fully overcoming colonial legacies.”

Most recently, it was the site of the massive demonstrations that forced longtime dictator Omar al-Bashir from power in 2019. As they marched, the protestors chanted: “Ila al-qasr hatta al-nasr!” To the palace until victory.

That revolution gave two generals increased authority: al-Burhan and Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, commonly known as Hemedti, who leads the RSF. Just two years later, the pair would join forces to launch a coup that removed the civilians from the transitional government.

Their unity was short-lived. Another two years later, the two generals had a falling out. War followed swiftly. Tens of thousands of people have been killed, and at least 12-million displaced. Half the population is facing hunger. The war has been characterised by massacres and war crimes on both sides; the RSF has been accused of committing ethnic cleansing and genocide in Darfur.

When the war broke out in April 2023, one of Hemedti’s first moves was to seize the Republican Palace. That control is now under serious threat. If al-Burhan’s forces do succeed in taking the palace, and the rest of the capital, it will be the biggest shift in the power balance of the war to date.

Momentum is with the SAF. The army has made startling gains in recent weeks, starting with the capture of Wad Madani in Al Jazira State. It has recaptured its headquarters in Khartoum, as well as the



Urban war: Sudanese army soldiers on patrol in the north of Khartoum.

Photo: Amaury Falt-Brown/AFP

Signal Corps base in Bahri.

Displaced civilians, desperate to return to their homes, are trailing in the army’s wake. There is no guarantee that those homes will still be intact: in the early days of the war, RSF troops occupied homes, especially in high-rise buildings, to use as sniper positions. Many were destroyed. Reports indicate that, as they retreat, the militia fighters are making off with domestic items like Starlink satellites and whatever else they can carry.

For other civilians, the changing power dynamics bring new dangers. After retaking Wad Medani, SAF fighters and allied militia executed at least 45

people and torched the villages of anyone suspected of having collaborated with the RSF. The evidence of said collaboration was often little more than ethnicity.

The RSF, meanwhile, appears to be unleashing wanton retaliatory violence as they retreat from Khartoum. On Tuesday, the Emergency Lawyers Network said that RSF fighters killed more than 200 people in Al-Kadaris and Al-Khalwat, in the White Nile state which lies just south of the capital.

Should the Republican Palace siege end in SAF's favour – the army says it will, and soon – General al-Burhan's claim to be the legitimate governor of Sudan will be dramatically more credible. Most countries continue to recognise al-Burhan as Sudan's official leader anyway,

even though he has – until recently – been stuck in Port Sudan, the wartime capital that is some 800km away from the office of the presidency.

This will not mean, however, that the end of the war is in sight. The RSF is still entrenched in Darfur and parts of North Kordofan, and Hemedti is attempting to build a coalition of civil society organisations with which he can create a parallel government.

Much may depend on the actions of foreign powers. One theory for the SAF's sudden military advances is that the supply of weapons to the RSF from networks in the United Arab Emirates slowed down following United States sanctions that were imposed early this year. ■



Nowhere to go

Sudan's civil war forced hundreds of thousands of people to leave their country. Some fled to Ethiopia – but their respite was short-lived.

Mukanzi Musanga

Earlier this month, armed men attacked the Aftit refugee camp in Ethiopia's Amhara region. "One person was shot in the leg and the other one took a bullet to the back which exited through his belly," a camp resident told *The Continent*.

The gunmen stole more than 100 mobile phones. The injured people did not receive immediate medical care, because there were no ambulances nearby. The roads to and from the camp are considered unsafe.

This is merely the latest in a litany of attacks against this community of refugees, who fled the civil war in Sudan hoping to find refuge in Ethiopia. Instead, they have experienced repeated incidents of murder, sexual assault, abduction, theft and natural disaster. Another resident predicted more attacks were coming.

When Sudan's war broke out in 2023, about 12,500 Sudanese people crossed into Ethiopia. Initially, they were sheltered in the Awlala and Kumer refugee camps. But Ethiopia was experiencing its own conflict: Amhara militias, known as the Fano, had turned against their former government allies. As the fighting intensified, refugees became easy targets.



Adrift: Sudanese refugees have been sent from pillar to post-apocalypse.

Photo: Michele Spatari/AFP

Conditions in the camps became so dangerous that the refugees fled again, this time into a nearby forest. They were subsequently relocated by the United Nations Refugee Agency to the new site in Aftit – where things are scarcely better.

"I'm afraid for my children and my wife," said Ibrahim Yousif. He has already lost two daughters, swept away by flooding in Awlala in September 2023.

The refugee agency said it continued "to advocate with authorities for heightened support, including the deployment of security personnel in and around" the refugee camps – not only to protect the people but also to facilitate the safe delivery of essential services by international aid agencies. ■

The Museum of Stolen History

Things can be taken. Their stories must still be told.

Curated by Shola Lawal | Art direction by Wynona Mutisi



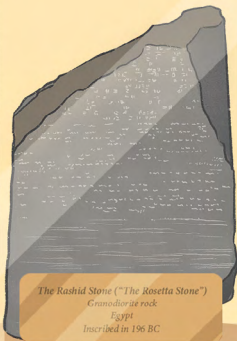
Ngwi Ndem ("The Bangwa Queen")
Sculpture in wood
Cameroon
Circa late 1800s



Golden Crown
Solid gold, alloyed with silver and copper
Ethiopia
Circa 1740s



Okakor
Sculpture in bronze
Nigeria
Date of creation unknown



The Rosetta Stone ("The Rosetta Stone")
Granodiorite rock
Egypt
Inscribed in 196 BC



Lions of Tsavo
Taxidermy specimens
Kenya
Shot and killed in 1898



Photo: Kola Sulaimon/AFP

Okukor

The rooster stood for over 114 years in the dining hall of Jesus College, part of Cambridge University, whose official crest is also a cockerel. *Okukor* was returned to Nigeria in 2021, after students at the college campaigned for its removal.

The bronze sculpture was among thousands of artefacts Britain plundered from the ancient Benin Kingdom in 1897. Officially, 2,500 items were stolen. Historians suggest the number was higher.

Benin Kingdom, in present-day Edo State, was known for its opulence, engineering, and legendary artistry. Benin carvers used bas-relief style to create solemn, life-sized head and bust sculptures of obas (traditional rulers) and members of the royal court; or plaques depicting historical events in brass, ivory, terracotta, and wood. The royal palace was adorned with many such pieces, but the sculptures were also important for rituals. *Okukor*

is believed to pay homage to the Iyoba or queen mother, referred to as “the cockerel that crows at the head of the harem”.

Benin’s advancement is credited to Oba Ewuare the Great (1440-1473), who oversaw the development of an ordered city of roads and gates, and ruled from Lagos to the Niger. Perhaps the greatest of Ewuare’s feats was the massive wall built around Benin to deter invaders. Historians think it stretched over 10,000km, with nine gates that opened and shut daily.

Benin’s wealth came from trade, including the horrifying sale of people as chattel. In exchange for weapons and brass ingots from Portuguese traders, Benin sold slaves, artwork, pepper, and ivory.

By the late 19th century, following the abolition of slavery, kingdoms surrounding Benin had been annexed by Britain. Still, Oba Ovonramwen Nogbaisi enjoyed sovereignty and monopoly over palm oil and rubber trade in the region, and taxed traders passing through – including the British. That greatly annoyed London.

James Robert Phillips, a British consular officer, decided to petition the oba himself in January 1897. The oba said he would not be available because of important annual rituals that forbade entertaining guests. However, Phillips’s entourage from the Oil Rivers protectorate (now the Niger Delta) still advanced. It included a number of Britons and

hundreds of local porters. Suspicious, the oba’s generals unilaterally ordered an ambush that killed nearly every member of the entourage, including Phillips. Only two colonial officers survived the attack.

In retaliation, a 1,200-strong British force invaded Benin with orders to execute the oba. Benin’s army was no match for the invading force, which came by land and sea with cannons.

Within days, the British reached the palace – but Oba Ovonramwen had escaped. The invaders looted the palace before razing it. The oba was later captured and exiled to Calabar with two of his 80 wives. The Kingdom of Benin was put fully under British control.

The plundered bronzes, meanwhile, were carted to London where they were given to officers or auctioned. Many made their way to museums in Britain and Germany. *Okukor* was donated to Jesus College in 1905 by a soldier who was part of the Benin expedition, whose son attended the school.

Following *Okukor*’s return to the Edo capital, Benin City, another 20 bronzes were returned by Germany in 2022.

Every object taken away represented an ancestor in captivity, Theophilus Umogbai, director of Benin City National Museum, told the *Associated Press* at the time. It was as though the people had been vandalised, he said, adding that their return now will help fill many gaps.

Illustration note, by Nigerian artist Daniel Oluwale: *Generations of queens have come and gone without the voice of Okukor, caged in glass and deprived of purpose, to greet them. Of what use is an indoor cockerel, who cannot tell day or night? Freed from that place at last and set on a familiar roost alongside his brethren and recognisable faces, he faced the sun once more. Although Okukor did not crow, his voice was felt across the land, celebrating a new dawn.*



Illustration: Daniel Oluwale

Daniel Oluwale
25

Poverty is rising, but the pain is not evenly distributed

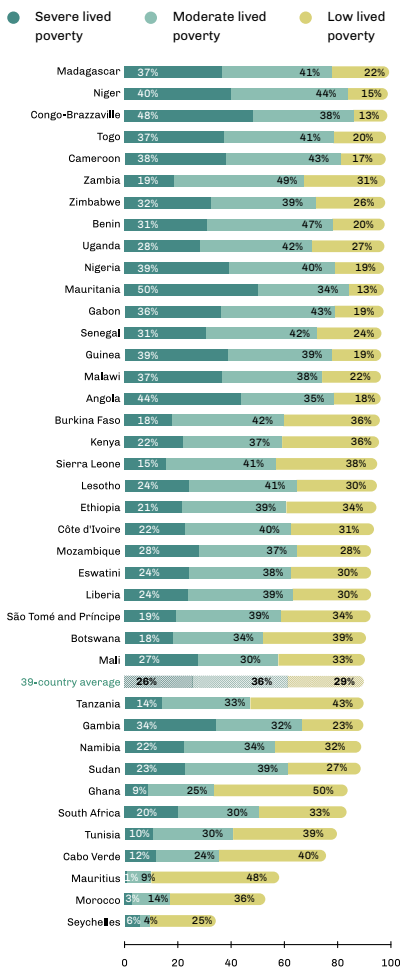
As we reported last week, growing numbers of Africans are struggling to meet their basic needs for food, clean water, medical care, cooking fuel, and a cash income. On average, lived poverty is at its worst level in a quarter-century of Afrobarometer surveys.

But average rates mask great variation. Fewer than two in 10 Seychellois (13%), Mauritians (16%), and Moroccans (18%) experienced a food shortage at least once in the past year, compared to over four-fifths of Angolans (81%), Mauritians (82%), Nigerians (84%), Nigeriens (86%), and Brazzaville-Congolese (87%).

In the past decade, severe deprivation (frequent or constant shortages of basic necessities) has fallen in Liberia, Burkina Faso, Togo, Morocco and Gabon, but risen sharply in Nigeria, Namibia, Mali, Zimbabwe, and South Africa.

Countries differ in the intensity of their people's lived poverty. In both South Africa and Ghana, about eight in 10 people experienced at least some shortage. But severe lived poverty was twice as common in South Africa (20% vs. 9%), while Ghanaians were more likely to report low lived poverty (50% vs 33%). ■

Levels of lived poverty | 39 African countries | 2021/23



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 to 2,400 people in each country yield results with a margin of error of +/- two to three percentage points.



Selling tomatoes in a war zone

The conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo is getting worse. But small-scale traders in Goma and Gisenyi – most of whom are women – keep going to work.

All Photos: Moses Sawasawa/*The Continent*

Prosper Heri Ngorora in Goma

On the northern shore of Lake Kivu, there are two towns right next to each other. They are divided by an international border. To the west is Goma, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. To the east is Gisenyi, in Rwanda.

Despite their different governments, the economies of these towns are closely intertwined – so much so that any change or disruption at the border can have an immediate impact on the small-scale traders, mostly women, that cross it every day. This year, there has been a lot of disruption.

Last month, a Congolese militia group known as M23 seized control of Goma, reportedly with military support from Rwanda. The militia has installed its own government in Goma and surrounding

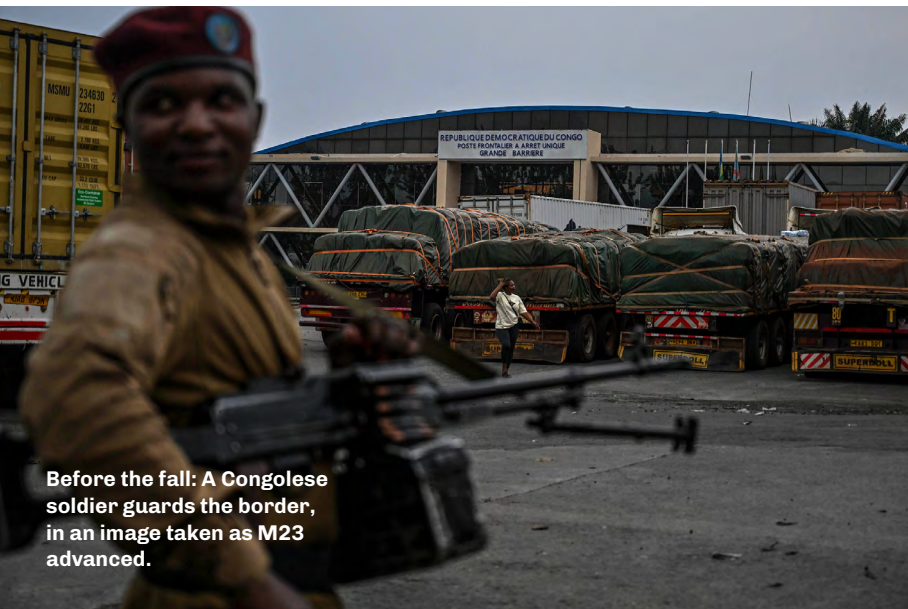
areas, and made new rules for how and when the border can be crossed.

The most significant of these is that the Congolese side of the border will now be open from 6am to 10pm.

This is a big change: in 2022, after an escalation in diplomatic tensions, Congolese authorities ordered that all borders with Rwanda should close at 3pm. This made it very hard for cross-border traders to get home after a full day of work.

The militia has installed its own government in Goma and surrounding areas, and made new rules for how and when the border can be crossed.

Another change is that traders will no longer need to present a special card from the Communauté économique des pays



Before the fall: A Congolese soldier guards the border, in an image taken as M23 advanced.

All in the same boat:
Life is slowly returning
to Goma after several
days of fighting



des Grands-lacs, a regional body, in order to be allowed to cross the frontier. This card costs \$10 a year – too expensive for many small-scale traders. Now, traders can move between the two countries on the strength of their identity documents alone.

In the immediate aftermath of M23's arrival in the city, trade ground to a halt as people stayed at home. Brigitte Kisuba, the president of a trade association that represents small-scale traders and co-operatives, said that at least two women members of her platform were killed in the fighting. Others had their goods looted.

But trade is picking up, Kisuba says, estimating that between 10,000 and 30,000 people cross between Goma and Gisenyi every day. Rwandan authorities put the figure at 30,000. These numbers are way up from the average of around 5,000 people per day before the M23 takeover.

Joyce Birindwa crosses the border most days. She sells tomatoes for a living.



Empty pockets: Small-scale market traders in Goma are struggling to find customers who can pay in cash.

She lives in Goma, buys her tomatoes in Gisenyi, and brings them back over the border to sell. Now she can move back and forth with greater freedom.

This does not mean that business is

good, however. Quite the opposite.

“Many of my tomatoes are rotting these days and we’re throwing them in the garbage can. It’s a loss of income for me. The few customers who buy them can’t understand the reality of the prices,” she says, sitting next to her tomato basin in Birere, 100m from the Petite Barrière border post.

The main problem is cash: on the Goma side, there isn’t any. “We don’t have any cash because all the banks are closed,” says a senior member of the North Kivu foreign exchange dealers’ association, speaking on condition of anonymity. According to this industry leader, most of the money circulating in Goma is what was in people’s hands when M23 came into the city.

On 12 February, the M23-appointed governor of North Kivu province met with the heads of banks and other financial

institutions in Goma to discuss the cash crisis. They told him that everything was in Kinshasa’s hands – they could only resume business once the Central Bank of Congo had given the go-ahead.



Stepping out: An M23 fighter on patrol





Struggles continue: Aimérence Nyamigamwe, 20, is one of the women traders who play a key role in the economy of Goma, where men have little hope of employment.

Given the tensions between M23 and the Congolese government, that is unlikely to happen any time soon.

“Many women small-scale cross-border traders had money in different

banks. They are finding it difficult to relaunch their trade activities, as a lot of their money is in the bank,” says Kisuba.

The lack of cash is having immediate consequences for Louise Ishimwe and



her family, who live in Gisenyi. She brings vegetables to sell in Goma, but no one has any money to buy them.

“We bring products here, but we don’t earn anything,” she says. “I don’t know why there isn’t any no money in the Goma market. We’re living badly because of this

lack of money. I can’t send my children to school because of how things are now.”

Small-scale women traders have always played a vital role in the local cross-border economy. But in the current political and economic instability, when many men are facing unemployment, these working women hold the key to the city’s economic recovery.

According to Dieumerci Munguiko, a Goma-based economic analyst: “Many women are carrying several burdens in their families these days. They easily enter Rwanda to fend for themselves. Unfortunately, the current economic situation in Goma is challenging them.” ■

‘Borderlands’ is a new series by The Continent, reporting from some of Africa’s most interesting border crossings. The series is part of the African Union’s Move Africa project, supported by GIZ



Film Review

Wilfred Okiche

Downward spiral of the vicious circle

Africa's sauciest reality show is losing its spice.

There remains something compulsively fascinating about *Young, Famous & African*, Netflix's reality television show about wealthy, badly behaved B-list celebrities hanging out in Johannesburg. But the novelty is wearing off.

Three seasons in, it is clear that these guys are more contractually obligated players than friends. The artifice is painfully obvious. They only hang out for tea or over-the-top dinner parties where everyone is curiously dressed to the max. And in the off-season, some of the drama from the show spilled over to social media.

But when the show is at its most genuine – which is any time troubled Nigerian actress Annie Idibia and her celebrity hubby appear onscreen – it can speak volumes about the wreckage that fame, infidelity and familial dysfunction can leave on a person.

Other African stars returning for this uneven third season include Ugandan socialite Zari “The Boss Lady” Hassan,



Young, Famous & African. Netflix © 2024

who has a taste for bitchery and boy toys, and Zimbabwean-South African rapper Nadia Nakai, whose music career may or may not be struggling depending on who is observing. These ladies provide some of the show's more truthful moments.

Tanzanian pop star Diamond Platnumz is also back, but his entire personality is stuck in playboy mode. His ridiculous entanglement subplot with Ghanaian rapper Fantana has been stale since last season, yet still they double down on it.

Apart from great gowns and splashy entrances, it is increasingly hard to justify what Nigerian celebrity stylist Swanky Jerry brings to the table.

The presence of actress Khanyi Mbau, a sort of anchor for the previous two seasons, has been scaled back considerably. New players include Nollywood sweetheart Ini Edo and South African influencer Kefilwe Mabote, both struggling to find their rhythm.

Young, Famous & African still brings the low-stakes drama. This in itself might be worth the price of admission. But three seasons in, it begins to feel like everyone – and everything – is just moving around in circles. Except for Annie Idibia. That woman needs help – pronto! ■

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

"Everybody knows Akabanga is the best sauce of the Nile."



- 1_** Juba and Khartoum are the capital cities of which two countries?
- 2_** "AfDB" refers to which continental financial institution?
- 3_** The US is proposing to resettle Gazans in which African country?
- 4_** 'Les Lions de la Teranga' is the nickname of which country's men's football team?
- 5_** True or false: Chichewa is Malawi's official language.
- 6_** Source Du Nil (pictured) is the southernmost source of the Nile. Which country is it in?
- 7_** Which country is the new AU Commission chairperson from?
- 8_** Is Ethiopia a coastal or landlocked country?
- 9_** Which country is four-time African Women Footballer of the Year Perpetua Nkwocha from?
- 10_** In which country was K'naan, famous for his 2009 hit *Wavin' Flag*, born?

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THE BIG PICTURE

Oar lords: Every year, Yauri in Nigeria's Kebbi State holds a regatta rooted in combat – 200 years ago, Gungu warriors with sharp paddles would canoe upriver, fighting the hippos destroying their farms.

Photo: Toyin Adedokun/AFP



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