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NEW AGENDA

SOUTH AFRICAN JOURNAL OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC POLICY

Are we getting the balance right?

Inside:
Celebrating IFAA's Living Rights Festival
Lessons from Stilfontein crisis
Extractivism in Africa

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A beach in Zanzibar.
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-- by Martin Nicol

The contradictions of green extractivism

Uneasy contradictions in development policy in Africa were laid bare in February 2025 by a disastrous accident at a copper mine in Zambia. An unmonitored and badly constructed tailings dam failed, releasing some 50 million litres of toxic mine sludge to pollute the Kafue River. Fish died, livestock were poisoned, farmers' crops were destroyed and people along the river, the longest in Zambia, lost their water supply. As the poisoned water flowed downstream, engineers had to cut off water to Zambia's second biggest city Kitwe, 30km from the mine with a population of over 600,000. By the date of publication, the scale of the catastrophe was still to be measured.

Zambia is promoting its mining industry as champion of green energy and an icon for the transition away from fossil fuels. In 2024, its government launched the *National Three Million Tonnes Copper Production Strategy by 2031* which aims to more than treble copper output over five years. Copper is a critical component in renewable energy systems as well as in energy-saving electronic technology. Yet it was a copper mine that caused the environmental disaster in the Kafue River.

Africa complains that its people see few benefits from its natural wealth, yet governments go out of their way to boost extractivism. They offer incentives and special treatment to international investors in mining, while failing to invest themselves in responsible regulation. The Zambia Environmental Management Agency (ZEMA) is notoriously under-capacitated and under-funded. ZEMA is said to have approved the design of the failed tailings dam. They don't monitor and they don't enforce the law.

The Chambishi mine was started in 1960, by British investors led by Sir Ronald ("Mr Copper") Prain of Roan Selection Trust. Then it was nationalised. The current operators happen to be Chinese (who have apologised for the accident). This disaster is on them. But tailings dam pollution is an inevitable consequence of mining and its transformative effects on the environment. A total of 170 major tailings dam failures have been counted worldwide since 1960 (WISE Uranium Project, 2025).

The logic of extractivism, which is supported by most governing elites in Africa, is based on profit, not sustainable and equitable development. In March 2025, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) President Felix Tshisekedi was said to have offered the United States and Europe special access to the country's vast mineral resources if they assist in breaking the Rwanda-supported M23 rebels who have taken control of the area around Lake Kivu in the east.

Mark Volmink's article on extractivism in this issue of *New Agenda* provides an analysis of why "rich" African countries needing to reach development goals are so often unable to access their natural resource wealth themselves.

The regular Africa Diary column salutes the new leadership of the African Union (AU), the chairperson and executive members elected at the AU Summit in February 2025. One of their many stretch goals is to pilot African initiatives towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), due for achievement by 2030. We feature two contributions on the SDGs – with two very different perspectives. Mulugeta Dinbabo and Perfect Mazani take the SDGs at face value and describe the framework that is in place to monitor African progress on the ambitious SDGs. Crain Soudien, on the other hand, highlights aspects of northern bias and racism in the mechanisms of the SDGs.

The progress assessment carried out by the United Nations in 2024 reveals that the world is severely off track to realize the 2030 SDG Agenda. Among the detailed targets that were assessable (given the data available), only 17% display progress sufficient for achievement by 2030. "Nearly half (48 per cent) exhibit moderate to severe deviations from the desired trajectory, with 30 per cent showing marginal progress and 18 per cent moderate progress. Alarmingly, 18 per cent indicate stagnation and 17 per cent regression below the 2015 baseline levels"(DESA, 2024:4). The comprehensive assessment underscores the urgent need for intensified efforts to put the SDGs on course.

The fourth Ben Turok Memorial Lecture was delivered by human rights and climate justice activist Dr Kumi Naidoo, on 9 December, the anniversary of Turok's death. Naidoo's call was to mobilise and organise at the grassroots level. He emphasised that people have far more agency than they are credited with, despite the legacies of colonialism, slavery, imperialism and now climate change. "We have power as enforcers of transparency and accountability, and as shapers of our own destiny," he said.

Countries and health programmes all over the world were sent reeling after the United States government suddenly cut its aid funding commitments. The cut came without warning and was immediate - allowing no time for partner countries and organisations to manage the decision. But then the UK government announced it would cut its own foreign aid spending by 40% – and the French and others have indicated they will follow. Optimists have said this is actually a wake-up call for Africa and a great opportunity for the continent to assert its independence. Foreign aid has rarely been associated with economic development and it has distorted both politics and policy. The new president of Ghana, John Mahama, said, "It sends a signal to Africa that the time has come for us to be more self-reliant." Hardship and death will be the immediate consequence of the cuts in aid. In the longer term, Africa has worthy ambitions to integrate its markets, expand inter-continental trade and move beyond extractivism.

A Living Rights Festival was hosted by the Institute for African Alternatives in Cape Town in October-December 2024. This is featured in a collection of articles, reflections and images in this edition of *New Agenda* that cover art and performance as well as politics. We thank the poets and artists for their work and acknowledge the many cultural workers and academics who shared their thoughts and creations at the Festival.

Revised editorial policy and new policy on Artificial Intelligence

In January 2025, *New Agenda* revised its editorial policies following guidelines suggested by colleagues at Electronic Information for Libraries (EIFL). This has been posted on the OJS platform managed by our partners at the University of the Western Cape. From issue 97, the journal will move away from our long-standing use of the generic Harvard style of referencing. Instead we will implement the APA7, an internationally respected standard which is regularly amended to keep pace with the best ways of allowing readers to locate the wide variety of resources cited by authors – from videos and podcasts to disappearing messages and the latest AI assistant, Claude.

Along with other publications, *New Agenda*, has had to confront many problems presented by authors' use of AI in the material they submit. This has been particularly obvious in the very large number of references attached to some submissions. The increased density of referencing, encouraged by the ability of AI to winkle out the most obscure scholarship, requires more resources – editorial attention and production time. If the so-called "efficiencies" in research become as high as AI enthusiasts envision, the volume of references will increase further. In a culture characterised by publication pressure, this means quality peer reviews will take more time.

It seems a race to the bottom. A ban would not be feasible, as markers of AI are often impossible to detect, so in the context of enthusiastic and uncritical use of AI, we have crafted a new policy to ensure maximum transparency by requiring authors to disclose if and how they have used AI. This policy will be in place from Issue 97 – and readers can see it on New Agenda's page on UWC's e-publications website in the section on Journal Policies entitled "Artificial Intelligence (AI) – assisted technology".

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A critical engagement

Sustainable development goals and the problem of 'race'

special feature

– By **Crain Soudien**

This article looks critically at the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and how they deal with their fundamental objective – the inclusion of all people. CRAIN SOUDIEN argues that dominant development discourses have struggled to deal with the realities and effects of exclusion and marginalisation as they are manifested in ongoing processes of racialisation, gender discrimination and class formation.

Introduction

How do we conceptualise and develop a global development agenda that is attentive to the needs, requirements and entitlements of all the world's people? In this contribution I problematise dominant approaches to development and the ways in which these approaches, firstly, conceptualise ideas about the 'universal' and, secondly, erase, silence and marginalise particular groups of people. With this backdrop, I focus on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and particularly their conceptualisation. Of particular interest is how the design of the SDGs deal with the fundamental objective underpinning this global intervention – that of inclusion. The argument I will make is that dominant development discourses, including the SDG project, have struggled to deal with the realities and effects of exclusion and marginalisation as they take expression and are manifested in processes of racialisation, gender discrimination and class formation.

This article unfolds in five movements. First it considers ideas of development and how these ideas deal with the questions of inclusion, 'progress' and equality, and well-being. It then works with the SDGs in terms of their substance and their objectives. Thirdly, a brief examination is undertaken of the broad architecture of the SDGs in relation to issues of racial inequality. A fourth section examines how racial inequality takes expression in SDGs 3 and 4, Health and Education. A final section considers the question of alternative development pathways.

The argument I will make is that dominant development discourses, including the SDG project, essentially conceptualise ideas such as progress in narrow European ways. They struggle to accommodate and make space for other sensibilities or other ways of making a life. They tell us that there is no alternative.

Ideologies of development

It is important to begin this discussion by insisting that there are alternatives. We can challenge dominant ideas of 'development'. We can, firstly and simply, because we have no option. As the world hurtles towards unprecedented levels of global warming, imperilling the very fabric of life, we have to be consciously, resolutely and practically doing everything we can, in the first instance, to mitigate the worst effects of what is to befall us, and, secondly, to begin the radical process of looking anew at our fundamental presumptions of what the 'good life' is (see Ripple, *et al*., 2024; and Alenda-Demoutiez, 2022). Facilitating, fortunately, our path towards rethinking what wellbeing means, we have, in the last 30 years or so, moved on from strait-jacketed economism, the conceit that economic questions constitute the essence of life, and ideas of economic growth. We now, into the 21st century, influenced by scholars such as Amartya Sen (1999) and, more recently, by the decolonial movement, have a broader, wider and deeper understanding of development (see Kumi, Maes & Fomunjong, 2022). Development is not simply an economic manifestation. It is also cultural, psychological and social. It involves the full amplitude of the complex relations that exist between humans, between humans and *all* the forms of life which make up our planetary ecology.

While the UN uses the concept of the Human Development Index, which includes questions of life expectancy, levels of education, it is essentially the standard of living indicator which has come to determine whether a country is developed or not (see United Nations, 2024). This standard of living indicator indicates what a country's annual per capita income is. 'Developed' countries are countries where the annual income per capita or gross domestic product (GDP) exceeds US$12,000 (Aggarwal, 2023).[1] A low-income country is where the income per capita or GDP is US$1,145 or less. In 1999 the World Bank defined poverty as the situation where people were earning less than $2 per day and extreme poverty as an income of $1 a day (see Haughton & Khandker, 2009). In terms of this definition about half of the world's population then was poor – three billion people – and another quarter extremely poor, underdeveloped. Progress is based on the pace of income growth per head of the population. The belief was that economic growth provided the basis to solve all challenges. We believed this. We believed that if we did not place ourselves on a path towards economic growth we would not be able to deal with the challenges of health, education, environment and the improvement of people's living standards.

It is important, before we move on, to be clear-eyed about how systematically economic growth thinking has seized control of not only financial policymaking but has come to determine development thinking almost everywhere. The dominant version of this thinking is evident in neo-classical economics - the idea of freeing up the market to give individuals the freedom to compete with each other. It takes form now in neoliberalism (see Harvey, 2003). But the idea of economic growth as the central objective of development is also there in what we think of as socialist planning (see, *inter alia*, Fernandes, 2022). The objective of socialist planning is to secure control of production processes to avoid the irrationality of the free market. It requires, however, planned growth.

To emphasise how much this 'growth' sensibility dominates our discourse, it is important to understand how the development discussion was managed in the circles in which we found ourselves, not least of all in the academy (see Fioramonti, 2017). The discussion has effectively come to pivot on the question of how parts of the world came to be 'developed' and others 'under-developed'. Out of this emerged a new field of enquiry, that of 'Development Studies'.

We learnt a lot out of this theory-making. We came to a better understanding of the nature of global capitalism and of globalisation and imperialism. We came to see, in the late 20th century, how globalisation took shape in extreme forms of financialisation and how a few corporate oligopolies were effectively determining the direction of economies everywhere (see Gallagher, 2005).

Now, of course, one should not in a reverse fundamentalism throw out economic ideas of development. In complex societies, now mass-based societies, one has to be thinking about production and how one produces for the fulfilment of the needs of everybody. But we are faced with quite important issues here. They are issues about whose idea of needs and wants are to be taken into consideration and how they are to be fulfilled; issues about how we settle and resolve disputes about whose interests and needs are to be taken into consideration, about how we define wellbeing, and, critically, how we think of development in relation to the capacity of the planet.

With respect to the question of whose needs and how we deal with the needs of different people, the work of Amartya Sen is critical. Sen, it must be said, is not beyond our criticism, but he kicks off his famous book, *Development as Freedom,* with an explanation which quite categorically upends the entire 'Development Studies' legacy we have inherited. "Development can be seen", he says in the very first line of his book, "as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy" (Sen, 1999: 3). He continues: "Focusing on human freedoms contrasts with narrower views of development, such as identifying development with the growth of gross national product, or with the rise in personal incomes, or with industrialisation, or with technological advance, or with social modernization" (Sen, 1999: 3). He also makes clear that standard economic factors can substantially contribute to expanding human freedom, but that the lack of substantive freedoms "robs people of the freedom to satisfy hunger ... or for the maintenance of local peace and order ... the freedom to participate in the social, political and economic life of the community" (Sen, 1999: 4).

Dominant approaches to development, focusing on production and consumption, lead to the dangers of over-production and over-consumption with extreme negative effects for the ecology. They promote personal cultures of excess and superficiality, and structural effects such as extreme inequality and unmanageable debt. They have driven the planet to the point of unsustainable collapse. In the wake of this, exclusion and marginalisation have been exacerbated. Poor people everywhere are being pushed to the edges of the survival cycle.

What we are dealing with, it is important to understand, is the larger and long-term project of modernity. The literature around this, especially as it pertains to ideas of progress, is large (see, for example, Portes, 1973; Jackson, 2009; Heinberg, 2011; Dietz & O'Neill, 2013; Rifkin, 2014). Critical about modernity, now a 500-year-old project, is that it brought to the world ideas of human progress and development. We are now, well into the 21st century, wholly under its supervision. The benefits it has brought to the world are abundant. We are living longer. Our states of health have somewhat improved (Broom, 2022). More people can read and write than at any other time in our history. The technological capacity we have at our disposal is extraordinary. But we wish to stand in clear resistance to its presumption that it does *all* that we would wish our knowledge repertoires to make possible for us. It is a European idea. It is filled with European conceit - the idea that we can bend all of nature, all that we deem to be of inferior status to the rationality of European logic. The idea took full flight with the renaissance and the industrial revolution and came to its climax with the confluence of the industrial revolution and colonialism. Based on extractivism, taking from the planet whatever we like, oppression of working-classes everywhere and the marginalisation and discrimination of people not deemed to be white, it constructed and constituted the idea of humanness, and its perfectability, in narrow European middle-classedness. Everything else was suspect, backward.

The problem now is that the world, geopolitically, is fighting over how to consummate this 500-year project. The sum total of what we have before us is complete paradox. While the wellbeing of large proportions of humanity has improved, we are now, amongst ourselves, riven with unacceptable disparity, inequality and discrimination. The gap between the rich and the poor in our contemporary times has grown year on year. In 2020 the world's 2,153 billionaires, based, largely, in what we call the 'developed North', had acquired more wealth than 4.6 billion of the world's population put together (Oxfam, 2020).

The Sustainable Development Goals

The SDGs are at the heart of the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015). This agenda, which was adopted by all member states in 2015, aims to provide a "shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future" (United Nations, 2020). It is, ostensibly, the world's response to its development contradictions. It will guide development investment in the coming decade (Griggs *et al*., 2013; Hák *et al*., 2016).

The agenda consists of 17 goals. These are subdivided into 169 targets and 232 indicators. Across their 17 goals is the objective of fulfilling human rights, achieving equality and non-discrimination - of "leaving no one behind." While the ambition and well-meaning intent of the SDGs are acknowledged there are substantial criticisms. Defenders claim that the goals reflect the complexity of development, detractors argue that the breadth is at odds with the need to prioritise (*The Economist,* 2015). The

mainstream journal, *The Economist,* describes the SDGs as so broad and sprawling as to, "… amount to a betrayal of the world's poorest people."

A more radical view argues that the SDGs' universalist claims are overstated and that they effectively reproduce the dominant discourse of 'development' and thus continue to legitimise the capitalist world order. They fail to work with the criticism that neo-liberalism is central to global poverty. Critics (see *inter alia,* Swain, 2017; Action Education, 2015) question whether they will protect and fulfil human rights for all and end racial, gender and other forms of discrimination prohibited by international law. Specifically, as an outline for a Society, Politics and Law course at the Open University (n.d) emphasises, the following issues arise:

Despite the 2030 Agenda's promising rhetoric, it largely fails to fulfil its pledge to 'leave no one behind' when it comes to the principles of racial equality and non-discrimination ....

- Power: The SDGs do not go far enough in challenging the status quo. They protect existing political and economic interests that contribute to the very global issues, such as environmental degradation, racism, sexism and inequality, the goals are supposed to address.
- Agency: Many people are excluded by uneven processes of development that are directed by and benefit the most powerful.
- Scale: Even though the SDGs are global in scale, implementation is dependent on national governments and governments can select which SDGs they wish to pursue.
- History: The SDGs are premised on the continuing pursuit of economic growth, which has produced stark social inequalities and damaged the environment.
- They devalue local knowledge and schemes of thought. This is where decolonisation is really important.

In what follows, we focus on the question of racism raised in this Open University course.

Racial inequality

Global racism is a particular point of issue with respect to the politics of the SDGs. E. Tendayi Achiume, United Nations Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance makes the following observation:

> *Despite the 2030 Agenda's promising rhetoric, it largely fails to fulfil its pledge to 'leave no one behind' when it comes to the principles of racial equality and non-discrimination .... Racial justice commitments are largely absent from the operationalisation of the SDGs ... The persistent lack of resources, failure to collect disaggregated data and dearth of political willpower still limit progress toward racial justice in virtually all national and international contexts. (United Nations, 2022)*

In her report, the Special Rapporteur attributed the entrenched challenges of promoting racial justice and racial equality through development initiatives to the racialised origins of the modern international development framework. She said that "the (2030 Agenda) is incapable of fundamentally disrupting the dynamic of racially discriminatory underdevelopment embedded in the international economic order" (Achiume, 2022: 1). Achiume said a vast body of research had demonstrated that the international economic, development and financial order perpetuated human rights harms and economic inequality, dismantling social safety nets in the global South and increasing dependency of formerly colonised peoples: "If anything, the development framework has contributed significantly to entrenching and advancing racialized underdevelopment" (Achiume, 2022: 9). Her report emphasised the urgent need for decolonising global economic, legal and political systems – a goal which could only be achieved by disrupting international hierarchies and moving beyond Euro-centric visions, models and means of economic development.

Winkler and Satterthwaite (2017) also argue that inequalities based on race, ethnicity and similar factors do not receive the same attention as gender equality in the SDGs and in the targets and the global indicators developed by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group (IAEG-SDGS) approved by the UN General Assembly to monitor progress on implementing the SDGs. While

Winkler and Satterthwaite (2017) support the explicit gender focus in the SDGs, they find the exclusion of many marginalised categories of people deeply troubling.

In many respects and despite global initiatives, talking about race in development, it could be argued, is a taboo subject (White, 2002). Reading the global literature critically, race acts as an absent presence in development discourses. It is often absent, for example, as a category of analysis in the institutional lives of development organisations and programmes. White (2002: 408) describes the silence surrounding race as a "determining silence that both masks and marks its centrality to the development project" (Walker *et al.*, 2023: 2). Through seeing itself as being outside of the politics of race and adopting a 'colourblind' stance (e.g., see Gillborn, 2019, for a discussion of colourblind ideologies), a conclusion which is hard to avoid is that international development functions as a continuation of the European colonial project, propagating a Western imaginary of the world order and of the accumulation of capital.

In the next section I work with two critical goals, those of health and education, SDGs 3 and 4, to see how inclusion is managed.

SDG 3 - Health and inequality

The short description of SDG 3 is "Good health and well-being. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages" (United Nations, 2015: 14). It consists of 13 targets.

The final decisions on SDG 3, the "Health SDG", occurred after intense, multi-cornered contestation among UN member states, the for-profit sector, civil society and private foundations. The groupings did not represent a single interest. There were many differences and schisms among them. In the end the differences of ideology and interest were, some say, massaged, and the multiple Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on health were brought together under the single umbrella of SDG 3. But the schisms were deep and essentially papered over.

The most important challenge in realising the aims of SDG 3 is that of funding. The funding for health, national and global, has been restricted ever since the 1980s - the early years of the neoliberal policy regime, with its cuts in national health budgets, its push towards privatisation and liberalisation of regulatory structures.[2] Within this racism is a particularly acute problem. Paradies *et al*. (2015) make the comment that racism influences health across the life span beginning in childhood. A large meta-analysis of people identifying as minoritised racial groups around the world demonstrated a negative relationship between racism and health in countries such as the Netherlands, Finland, Israel, Norway, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Spain, Portugal, New Zealand and Barbados. Racism erodes health through a myriad of pathways, including a heightened stress-response, with adverse consequences for the cardiovascular, inflammatory and immune systems (Harrell *et al.*, 2011).

In the United States and Latin America, minoritised and racialised groups (people classified as Black, Native American and Indigenous) are more likely to get ill earlier in life, have faster disease progression and lower survival rates (Williams *et al.*, 2019). These disparities are particularly evident for stress-related illnesses such as heart disease and stroke (American Psychological Association Working Group on Stress and Health Disparities, 2017).

Research on the short- and long-term psychological effects of experiencing racial discrimination in childhood in the United States and South Africa has found that children who experience racial discrimination develop perceptions of threat, fear, victimisation, low self-efficacy and self-esteem, and hopelessness.

... there is the need to think again about the relevance, foundations and the implementation of the SDGs ... questioning their claims to be speaking for the world.

Target 3.8 seeks to achieve universal health care but pays no attention to processes such as racism and racialisation (United Nations, 2015: 16). It says relatively little about the pathways by which and through which Universal Health Care (UHC) will be provided to people. Yet, there is growing concern that those pathways may be critical to determining whether those responsible for implementing the UHC approach, nationally and globally, limit themselves in the foreseeable future to picking low-hanging fruit, or tackles the more difficult challenges that confront the health of those at the very bottom of social and economic hierarchies (see Sen, 2015). The UHC approach has traditionally been concerned with economic inequality and whether or not the health system protects and promotes the health of the poor. But, at the bottom of most socio-economic ladders,

inequality is not only economic but is reinforced by such factors as gender, caste, race, ethnicity, disability, gender identity or sexual orientation to name some. This kind of intersectional inequality is often impervious to universalising approaches and requires specific targeted approaches.

SDG 4 – Education

SDG 4 reads as follows: "Quality Education: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (United Nations, 2015: 17). It has 10 targets.

In advocating for inclusive, high-quality education for all, it could be argued that SDG 4 was written with a consciousness of the questions of race and racism. Strikingly, while there is specific mention of inequalities relating to gender, disability and indigeneity, the terms 'race' and 'racism' do not appear in any of the official text describing the goal and its 10 targets. None of the targets, and particularly Target 5 on 'Discrimination', makes any reference to racism (United Nations, 2015: 17). Evident, I argue, is a failure to engage with ideologies of race, processes of racialisation and the material effects of racism. This failure has the effect of reinforcing racial disparities and perpetuates epistemic violence through global education policy.

Education, it must be emphasised, was central to the colonial project both in terms of providing the human capital required by segregated, colonial labour markets but also in producing racialised subjects who knew their place within the colonial social and political order. At an epistemological level, education also played a key role in the spread of the Western episteme in the form of Western languages, knowledge systems and religions at the expense of the knowledge systems, values, cosmologies and languages of the colonised.

In developing our arguments here, it is important to clarify that we are not seeking to assert that racial disparities are more or less important compared to other forms of oppression and disadvantage in education. Rather it is to argue that by eliding issues of race and racism, the international education development community is failing to recognise and address a burning form of disadvantage. Further, it is often the intersection between racism and other forms of disadvantage that is crucial to grasp when seeking to address disparities of different kinds, a point we will return to below.

This omission is compounded when we work with the continuing legacy of colonial epistemic violence. Target 4.7 explicitly refers to the need to inculcate respect for cultural diversity as a basis for global citizenship (United Nations, 2015: 17). Whilst this is undoubtedly a positive aspiration, from a racial justice perspective it is impossible to implement until such a time as the full extent of epistemic violence perpetuated through education is addressed. As noted, education has been a major vehicle for the global hegemony of the Western episteme (Western knowledge systems, values and languages) as the basis for curricula around the world. Of course, this episteme is not singular or, put differently, without contradiction. In its worst conceits, however, it undermined or in some cases, in the process, completely erased indigenous languages, knowledge systems, religions and cosmologies.

Closely linked to the predominance of a Western episteme is the hegemony of Western languages as languages of teaching and learning around the world. As has been clearly evidenced, the use of a subtractive, bilingual approach in many formerly colonised countries that promote English and other Western languages at the expense of local and indigenous languages can be seen as a form of linguistic imperialism in that it further reinforces Western interests within the Western-led development project (Phillipson, 2012).

Conclusion: towards alternative pathways to development

In light of the critique developed in this contribution, it is clear that there is the need to think again about the relevance, foundations and the implementation of the SDGs. Most critical is questioning their claims to universality – to be speaking for the world.

There is an emerging debate in the academic and political spheres about considering the possibility of scrapping the existing framework and the 17 goals and starting over, adjusting the SDGs and creating new SDGs, as there are important areas that are not yet addressed or are insufficiently emphasised in the current framework of the 2030 Agenda. For example, some countries have presented in their Voluntary National Reports proposals for different SDGs according to their domestic political priorities. India has proposed an SDG on local empowerment and rural development, and Costa Rica has proposed SDG 18 on people's happiness and wellbeing. Most pertinently, Brazil has suggested the adoption of a new goal to combat systemic racism. President Lula da Silva announced, at the High-Level Political Forum, that his country favoured the voluntary adoption of an 18th goal regarding ethnic-racial equality (see Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development, 2024). The suggestion emanated from a need to confront the country's main development problem, that is, structural racism.

The suggestion of an 18th goal is significant because the year 2024 marked the 76th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the final year of the International Decade for People of African Descent. The global analysis is

that there has not been enough progress with structural changes in the issue of racial equality. Despite the enormous challenges, the Brazilian suggestion can be seen as part of a shared effort of the international community against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, as well as to contribute to inclusive sustainable development for persons however they have been racialised. This would fundamentally reshape the 2030 Agenda and would have ramifications for the future of international politics.

What such a development would set in motion is the possibility of developing new, alternatives theories to fill in the gaps left by the SDGs and, critically, to foster resistance in fields such as agriculture, economics, education or health (Isgren & Ness, 2017; Kopnina, 2020; Padayachee *et al*., 2018).). It would provide the conditions for the legitimation of marginalised epistemologies and cultures and open possibilities for new and plural ways of thinking about development. It would make possible a critical engagement about some of the notions on which the SDGs lie, be it the notion of development or wellbeing (Jimenez & Glover, 2023; Van Norren, 2020). Those routes call for a robust dialogue between several worldviews, positionings and modes of action that can enrich one another to make it possible to enter the provocative zones of imaginations deemed to be off-limits.

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ENDNOTES

[1] See Farias (2023) for an extremely useful discussion about the typologies that have developed around the meaning of 'developed' and 'under-developed'.

[2] Contemporary developments with the withdrawal of federal government funding by the United States government to financially challenged economies around the world have brought this whole system to unmanageable levels of crisis.

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Where hearts and minds meet

special feature

In pursuit of global 'citizen diplomacy'

- By Nazeema Mohamed, Moira Levy, Bernedette Muthien & Zenariah Barends

The festival was a rallying cry for justice and peace, for global accountability, collective action, solidarity and a renewed commitment to human rights. Through creative expression, critical dialogue and cultural engagement the festival gave a voice to those most affected by economic and social injustices.

The Little Giants, a long-standing community initiative, played at the opening night. Photo: Nawawie Mathews

Living Rights are not static; they evolve and are continually reshaped by the forces of equity and justice as society progresses. They refer to the actualisation of constitutional, legal and treaty-promised protections into everyday realities for all individuals. These rights manifest when visionary texts transcend the page to become actionable guarantees that people not only theoretically possess but also actively experience in their daily lives. Living Rights embody the transformation of policy and law into effective practices that safeguard the dignity, freedom and well-being of every person, ensuring that human rights are not just idealistic promises but lived experiences. They bridge the gap between high-minded legal frameworks and the on-the-ground conditions that define human existence, especially for the most vulnerable.

Introduction

In initiating the inaugural Living Rights Festival, the Institute for African Alternatives (IFAA) has introduced a new term -- 'living rights'. The term, initially coined by IFAA's Acting Director Ari Sitas, developed through iterative discussion and was eventually penned by festival organiser Nazeema Mohamed. Once the concept of 'living rights' was clear, organisers deliberated on the what, who, how, when and where? The big questions to Sitas from the team were: Why a festival? Was it appropriate in a world in mayhem? What were we celebrating? And should we even be celebrating at all in the face of global crisis?

This was some time in the latter half of 2024, when the world was being assailed by the genocide in Gaza, civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the crisis of famine in Sudan, ongoing assaults by Russia on its neighbour Ukraine, and unbridled hostilities in the Middle East, backed by world superpowers, that posed the spectre of an inconceivably disastrous World War Three. These struggles for global dominance, exacerbated by greed, based on colonisation and expressing deep-seated racism, had resulted in widespread humanitarian catastrophes, predominantly in the Global South.

The 2024 Living Rights Festival was conceived as an act of solidarity in response to a world in turmoil – a world witnessing humanitarian catastrophes in Gaza, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and beyond.

'Citizen diplomacy'

The festival was perceived as a rallying cry for individuals and communities to stand up for justice, peace and human rights, for global accountability through collective action, solidarity and a renewed commitment to human rights and peace. It was against this backdrop that IFAA mobilised community organisations in Cape Town to embark on 'citizen diplomacy'. Through creative expression, critical dialogue and cultural engagement the festival sought to amplify the voices of those most affected by economic and social injustices, fostering a shared commitment to justice and resilience.

The Living Rights Festival was conceived with the goal of uniting hearts and minds, seamlessly integrating scholarly inquiry with creative expression. Cape Town, with its vibrant university landscape – home to four distinguished higher education institutions – and its profound history of cultural activism, provided the perfect setting for this endeavour. Central to the festival's mission was the mobilisation of these two powerful forces: academia and the arts.

By channelling artistic innovation and academic expertise to address societal challenges, the festival aspired to unlock transformative possibilities for equitable and empowering change. This synergy envisioned a future led by enlightened leadership, one that upholds the ideals of justice, transformation and a deeply humanised world, while celebrating the very best of our shared humanity.

For almost 10 weeks, from 24 October to 10 December, music, poetry and theatre events alongside political discussions, debate and knowledge-sharing sessions were conducted at significant venues throughout Cape Town, place with a decades-long association with political activism, in a community-driven effort to mobilise citizen awareness and action in defence of democracy and to promote dialogue, activism and collective action. The festival's theme, "Solidarity and Justice," called on individuals and communities to stand together against global human rights crises and to advocate for peace and dignity for all.

At the opening night, Sitas explained: "We are in the midst of a cluster of global crises that transgress borders and demand serious responses at the local and international levels. Our mission is to reflect on the increasing precarity of our planet and humanity, focusing on challenges such as the existential threat of climate change and global warming, murderous actions in Palestine and Sudan, the ongoing conflicts on this continent, the new phases of violent 'extractivism' for the great cell phones we cherish, and the fact that the sea that hugs our (Africa's) northern coastline has become an aquamarine grave for multitudes of our continent's people searching for a better life.

"We live in hope that the festival will generate learning, critical thinking, advocacy and cooperation. It speaks to our brains and our hearts, it is about thoughtful and critical engagement. We will reflect about rights, in a world full of wrongs that is losing its moral compass, a world where once again might is right, where we have become a human abstract available to be collateral damage, to be targeted, to be drone-infested and to be bombed, violated and displaced."

Festival starting point

It was the failure of the international institutions mandated to drive global peace, justice and accountability to intervene in the pervasive violence and injustice that served as the starting point. The festival was launched on 24 October, a date selected for its symbolic value as the 79th anniversary of the United Nations, which had clearly failed to uphold even the very first line of its founding Charter, which commits the nations of the world to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war".

The opening event significantly held at the District Six Homecoming Centre[1] in Cape Town, took the form of a panel discussion titled 'Sitting on the Precipice: Is There a Future for the United Nations?' Several prominent speakers lambasted the world body for failing to meet its mandate. They agreed that the UN Charter itself had created the conditions for the inevitable failure of the world body to protect global citizens and act on crimes against humanity by institutionalising the veto power of the five permanent members of the Security Council. This has effectively stymied all attempts by the broader world body to drive global justice and redress.

Speaking online from their different global posts, the panellists argued that the international community had to follow South Africa's example in its case at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and seek alternative routes to justice and redress, including through the multiple satellite and subsidiary bodies of the UN. Panellists lauded South Africa not only for its daring to take on the military might of Israel and its allies but also for its groundbreaking decision to enter the international discourse through a side door, in this case, the ICJ.

Michael Lynk, former Special Rapporteur on the Palestinian Territories, with the panel's Nazeema Mohamed from IFAA and Usuf Chikte from the Palestine Solidarity Campaign. Photo: Nawawie Mathews

Panellist Amr Moussa, the former secretary-general of the Arab League and a member of the Panel of the Wise of the African Union, said: "The permanent members have abandoned international law, they have abandoned their commitment and their leadership under the Charter. That the Security Council can veto the ceasefire resolutions while the war is going on and people are being killed and cities are being destroyed has set a very important and negative precedent in the history of the UN. This is a travesty of all that we have built.

Michael Lynk, former Special Rapporteur on the Palestinian Territories between 2016 and 2022, told the panel he found "the biggest hole in the heart of the international system is the question of accountability and the lack of challenge to impunity."

Zaheer Laher, South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation's (Dirco's) chief director: United Nations Political, Peace and Security and Dirco's acting chief state law adviser (international law), joined online from Addis Ababa where he was engaged in an international peace initiative. A member of South Africa's foreign service for 28 years, he indicated that the country's use of the ICJ in defence of the people of Gaza was a masterstroke in the face of the UN's paralysis and intransigence. But he emphasised that ultimately the South African government's decision to act on the world stage was the result of the intense lobbying and pressure by South African civil society.

Panellist Kumi Naidoo, president of the Fossil Fuel-Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative and former international executive director of Greenpeace International and secretary-general of Amnesty International, concurred. "Without pressure from citizens and national governments the international system will do nothing."

South Africa as catalyst

This theme underpinned the predominant understanding shared by the festival organisers and participants, including the diverse audiences that attended the range of events, from political and economic panel discussions to jazz performances, poetry readings, innovative indie theatre and exhibitions of the work of emerging young artists: South Africa, as the country that defeated the apartheid system of legalised racism, discrimination and prejudice, that found its way from the darkness into the light, has a global responsibility to defend those ideals and principles that drove the protracted and painful struggle for democracy. That applies anywhere in the world where citizens face such threats and worse.

This was borne out of the knowledge that South African citizens' rights to freely express themselves, gather, speak out, dissent were protected by South Africa's unique Constitution. With those essential freedoms came the right to demand the same of any country in the world in which they were being thwarted and the responsibility to protect and defend them for the universal good.

Over and above that shared confidence in the principles of South African governance, despite many grave failings and shortcomings, was a sense of the need to face the manifold crises, in South Africa, elsewhere on the continent and indeed further

afield, with the same courage and conviction that secured South Africa's freedom from oppression. South Africans possess a strong sense of achievement and purpose and rarely let go of that lifeline, even during the worst of times. That in itself deserved to be celebrated, and, after all, South Africans have much to celebrate. The timing could not be more perfect. What people needed at that time was to come together and speak to each other in the universal language of culture and the arts.

An expression of 'living rights'

What emerged in due course was an extraordinary expression of unity and solidarity as individuals and different cultural organisations came together in a collaborative initiative. Each partner organisation brought a rich history of activism to the collaboration, channelling their dedicated efforts toward advancing social justice and strengthening democracy. Their initiatives focused on working with young people in all their diversity, ensuring impoverished communities were represented, and providing them with creative platforms for self-expression while honouring and building upon the rich cultural heritage of past generations.

This was a collaboration with a number of long-standing community organisations such as the Cape Cultural Collective, founded in 2007, Koko Kalashe's Jazz in the Native Yards, which was founded in 2014 and is based in Gugulethu, Cape Town, and the Little Giants, a grassroots-based band formed in 1999 by Ezra Ngcukana and George Werner. These struggle stalwarts from Cape Town's cultural sector, rooted in decades of expression through music and the arts, are dedicated to mobilising youth around cultural protest action and have been instrumental in developing today's generation of artists, performers and musicians.

Festival partners also included the Palestinian Solidarity Campaign, established in 1998; the Leah and Desmond Tutu Legacy Foundation, founded in 2011; Mary Tal, founder of the Whole World Women Association established in 2013; the Palestinian Solidarity Campaign, founded in 2000; the Institute for the Healing of Memories, established in 1998; South African History Online, founded in 1998; Insurrections Ensemble, which began in 2010 to create interactive, collective poetry, music and theatre; André Marais' Surplus Radical Bookstore, founded in 2021; and the District Six Museum, which opened in 1994.

This coalition of organisations showcased the transformative power of collaboration, merging artistic innovation, academic inquiry and activism on social justice and our transition to a democracy to address some of society's most pressing challenges.

We all agreed that living rights embody the transformation of policy and law into effective practices that safeguard the dignity, freedom and well-being of every person, ensuring that human rights are not just idealistic promises but lived experiences. They bridge the gap between idealistic legal frameworks and on-the-ground reality that define human existence, especially for the most vulnerable.

Festival organisers formed a steering committee of organisations who provided oversight and guidance on the programme and its implementation. A call for volunteers to assist drew a strong response. Clearly the concept struck a chord because finding volunteers was easy. Ordinary citizens were reeling from the onslaught of multiple global crises and felt the need to come together as a collective. They wanted to have their say, and many said they felt like they were actually doing something in a context where one felt completely helpless. Most of the work for the entire festival was done by volunteers who gave freely not only their time but also their many valued and varied cultural creations. We publish a poem presented by poet, writer and storyteller Diana Ferrus and share some of the artwork on display (see below).

The concept and draft programme of the festival rapidly gained momentum, even though there was no budget or organisational infrastructure in place. Core funding came later, from the Heinrich Boell Foundation, an international funder who was enthusiastically supportive with the limited funds at their disposal.

The festival's activities were hosted at remarkable venues, each contributing their own unique history and ethos to the event. Generously providing space at no or minimal cost, these included:

- The District Six Homecoming Centre, which was selected for the launch of the festival as an expression of solidarity with the people of Gaza and homeless and dispossessed people globally.
- Bertha House, a dynamic multi-purpose space where activists, educators, community organisations and other social actors gather to collaborate and learn together, generously contributed their whole building for two days of rich cultural activities. They also provided catering and transport to and from the venue for communities in outlying areas enabling more inclusive participation in the events. This contribution had profound effects on diversifying our audience.
- Desmond and Leah Tutu Legacy Foundation whose premises are used to foster courageous conversations to nurture healing from discrimination, prejudice and conflict across societies worldwide.
- The Guga S'Thebe Arts and Culture Centre, a vibrant community hub in Langa, Cape Town -- the first African township established by British colonial rulers in 1927. The beginning of apartheid style group separation that later was to be consolidated under the Group Areas Act.

- Community House, an activist haven that houses non-governmental organisations, trade unions and the Labour and Community History Museum, centred on the Trade Union Library and its archive.
- The University of the Western Cape, with its legacy of activism against apartheid.

These spaces, each deeply rooted in activism and community engagement, provided more than venues – they embodied the festival's mission to unite art, academia and social justice. Sitas described the festival as a "partnership of so many great initiatives, hundreds of volunteers, cart-loads of friends and organisations and institutions that believe in solidarity and social justice".

At a performance at the Guga S'Thebe Arts and Culture Centre, top left, Keyboardist Charles Louw of the Rosa Choir, right is Operation Khataza Jazz Band, bottom left is Koko Kalashe and his son Ndax kalashe of Jazz in the Native Yards and bottom right is Traditional Drummers with the Cape Cultural Collective Poets Chris and Vusu.

Festival highlights – the core themes

The festival dissolved the daily divisions that coalesce around age, status, sexual orientation, race, class and so on. There was something for everyone. Most importantly, though, was the festival's appeal to the youth. This had been carefully cultivated; it was agreed that a platform for young people was critical, and at times it took centre-stage.

Struggle veteran Bernedette Muthien facilitated an open-mic, multi-genre session titled "Youth Speak Truth to Power". She was supported by comedian Goldie Shevlane. The young participants were asked: "What does the state of the world say to me?" In their challenging and insightful responses they drew on poetry, music, comedy. Poet Lisa Lily Julie opened with what she

called "a punch to the stomach", a wakeup call. Another poet, Jerome Coetzee, in a piece called "Seven Minutes of Silence," stood unmoving and silent for an agonisingly long stretch. His only action in the end was to hold up a poster bearing only one word, "peace". He followed this with a poem dedicated to his childhood friend who was killed by gang crossfire in Lavender Hill.

Dani Petersen performed a song on gender-based violence in Afrikaans and English, comedian Sacre (mononym), who grew up on the Cape Flats, a child of Congolese migrants, regaled the audience with tales about his experiences, his self-deprecating humour delivered in Afrikaapse English. Comedian Alexander Henry demonstrated a spirit that transcended the confines of his wheelchair, including shamelessly flirting with Goldie, the comedian. He later wrote on Whatsapp, "The role of a standup comedian is sometimes to antagonise the audience, to make them think. In my performance I shared shades of what I want people to see about me and other people with disabilities. There is a definite line between the medical model and the social model on disability. And that is why the flirtatiousness between myself and Goldie is so important."

According to Muthien: "it was important for youth to take the struggles for realising intersectional and non-negotiable constitutional rights to heart and action, to embody these rights and quests for justice, prosperity and peace, so that rights do not become static, paper rights, but realisable rights in action. The young performers and participants were so alive with kinetic energy."

Twenty-one-year-old artist Zara Newman and fellow artist John Barrow engaged in a thought-provoking conversation with art historian Nomusa Makhube about their artworks. Newman, an artist living with disabilities and health challenges, shared insights into her collection titled *Colours in Grayscale!* Reflecting on her journey, she remarked, "I've found that the easiest path to healing is by accepting and acknowledging a situation for what it truly is. When you're depressed, the world can quickly lose colour, and everything turns to grayscale. Deep down, there is a part of you that hopes for better days, and that part is beautiful – colourful. You may want to move forward without confronting what you've been through, but that's not how it works. The only way out is through."

Barrow, meanwhile, explained that his work consistently seeks to expand diversity and celebrate what it means to be human. The discussion, expertly facilitated by Makhube, spurred insightful conversations among the audience, touching on topics such as inequality and the lived realities of township life in South Africa. A community activist, known for her efforts to establish community kitchens during the Covid pandemic, shared her struggles with the public health system and the desperate attempts she made to secure care for her sick infant.

Artist Zara Newman (at the front) in conversation with participants attending her walkaround, at Bertha House.

The session concluded with artist walkabout tours, where attendees had the opportunity to engage with the works more intimately. For many young participants, it was their first opportunity to connect with artists and discuss the meaning and inspiration behind their creations.

The launch of the book, *Gandhi's African Legacy, Phoenix Settlement 1904-2024* by Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie, provided a critical reflection on the achievements and failures of Gandhi. The book launch provided a powerful backdrop to the Insurrections Ensemble's innovative and moving performance of *Must Gandhi Fall* , a profound exploration of multi-media historical and contemporary narratives. It explored the complexities of Gandhi's legacy, engaging with questions about his role in anti-colonial resistance while critically examining the contradictions and contested aspects of his ideology and leadership. Through its combination of powerful storytelling and musical excellence, the performance challenged audiences to confront questions of decolonisation and justice, leaving a lasting emotional and intellectual impact.

Addressing their workshops during the Living Rights Festival, Professor Crain Soudien (left), at Community House) and Professor Fred Hendricks at the Leah and Desmond Tutu Legacy Foundation offices in Cape Town.

The *Unbroken Spirits: Concert for Humanity* poignantly paralleled the resistance struggles of Palestinians and South Africans, reminding audiences of the enduring fight against apartheid and colonial oppression. Cultural performances and art exhibitions underscored the urgent need for solidarity in confronting global injustices. Panel discussions and seminars spurred lively debate – for example on how African citizens can mobilise to assert their agency, ultimately contributing to sustainable transformation across the continent and at on critical questions on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), bringing the discussion back to its starting point: the role of the United Nations and international agendas.

At the heart of the festival was the recognition of art and scholarly work as an intrinsic form of human expression and a safeguard of our shared humanity. Through critical discussion and debates, performances, exhibitions and poetry, creative expression blended the brain and the heart to illuminate injustice and inspire action. Art forms were recognised and celebrated as important tools for liberation, of the mind as well as of the person and the state, in a multi-faceted and innovative narrative that challenged conventional Left thinking and suggested a new way forward towards transformation and a better world.

[1] District 6, with its vibrant, diverse community, situated in the heart of the City of Cape Town, was impacted by one of apartheid's most brutal laws, the Group Areas Act. Its implementation in 1966 meant forcefully removing over 60,000 people from District 6 into areas in the underdeveloped Cape Flats. After the bulldozers had gone through the area and destroyed everything in its wake, all that could be seen was dirt, rubble and the desolate churches and mosques.

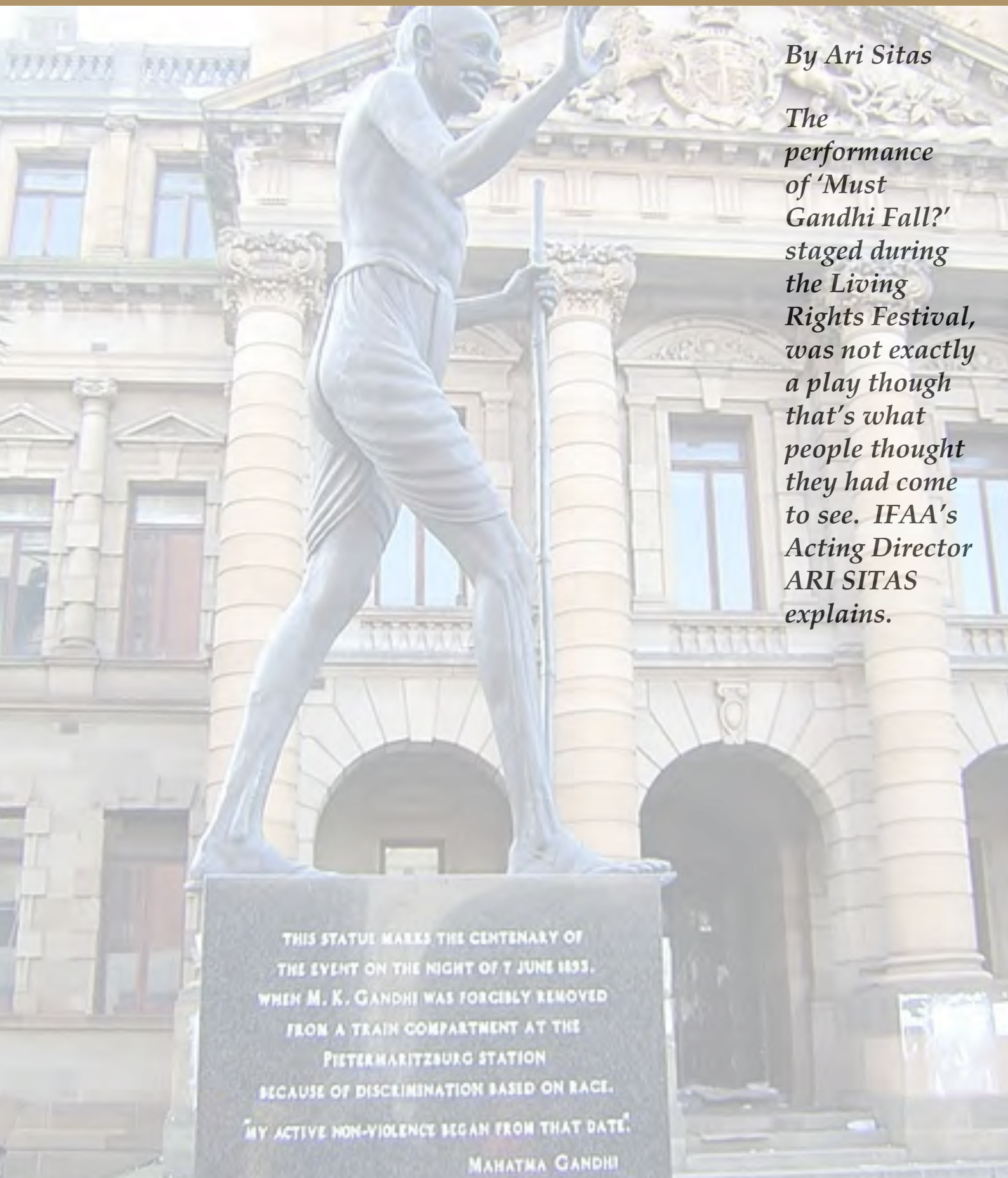
Must Gandhi fall?

Insurrections Ensemble and the Gandhi Project

special feature

Living Rights Festival

Solidarity for Change



By Ari Sitas

The performance of 'Must Gandhi Fall?' staged during the Living Rights Festival, was not exactly a play though that's what people thought they had come to see. IFAA's Acting Director ARI SITAS explains.

Many people have asked me in a rather bewildered tone, what was it that we staged during the Living Rights Festival at the Avalon Theatre at the District Six Homecoming Centre in Cape Town? The performance was not a play but felt like one! It was not a political statement although it sounded like one, it was not a musical but it was full of music and it was not an art work but it was full of art! And it was about Gandhi without Gandhi appearing on stage once!

Must Gandhi Fall? was precisely a "pluri-medial" performance that tried to invite audiences into a world of difficult questions and disquiet. It was not an easy project, not only because of the large number of participants involved but also because the Insurrections Ensemble[1] itself was not in agreement on whether the Gandhian legacy must "fall" or crawl or be revived so it could/can "walk"!

Nevertheless, we had to rise to the real challenge of the Living Rights Festival: what can living be in an environment of violence, militarism and genocidal indifference? We had to bring excellent wordsmiths, musical composers and performers and visualists together[2] – and again, to focus not on just any music, or any words or images but screeds of creativity to weave something around the legacy of non-violence and the threats to freedom.

We had to trust each other because of a long period of collective work in South Africa and India. The Insurrections Ensemble and its broader AfroAsian family of related projects and friends became the talk of the progressive creative world recently but alas, our capacity to move has been curtailed.

It was a wild dream by us, that started way back in 2008.

Sumangala Damodaran, one of its founders, was curating the repertoires of song of the socialist and anti-colonial movement in India, I was part of the people's and co-founder of the workers' theatre movement in South Africa. She was a classically trained singer; I was a poet and a lapsed dramatist. We said let's try and create a dialogue between our worlds. We had both worked with musicians and poets. So, we reached out and we had a dozen brilliant creators before 2009 was over. It became a successful addiction in the years to come.

The Covid pandemic unfortunately forced us to survive between Zoom and streaming. We have had a growing following in Africa and India, with major tours planned but the pandemic hit us hard. And the prize money won in national awards for composition and musical arrangement had run out.

To play with a Marxian adage: people may dream of alternatives, engage in crazy acts of voluntarism but alas they are constrained by broader objective forces, in this case by forces that have turned toxic.

Our work depended on the mobility of brilliant trans-local creators, each with their own enticing ensembles, coming together for an affordable period of time to produce challenging works.

As was expected we started with uncertainty and after the audience responses we took courage and confidence: first in 2012 at the Fugard Theatre in Cape Town, then premiered at the District Six's Homecoming Centre in 2014 and 2015, then the Centre for the Less Good Idea in Johannesburg in 2018 and in 2019 at the Theatre Arts Collective in Cape Town and so on! We tried to be as non-commodified as possible and always align our work with visionary centres of culture.

The first part of each year was taken up by the writers who responded to an agreed theme. The texts in many languages were sent to the composers who proceeded to delete, reconstruct, trying to put them into song-like shapes. It has to be said that poets had to learn humility as what happens to their work may be brutal.

The Gandhi Project was supposed to happen in 2023.

Most of us were appalled by the rising tides of violence and so we thought … OK, Gandhi had drafted *Satyagraha* in 1923 in an Indian jail. Was his gospel of non-violence still relevant? After discussions with the Gandhi family and especially Professor Uma Meshtrie it was agreed to postpone it for 2024 to coincide with 120 years since Gandhi started his utopian experiment in Durban: the Phoenix Settlement. [3]

This is easy to say and harder to achieve: Gandhi is the easiest and the most difficult bridge between the freedom struggles of India and South Africa. Congress here, Congress there!

Is it possible to separate [Gandhi's] philosophy of praxis from his philosophy of being and both from the everyday conduct of an individual?

But there is a mounting critique of the Mahatma: was he a Racist, a Sexist, a Casteist? Were Nkrumah, Nyerere, Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr unthinking in embracing non-violence as a modality of militant struggle? Is it possible to separate his philosophy of praxis from his philosophy of being and both from the everyday conduct of an individual? Is it possible to control our outrage at how his murderer is sanctified by India's radical right? Can one do a project in the shadow of the 2021 carnage in Durban and the killing of African people in Phoenix by Indian residents and the calls for revenge in the townships around there?

There were serious disagreements in the group. For example, one of the founders of the Ensemble had less of a problem with Gandhi but with the musical work of the Mahatma's African friends in Inanda: their Christian hymnodies stultified the continuity of Zulu musical traditions. He walked off the project. Another felt that the musicality around Gandhi's ashrams and what was encouraged by him was deeply uninspiring. Then there were stories of the multiple communities that both were touched and harked to touch their hero.

So we decided on a four-part movement and agreed there would be no Gandhi on stage. Touching Gandhi (the need to resist calls for his persona or his statues to fall); Criticising Gandhi (all the challenges had to be amplified); Martyrdom (his stance against communal violence and his empathetic projects); The Now (how such traditions speak to our catastrophic present).

Once agreed, creativity was unleashed to populate these movements: composers composed, lyricists jotted and edited lines, whoever could not attend because of financial constraints had to be pre-recorded and, in the end, to put the piece of 19 transitions down to its tiniest detail.

It worked and it will travel. Meanwhile the album from the recording of that night is being mixed.

ENDNOTES

[1] For the expansive work of the Insurrection Ensemble see www.insurrectionsensemble.com; also Ari Sitas, 2023, *Music Notebook,* Cape Town: Chimurenga.

[2] The project was undertaken under the auspices of the "Other Universals" project at the universities of Cape Town and Johannesburg. The narrators and writers were Ruchi Chaturvedi and Amrita Pande; the lyricists were Anvar Ali, Vivek Narayanan, Sabiha Satchi, Phillippa Yaa de Villiers; Lu Dlamini, Tina Schouw and Ari Sitas; the musical composers and performers were Pritam Ghosal (sarod & composition), Reza Khota (guitar & composition), Sean Sanby (double-bass), Ru Slayen (percussion), vocals: Lu Dlamini (guitar & composition), Tina Schouw (guitar & composition), Sumangala Damodaran (composition), Kathyayini Dash (tanpuri & composition), art and visual animation was by Benjamin Haskins and artistic direction by Ari Sitas.

[3] See Bernedette Muthien's book review in *New Agenda 96,* March 2025 of *Gandhi's African Legacy Phoenix Settlement: 1904-2024. A History Through Letters*, by Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie, UWC Press, 2024.

special feature

Living Rights Festival

Solidarity for Change

How can we hold the powerful to account in Africa

when the ruling party acts with impunity and disregards the will of the voters?

By Moira Levy

A panel discussion at the Living Rights Festival called on citizens to recognise moments of change and 'translate them into something that's democracy- deepening and democracy- consolidating.' MOIRA LEVY also reports on the African Citizen Watch, an innovative tool to monitor government promises.

At war: Mozambique street protests during the elections. Source: Free Malaysia Times Creative Commons Licence

Many countries call themselves democracies simply because they hold regular elections. At a panel discussion in October 2024 as part of IFAA's Living Rights Festival, participants were reminded that elections are a necessary but not sufficient requirement for democracy. A key question that surfaced in the debate, titled "Holding the Powerful to Account in Africa," was what actions could promote accountability in a so-called "democracy" in which the ruling party is able to act with impunity and disregard the will of the voters?

The discussion was held days after Mozambique's corrupt and mismanaged general election (see Hanlon, 2024), which was accompanied by attacks on the opposition by government agencies and violent protests across the country. These continued into 2025 after the Frelimo candidate, Daniel Chapo, was inaugurated as the new president.

Panelist Dr Edson Cortez, Director of the Public Integrity Centre (CIP), a civil society organisation based in Maputo, asked: "how can we force the government to be accountable to us if our votes mean nothing to them, when they don't need the citizens to remain in power?"

Cortez showed graphic videos of police violence against protesters who rose up against the corruption of the Frelimo government and their denial of constitutional rights to public assembly. He was subsequently warned that his name was on a list of police targets because of the work he has done in monitoring and exposing electoral fraud.

The CIP deployed a team of approximately 2,000 election observers at polling stations in all parts of the country. The photos they took of election results displayed outside counting stations after the counting differed radically from the final published poll. The election was shamelessly and transparently rigged to favour candidates from Frelimo, the long-ruling party.

What is accountability?

Speaking from the chair, Emeritus Professor Fred Hendricks, former Dean of Humanities at Rhodes, described the results as fraudulent, saying Frelimo had "brazenly stolen the election". He asked: "How do you hold leaders to account under conditions of extreme repression?"

Directly addressing the question put to the panel on how to instill a culture of accountability in governments struggling with challenges to the rule of law, he said what is urgently needed is "not a philosophical reflection [on] what accountability might be, although engaging the theoretical concept of accountability is extraordinarily important. It's also not an attempt to extend the rhetorical flourishes around accountability."

In his view accountability comprises three interlinked components. The first is 'answerability'; those in power must be able and willing to justify all decisions and actions they undertake to the people on whose behalf they are acting or making those decisions. The second is 'responsiveness'. The political leadership "has to respond to the needs and interests of the vast majority of

Ablaze: Citizens of Mozambique took to the streets to denounce the ruling party in the run-up to the election.
Source: Free Malaysia Times Creative Commons licence

citizens," he said. Finally, accountability must be 'enforceable'. This he described as "the mantra of a mandate" and said it assumes that the first two conditions are met.

The notions of answerability and responsiveness imply discussion and agreement between the people and those who serve them as their elected representatives. "Mandates need to be engaged with, they need to be discussed and people need to agree to (them)." Leaders who fail to meet these mandates should be disciplined, and those over whom they hold power should be able to enforce the agreements that have been reached.

Panellist Dr Tendai Murisa, Executive Director of the SIVIO Institute based in Harare, described the current state of democracy in many parts of Africa as "authoritarianism through election," where citizens exit the public domain after voting, leaving whatever has to be done to the politicians. He said most politicians in these countries are "electoral dynasties" representing families that had previously played prominent roles in the liberation movements and that continued to hold onto power for generations.

"Politics has become privatised. It has become an avenue for private accumulation for the elites, and the common trend across all countries (in Africa) is growing wealth inequality and poverty. Our assumptions about liberal democracy and the concept of the separation of power is flawed because we're expecting the legislative branch to hold the executive branch accountable, but they all come from the same political base."

'Mandates need to be engaged with, they need to be discussed and people need to agree to (them).'

'Accountability movement'

Africa has engaged in many struggle movements, he said -- the liberation movement, the feminist movement, the debt justice movement, the land occupation movement – all of which have been successful to some extent. But what is needed now is an "accountability movement," in which leaders are held responsible for their actions and expected to deliver a certain standard of performance.

Allegations of a coup attempt in Zimbabwe in 2017, and the much contested elections that followed, was the catalyst for establishing Africa Citizen Watch - an independent digital tool to track "the performance and effectiveness of African governments based on the pledges made in their manifestos and other important policy pronouncements". Murisa had counted more than 200 promises made by those in power in Zimbabwe in the brief period leading up to the presidential inauguration and with the backing of the research organisation, SIVIO Institute, which provided the technical backing for this innovative online tracking tool, his organisation began to monitor actual government delivery on its promises.

The model is simple but effective. Using party manifestos and publicly available documentation, Africa Citizen Watch measures political performance against a list of electoral promises.

"We are not looking for things that governments have said or signed at the UN, African Union or SADC level," said Murisa. African Citizen Watch reports on what governments have actually done, measuring their performance and effectiveness against the pledges made in their manifestos and other public policy pronouncements. "To us, these are binding contracts."

In addition, the organisation conducts or commissions independent surveys of citizen opinion, what Murisa called a "twin track process," to measure the degree of alignment between the promises made by political elites and citizens' satisfaction with government delivery and service.

"We check what governments are doing based on what they are saying, but we also separately track citizen satisfaction with the performance of governments. Citizens vote based on what they've been promised and expect government to implement their promises. [We track] the extent to which government is making progress [and] if government is actually fulfilling the promises that politicians made. We need citizenship, active citizenship."

Zim Citizens Watch has been going since 2018, much to the dismay of the Zanu-PF authorities. Their immediate response on the release of the most recent report, according to Murisa, was to ask: "Who's funding you?" But it has also irritated government opponents by recording instances of successful delivery and examples of the promises kept, a testament to its own independence and integrity.

The organisation has applied its tracking tool in Malawi and Zambia. On its website African Citizens Watch reports that since the last presidential inauguration, the Malawian government has implemented only 15 of its 204 promises, with another 149 in progress, 49 not yet started and 11 already broken. That is according to the platform's continuously ticking online clock, an ominous indication that at this rate it looks unlikely that the current government will pass muster as its term of office is running out.

Since its most recent presidential inauguration, Zambia had delivered on seven of 248 recorded electoral pledges. Another 160 promises were recorded as being in progress, 77 had not commenced, and three had been broken.

This should keep the South African Government of National Unity (GNU) on its toes. African Citizens Watch is currently tracking 39 promises made by President Cyril Ramaphosa in his July 2024 inauguration speech and in other key policy pronouncements. None have yet been implemented, but then neither have any been broken.

'... opportunities seem to open up [but ...] we as activists are unable to translate them into something that's democracy-deepening and democracy-consolidating?'

Civil society agency

Nontando Ngamlana is the Executive Director of Afesis, a developmental NGO based in East London which aims to strengthen local democracy. As the panel's discussant, she closed the debate by challenging the audience to consider how they have reacted to the citizens' protests in Zimbabwe and Mozambique at that time, and to South Africa's July 2021 riots and the ongoing waves of social delivery protests.

These are examples of citizens exercising their own agency, she said, but "in isolated, less coordinated ways. When we talk about strengthening democracy we [must ask ourselves] what does connecting energy look like? What does solidarity look like? What would solidarity with the people of Mozambique right now look like?"

Ngamlana suggested these could be potential "moments of change" when people who had been oppressed for generations finally rise up. "We have seen it so many times, but it never seems to translate into any sustained energy for social change.

"We need to ask why we're not able to capitalise on these moments, when opportunities seem to open up [but] that we as activists are unable to read and act on. We need to ask why we're not able to sustain them and translate them into something that's democracy-deepening and democracy-consolidating?"
The formation of South Africa's GNU is a case in point, she said: at last here was a liberation movement in Africa that was not going to rule "until Jesus comes". But the country has missed what could have been a unique opportunity for change, because "the political culture has not changed. The dominant political culture that the ANC had established has not changed in any significant way."

Ngamlana highlighted the huge amount of work still needed – from creative and engaged institutions of civil society – to make something constructive out of the energy within frustrated communities that are intent on a better way of life.

"What would it take to shift a culture into something different? It is one thing to change the party in power and the people in power. But it is another thing to confront the culture, the ways of being and doing, and the systems -- formal and informal -- that are dominant and that are leading us deeper into the funk that we are in."

REFERENCE

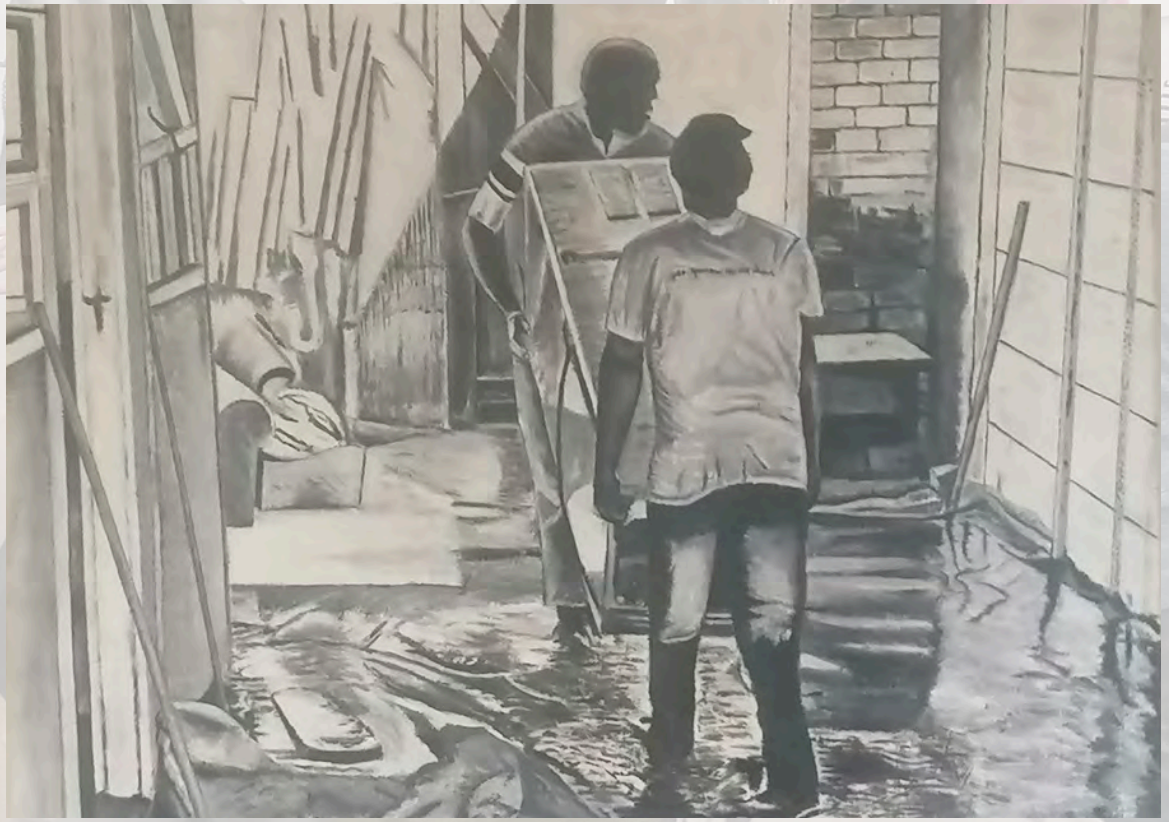
Hanlon, J. 2024. 25 years of electoral fraud, protected by secrecy. Centro de Integridade Pública (CIP), Maputo. Available at https://bit.ly/Moz-El-Fraud. See the detailed weekly reports at https://www5.open.ac.uk/technology/mozambique/national-elections-2024-eleições-gerais, also see https://bit.ly/Moz-Elections

Living Rights Festival Art Exhibition,

special feature

Bertha House, 25 Oct 24

Songezo Zantsit

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Zara Newman

Out Of Gods Hands

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Edition 1 / 7

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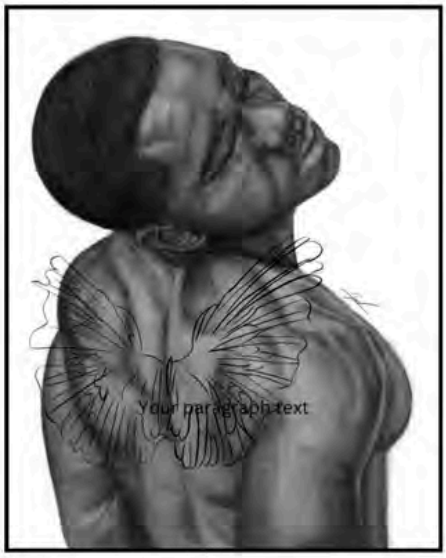


WINGS / JUDGEMENT

Limited Edition Digital Print

59.4 x 84.1 cm

Edition 1 / 7

R5000.00

special feature

My Name is February

– By Diana Ferrus

Diane Ferrus is a poet, writer, performance artist, activist, founder member of Bush Poets, the Afrikaans Writers Association (Afrikaanse Skrywersvereniging) and Women in X-chains. She is a member of the Women's Education and Artistic Voice Expression (WEAVE), played an instrumental role in the repatriation of Sarah Baartman's remains from France to South Africa and was a recipient of the Minister's Award for Women.

Her work has been published in various collections and some serve as prescribed texts for high school learners. She worked for 25 years at the University of the Western Cape until she retired in 2016. She has completed a postgraduate degree in Women's and Gender Studies.

Diane performed this poem at the 'Unbroken Spirits: Concert for Humanity' that formed part of the Living Rights Festival. She has graciously given New Agenda permission to publish this poem.

T

Source: Cape Cultural Collective

my name is Februarie

my naam is Februarie
ek is verkoop
my borste, privaatdele, my oë
my brein
is nog nie myne
soos die Sao Jose
loop ek opgekap
word ek telkens gesink deur ‘n ander storm
geen Jesus wat op die water loop vir my

my naam is Februarie
ek soek nog die stang van die stuur
want onderwater lê die familie
die kind aan ma se rokspant
die ma aan pa se hand
hoe diep lê hulle, aan watter kant

my naam is Februarie
opgeveil, verkoop, die hoogste bieder
het ontslae geraak van my regte naam
geen vergoeding betaal
vir dit my naam, gesteel, gesink
onderwater lê dit nog
saam met die familie
wrakstukke van die Sao Jose
ten gronde geloop deur ‘n wind
briesende branders wat die buit
se hele toekoms besluit
die profyt teen die wal uitsmyt

my naam is Februarie
die Masbieker op die Sao Jose
so was ek genoem
toe my hierse moedertaal gestalte kry
toe tonge met mekaar begin te knoop
en letters ‘n vrye gang begin te loop

My name is February
I was sold
my breasts, private parts and eyes
my brain
are not mine yet
like the Sao Jose
I am walking ruined
often sank by another storm
Jesus walking on water for me

my name is February
I still search for the rod of the steering wheel
because the family lies at the bottom
the child stitched to mother’s dress
mother’s hand locked in father’s fist
how deep down are they, on which side

my name is February
auctioned, sold, the highest bidder
disposed of my real name
paid no compensation
for that, my name, stolen, sunk
underwater it still lies
with the family
wrecks of the Sao Jose
ran aground by a wind
furious waves that decided
the future of the loot
smashing the profit against the embankment

my name is February
the Masbieker on the Sao Jose
that’s how I was called
when my mother tongue of here came into being
when tongues started to form a bond
and letters started walking freely

in ‘n desperate poging in hoop
dat magte ook nie hierdie identiteit moet stroop
word ek die Masbieker, net ‘n naam
onder ‘n ander lug gekraam
en diep gevul met skaam

My naam is Februarie

in a desperate attempt at survival and hope
that forces should not strip this identity too
I became the Masbieker, only a name
born under a different sky
and deeply filled with shame

my name is February

I rearranged this landscape
my hands wove the patterns of the vineyards
my feet pressed the grapes
and I was paid with the wine
I carry Alcohol-Foetal Syndrome children on my back
my name is February
I still march on the eve of December first
I walk the cobblestones of this city
when I cry out in desperation
“remember the emancipation of the slaves!”

My name is February
two hundred years after the Sao Jose
I was given the vote
they said I was free

but don’t you see how often I am submerged
weighed down
I am the sunken, the soiled
forgotten
and yet memory will not leave me

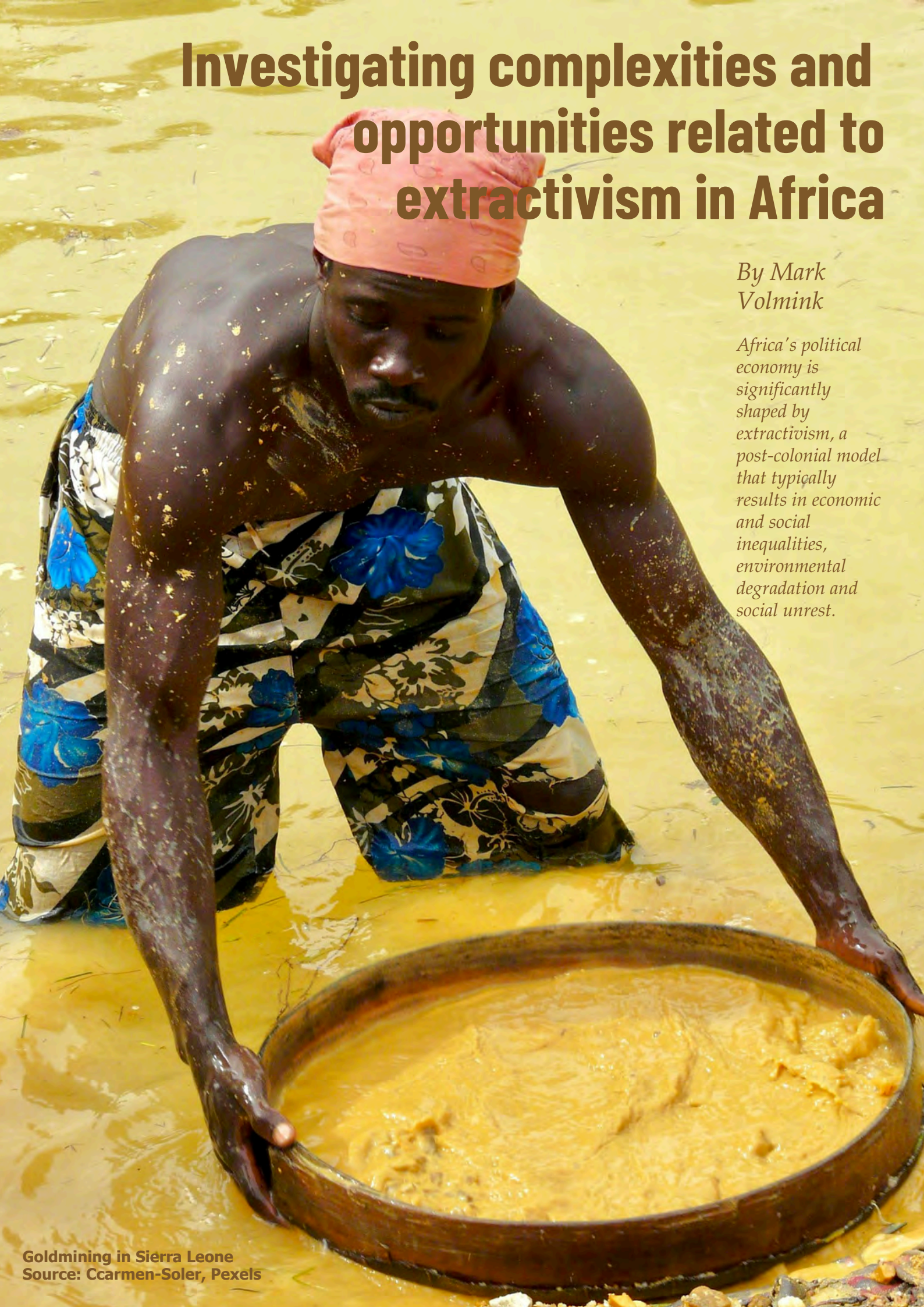
My name is February
stranded at Third beach
but no one comes to look for me
no one waves from the dunes
no bridges back to Mozambique

my name is February
I will be resurrected
brought to the surface
unshackled, unchained, unashamed
My name is February.

Investigating complexities and opportunities related to extractivism in Africa

By Mark Volmink

Africa's political economy is significantly shaped by extractivism, a post-colonial model that typically results in economic and social inequalities, environmental degradation and social unrest.



Goldmining in Sierra Leone
Source: Ccarmen-Soler, Pexels

Investigating complexities and opportunities related to extractivism in Africa

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Abstract

Extractivism in Africa presents a paradox of substantial economic opportunities and significant social, environmental and political complexities. Africa's rich natural resources have attracted foreign investment, contributed to economic growth and improved infrastructure. This article examines how extractivism has led to displacement, human rights violations, environmental degradation and corruption, perpetuated by neocolonialism. Based on a review of literature, this article draws on insights from several sources, including articles and reports, and describes concepts and a theoretical framework relevant to extractivism in Africa. While the findings of this study articulate the challenges and complexities of extractivism, they also present opportunities that exist for Africa to harness its resources for inclusive growth and sustainable development. This necessitates the enhancement of institutional capacity, promoting transparency and accountability and ensuring participation in global trade. Regional inter-linkages and improved policies can also maximise benefits and mitigate risks. By addressing the complexities and grasping opportunities, Africa can transform extractivism into a catalyst for equitable and sustainable development.

Key words

Extractivism, Africa, development, inclusive growth and sustainable development.

Introduction

Extractivism is a complex and multifarious economic model characterised by the large-scale extraction of natural resources, primarily for export, with minimal processing. This concept emerged in the 1990s in Latin America to describe the appropriation of resources such as minerals, oil and timber, often in ways that had significant local socio-economic and environmental impacts. Africa's political economy is significantly shaped by extractivism, a model rooted in the legacy of colonialism that often leads to familiar economic and social inequalities. In the supposedly post-colonial era, African nations remain heavily dependent on the extraction of primary commodities for economic growth, often leading to the resource curse, where abundant resources correlate with poor economic outcomes and governance issues (Bruna, 2022; ROAPE, 2021).

In terms of current practices and challenges, Huber (2014), argues that many African economies' heavy reliance on the export of non-renewable resources has resulted in high levels of corruption, environmental degradation and social unrest, typified by countries such as Nigeria whose oil wealth benefits a small national elite while the majority remains impoverished. Characteristically, beneficiation (think wealth extraction) occurs outside the source country and the flow of resources is generally south to north, assisting in perpetuating the economic hegemony of the Global North.

The environmental impact of extractivism in developing economies is profound, often including permanent ecological degradation and displacement of communities. For instance, green extractivism in Mozambique illustrates how initiatives aimed at addressing climate change can exacerbate existing inequalities by prioritising international agendas over local needs (Bruna, 2022).

Assessing the socio-economic and environmental impacts of extractivism on the political economy of Africa requires an understanding of the historical context and evolution of extractivism, types and economic implications of extractive practices, their social impacts (including community resistance, gender considerations and environmental consequences) and the obstacles impeding sustainable alternatives for promoting local development, diversifying investment to include other sectors and exploiting continental opportunities.

The purpose of this article is to explore the complexities and opportunities related to extractivism in Africa. Issues that will be addressed include the historical context and evolution of extractivism, types and economic implications of extractive practices, social impacts, and gender considerations, environmental consequences and sustainable alternatives, and governance issues related to extractive industries. This article aims to share insights related to existing challenges and new opportunities commensurate with extractivism in the political economy of Africa. The discussion below is based on selected reviews of relevant secondary resources, including existing literature, government reports and media articles.

Defining and delimiting the meaning of African extractivism

The most obvious component of the meaning of extractivism is "resource extraction" which, according to Lowrey and Rogers (2022), entails the removal of vast quantities of raw materials, such as minerals, oil, gas and agricultural products, for export rather than local consumption or use. Additionally, Acosta (n.d.) highlights the significance of "minimal processing" of these resources before they are exported. Products or commodities are lower value-added (Chagnon *et al*., 2022). Extractivism is based on a disproportionate relationship between economies in the Global South and the interests and priorities of the owners of global capital. This unequal relationship is undergirded by the commercialisation and exploitation of natural resources, knowledge systems and culture, the dispossession of the means of production and the independence of social domains.

Chagnon *et al*. (2022) also highlight the importance of "capital accumulation" in extractivism that often results in the centralisation of power among a few entities, typically alliances of multinational corporations and local elites. These unequal power relations often lead to the displacement of local communities, the destruction of local economies and the degradation of ecosystems (Lowrey & Rogers, 2022; Matthes & Crncic, 2012). Acosta (n.d.) and Riofrancos (2020) note that countries reliant on extractivist economies become dependent on global commodity markets and vulnerable to their volatility, which can lead to economic instability and limit broader economic development.

While extractivism also attracts foreign direct investment (FDI) which can boost local economies, it can also lead to exploitation and inequitable wealth distribution (Lowrey & Rogers, 2022), the displacement of indigenous populations, the disruption of traditional livelihoods, and conflicts over land rights and resource ownership (Lowrey & Rogers, 2022; Matthes & Crncic, 2012), a disproportionate impact on poor and marginalised communities of environmental degradation due to deforestation, water pollution (Chagnon *et al*, 2022; Riofrancos, 2020) and governance challenges resulting from corruption, rent-seeking and weakened state institutions. African governments have frequently succumbed to neo-extractivism, the practice of prioritising short-term gains from resource extraction over long-term sustainable policies (Acosta, n.d.; Riofrancos, 2020). Unsurprisingly, there is growing resistance against extractive practices across Africa, driven by local communities advocating for their rights and environmental sustainability.

Brief overview of extractivism in Africa

Extractivism in Africa can be traced back to colonial times when European powers exploited the continent's natural resources, establishing a pattern of economic dependency that persists to this day (Bruna, 2022; Greco, 2021; Randriamaro, 2018). The colonial framework required to facilitate the extraction and export of minerals and agricultural products consisted of rudimentary infrastructure and technology. After independence, many African countries attempted to assert control over their resources through nationalisation and resource nationalism. However, these efforts were challenged by the lack of capital, technology, expertise and access to markets, leading to a return to foreign investment, foreign corporations and a reliance on primary commodity exports.

While extractivism also attracts foreign direct investment … it can also lead to exploitation and inequitable wealth distribution, the displacement of indigenous populations, the disruption of traditional livelihoods, and conflicts over land rights and resources …

More recently, the trend of neo-extractivism emerged, characterised by increased state involvement in resource extraction while still accommodating foreign capital. This approach aims to boost local content in extractive industries but often falls short of achieving significant structural transformation within economies (Greco, 2021). A new dimension of the globalised economy known as digital extractivism involves the exploitation of data and digital resources in ways reminiscent of traditional extractive practices (Kannan, 2022).

Extractivism trends in Africa

The literature highlights significant differences in regional resource endowments and extraction practices, with countries in Central, West and Southern Africa being particularly resource-rich. In Southern Africa, the focus is on mineral extraction, with a strong leaning towards state-led development. This approach has largely failed. Nationalisation of the copper industry in Zambia (1969-1990) largely failed due to a combination of economic mismanagement (Larmer, 2006; Libby & Woakes, 1980), external factors and shifts in policy focus. Mozambique has faced issues with foreign investment leading to land grabs and local disenfranchisement due to coal and gas extraction projects (Feijó & Orre, 2024). By contrast, the mining industry in South Africa is entirely privatised, notwithstanding past state interventions in steel and fuel production and power generation. The emphasis in West Africa is on oil and gas extraction through a mix of state-led and private-sector approaches (e.g. in Nigeria, Ghana). East Africa is dominated by oil, gas, gold and uranium extraction, with increased investment in state-led development and regional integration (e.g. in Kenya, Tanzania). Central Africa has vast untapped mineral reserves approximately $30 trillion in value. Its mines are operated in a mix of state-led and private-sector approaches in a complex and politically volatile landscape, particularly in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Republic of the Congo and South Sudan. The DRC has struggled with resource-related conflicts where mining activities have led to environmental degradation and human rights abuses (ROAPE, 2021). The dominance of oil and gas resources prevails in North Africa (Tawfik, 2018) with a strong state-led approach and a focus on export-led growth.

Political economy framework

The political economy influences extractivism through the interaction of political institutions, economic policies and social structures. Key considerations include governance, regulatory frameworks, corruption, international trade relations and the role of multinational corporations. Political institutions, economic policies and social structures significantly influence extractivism in several ways. The colonial legacy has influenced political institutions in Africa, where a higher premium is placed on the interests of foreign powers, foreign investment and corporations than those of the local population (Fofack, 2019; Niang, 2019). Social structures (e.g. traditional leaders) are often co-opted to ensure a pliant workforce, marginalise communities, perpetuate power imbalances that hinder equitable resource distribution and exacerbate social inequalities.

African governments increasingly seek control over their natural resources, driven by a desire for greater economic independence and national benefit. This has led to resource nationalism, wherein states implement policies aimed at maximising local benefits from extraction activities. However, the effectiveness of these policies varies widely. While some countries have made strides in local ownership requirements and procurement policies, others struggle with governance issues that limit the potential benefits of extractivism to the broader society (Copely, 2017; Vandome & Dechambenoit, 2023). In addition, corruption pervades many African extractive sectors, often exacerbated by authoritarian regimes and warlords diverting funds that could otherwise support national development (ACHPR, 2022; Copley, 2017). Post-colonial elites in Africa are not merely co-opted by external interests – they actively participate in facilitating money laundering and illicit financial flows (Bryan & Hofmann, 2007). These elites often leverage their positions to siphon off resource revenues into foreign accounts or investments abroad, thereby perpetuating systems of inequality within their countries.

Understanding how extractivism links with Africa's political economy is a prerequisite for comprehensive policy reforms, which are a critical need. The desired outcomes of such reforms should include increased transparency, community engagement and a shift towards more sustainable and inclusive development models.

Key dimensions of African extractivism

The analysis of the literature highlighted several interconnected dimensions of how extractivism plays out in Africa's political economy. These are briefly discussed below.

Structural dependence on extractive industries

Many African economies' heavy reliance on primary commodities creates vulnerability to fluctuations in global commodity prices, which is exacerbated when these economies have failed to diversify and thus have little resilience to the effects

of declines in key commodity prices. While neo-extractivism reflects a shift towards resource nationalism, wherein governments attempt to reclaim control over natural resources, these policies lack the ambition of earlier socialist efforts to challenge multinational corporations. This results in a modest agenda focused on increasing local content, rather than achieving substantial national control over resources (Bruna, 2022; Greco, 2021). The structural dependence on extractive industries in Africa significantly influences the continent's development trajectory. While these industries should spur economic growth, they often fail to instigate broader economic benefits due to limited industrial processing and value addition (Nhabinde & Heshmati, 2020). Extractive industries frequently operate as enclaves, generating revenue without significantly contributing to local economies or contributing much to local enterprise development and job creation (Addison & Roe, 2024). There are also noteworthy perspectives of Ayuk and Klege (2017) who maintain that despite the potential benefits, many African nations experience what is known as the "resource curse", where abundant natural resources lead to economic instability, corruption and social inequality. Additionally, the reliance on extractive industries creates structural challenges for African economies.

Inadequacies of policy frameworks

Insufficient political backing and competing initiatives from global actors have encouraged a policy vacuum that undermines efforts to regulate extractive industries and promote sustainable and equitable mineral resource management. Robust accountability mechanisms are lacking resulting in existing frameworks frequently relying on voluntary compliance from corporations. Companies operate with minimal oversight, which encourages environmental degradation and social inequalities (Bruna, 2022). Policy reform must facilitate more openness and clarity, more community engagement and the adoption of more sustainable and inclusive development models that can put Africa on the path to economic equity with its trading partners.

A cursory examination of the continent's performance shows the short-sightedness of neo-extractivism. Sub-Saharan Africa sustains the European Union (EU) economy with a substantial proportion of its raw material requirements as well as gold, diamonds and many minerals yet African FDI in Europe is minuscule, due in no small part to domestic protectionism and control of development financing. This accords with the Global North's colonialist preference that Africa's role in the world economy should be confined to being a supplier of raw materials.

This distorted view of Africa's role in the global economy prevails because many of these Sub-Saharan African countries are convinced that without these exports they will sink even deeper into poverty, underdevelopment and instability. To exacerbate the situation, the Sub-Saharan countries do not have the bargaining power that members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) have with regard to oil. Therefore, the EU does not have the same obligation and need to elaborate a policy for Africa. The export of wealth from Africa, rather than its expansion within the continent, was quite apparent at the end of 1997 when nations of the Global North held 68% of the world stock of FDI, compared to Africa's 1.9%.

The tragic disregard of Africa's investment role will only end when the people of Africa embrace the conviction that they are not custodians of First World benevolence, but guardians of their own sustained development.

To find sustainable solutions for poverty, underdevelopment and marginalisation, Africa and the rest of the 'developing' world must move from neocolonial dependence on extractivism to trade with the global community based on value-added products processed from its abundant natural resources. In this regard, a policy environment must be created that allows: (i) the requisite economic measures and policies to be implemented to make domestic and foreign investment into the extractive sector of Africa's economy appealing; (ii) the manufacture and export of value-added products to the markets of high-income countries; and (iii) all products from this value chain to be globally competitive.

In 2006, after attending the inaugural summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (Focac), which marked a significant milestone in the Africa-China relationship, then South African President Thabo Mbeki highlighted the need for Africa to avoid repeating historical colonial patterns where it primarily exported raw materials while importing manufactured goods, frequently made with the same raw materials. Mbeki emphasised the importance of creating a more balanced relationship that would benefit African economies without falling into dependency (Mbeki, 2006; Shelton & Paruk, 2008).

Socio-economic implications for local communities

The benefits from resource extraction do not necessarily translate into improved living conditions for local communities or impact poverty, despite the wealth generated from extractivism (Bruna, 2022). Poverty and extractivism in Africa are deeply intertwined, with the continent's vast natural resources often failing to alleviate poverty for local populations. Instead, extractivism has frequently resulted in environmental degradation, social inequality and economic dependency. The extractivist model often leads to significant environmental degradation (Hamouchene, 2019). For example, large-scale extraction activities such as oil and gas extraction have caused acute ecological crises in North Africa, including soil degradation and water scarcity. These environmental issues exacerbate poverty among rural populations who rely on natural resources for their livelihoods. Even ostensibly environmentally responsible green extractivism, which purports to extract natural resources sustainably, reduce carbon emissions or conserve biodiversity, often results in significant socio-economic costs to local populations in real terms and can

increase poverty by prioritising international climate agendas over local needs (Ayelazuno, 2019; Bruna, 2022). Furthermore, the commodification of natural resources through extractivism reinforces neocolonial hierarchies, where local economies remain subordinate to global market demands (Acosta, n.d.).

Gender impacts of extractivism

According to Pereira and Tsikata (2021a), research gaps that need to be addressed include women's opposition to and African feminists' analyses of extractivism, and their recommendations of anti-capitalist alternatives. African women have mobilised against mining projects and oil extraction through grassroots organisations, protests and community education initiatives. They highlight the interconnectedness of gender, environment and economic justice, emphasising that extractivism not only threatens their livelihoods but also undermines their social structures and cultural identities (Barcia, 2017). Examining the feminist position on extractivism, Daskalaki and Fotaki (2023) note that feminists have used artistic expressions and community gatherings to reclaim space and assert their rights against extractive industries. This approach not only fosters solidarity among women but also challenges traditional notions of gender roles within these movements. To counteract the detrimental effects of extractivism, African feminists advocate stronger legal frameworks to protect women who oppose extractive industries from violence and repression (Barcia, 2017) and community-controlled resource management that emphasises local governance over natural resources (Pereira & Tsikata, 2021b).

In South Africa's mining history, the burden of the health and environmental externalities which impacted communities has often been carried disproportionately by women, and much of this continues today. Among others, Benya (2022) has argued that the impact of industrial mining is still gendered and racialised. This research confirmed that, although extractivism has

focused on the production of resources, it has neglected social production, with specific reference to the exclusion of women in mining.

The impact of technological advancement

Foreign technology companies are not only able to prevent the development of local technological ecosystems but use digital extractivism to extract vast amounts of data from users, without adequate compensation, in ways that mirror the exploitative practices of conventional resource extraction (Jung, 2023; Morozov, 2017.). Not only Western economies are implicated in these practices.[1] Chinese investors control approximately 70% of the DRC's mining sector, particularly in regions rich in copper and cobalt, such as Haut Katanga and Lualaba. This dominance has made the DRC's economy heavily dependent on Chinese extractivism and vulnerable to fluctuations in the Chinese economy (Kinch, 2020). The economic benefits from this mining largely accrue to Chinese companies while the DRC receives minimal returns in terms of infrastructure and royalties (Rakotoseheno, 2024).

Preference for foreign companies

The enduring influence of colonialism on political institutions and elites is evident in the preference given to foreign business interests over those of local companies. The extraction-oriented framework established by foreign powers in the colonial period fostered a dependency on foreign investment and expertise which persists today, as many African countries still rely heavily on multinational corporations to provide FDI and employment and favour them with incentives that are denied to domestic firms (Douglas & Davids, 2023). For instance, South Africa offers tax breaks and other incentives to attract foreign businesses.

Furthermore, many African countries increasingly prefer Chinese companies over their Western counterparts. In 2023, trade between China and Africa reached a record $282 billion (Munyati, 2024). While Chinese investments bring opportunities, critics are concerned about the potential over-exploitation of resources and environmental degradation, fearing that, without proper oversight, these investments might exacerbate local inequalities (Zhang, 2024).

Economic, social and environmental impacts

FDI from extractivism has bolstered national economies and contributed to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth (Huber, 2014), but often fails to translate into local development due to structural and systemic challenges. Over-reliance on natural resource extraction can lead to negative economic outcomes, including stagnation in other sectors like manufacturing and agriculture (Nhabinde & Heshmati, 2020). The socio-economic and environmental impacts of extractivism on local communities are profound and multifaceted, including increasing displacement of people, corruption and socio-economic inequalities (Acosta, n.d.). Among the environmental impacts noted in the literature are mining and drilling damage to marine habitats and loss of biodiversity (Africa Wild, 2021); offshore oil extraction causing oil spills, harming marine life and ecosystems (Ukpene *et al*., 2024); extractive fishing practices depleting fish populations (IUCN, 2017); and sand mining causing coastal erosion and threatening the livelihoods of coastal communities and ecosystems (World Bank, 2019).

More positively, green energy extraction practices and an increased focus on renewable energy sources encourage African governments and companies to increasingly invest in renewable solar, wind and hydroelectric power technologies to reduce reliance on fossil fuels. In addition, the renewable energy sector is poised to create numerous jobs and stimulate economic growth across Africa. For example, it is estimated that renewable energy development could contribute significantly to GDP and create hundreds of thousands of jobs by 2030 (Kestrel Wind, 2023). In the discourse on the green economy, it's important to note, as expressed by Van Staden (2024), that there are several challenges to effective climate collaboration, including differences in national interests, economic disparities and levels of commitment to climate action among countries. Van Staden advocates innovative, flexible approaches to climate collaboration that can accommodate diverse national circumstances and priorities and give agency to local actions and initiatives addressing climate change.

Contradictions

New forms of extractivism, like neo-extractivism and green extractivism, bear similar contradictions to their colonial predecessors. For example, green extractivism includes the extraction of minerals and metals for green technologies, such as lithium for batteries and materials for renewable energy infrastructure (Hotz, 2022). While marketed as part of a transition to a green economy, this form of green extractivism can perpetuate exploitation and environmental degradation. Bruna (2022) argues that its rise is heavily influenced by financialisation, where investments in green projects lead to increased capital accumulation at the expense of local communities. In Mozambique, for example, climate-smart projects have resulted in significant rural displacement without adequate compensation. Furthermore, the irony has not escaped scholars and activists that African resources are extracted and beneficiated in processes and products that contribute to global warming and climate change

consequences in Africa such as drought, flooding and desertification, for which the extractive economies refuse to acknowledge responsibility or any right to compensation.

Alternative models to conventional extractivism

Alternative models to conventional extractivism in Africa are emerging as responses to the limitations and negative impacts of extractive practices. These alternatives prioritise sustainability, social equity and environmental protection over profits, aiming to create a more equitable and resilient economic framework.

Sustainable mining-agriculture linkages

Extractive companies can support agricultural development in regions where they operate. By fostering connections between mining and agriculture, companies can enhance local economies by supporting farmer-based organisations and agricultural initiatives and generating employment opportunities beyond the mining sector (Chakanya *et al*., 2016). The literature indicates that communities engaged in sustainable farming report higher local employment levels compared to those reliant on mining activities that often prioritise capital over labour. In areas dominated by extractivism, such as South Africa's coal belt, food security initiatives like organic vegetable farms have demonstrated the potential for self-sufficiency and improved nutritional outcomes. Renewable energy companies have encouraged the exploitation of renewable energy sources for agricultural activities rather than fossil fuels. Community-owned renewable energy projects will support agricultural productivity and reduce the carbon footprint of mining operations, aligning both with broader climate goals (Pier, 2023).

Feminist alternatives

Randriamaro (2018) has mooted alternative models emphasising a feminist perspective on social justice and gender equity. This approach critiques traditional extractivism for exacerbating inequalities and the hidden costs of extractivism that disproportionately affect women and vulnerable populations. Two promising, women-focused alternatives to conventional extractivism noted in the literature are the WoMin African Alliance, which works with local women in countries such as South Africa, Kenya and Nigeria to resist harmful mining practices and promote eco-feminist alternatives that prioritise community needs over corporate interests; and the community initiatives in Somkhele and Fuleni in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, where women have not only organised against coal mining activities that threaten their water sources and agricultural land but have developed alternative livelihood strategies that focus on sustainable agriculture and food security (AWID, 2017).

Community-based resource management

Community-based resource management (CBRM) is an alternative model that prioritises sustainability and emphasises accountable local decision-making bodies that are representative of community interests and support sustainable use of natural resources to allow communities to manage and benefit from their resources**.** Community-based natural resource management aims to empower local communities by assigning them rights over natural resources such as water, forests and wildlife. This model promotes sustainable use practices to ensure that communities can derive long-term economic benefits from resource management (Roe, Nelson & Sandbrook, 2009).

Conclusion

While extractivism remains a dominant feature of many African economies, its historical roots and contemporary manifestations reveal a complex interplay between local agency, global capital interests and socio-environmental challenges. Extractivism presents opportunities for economic growth in Africa, but it also poses significant challenges related to social justice, environmental sustainability and governance. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing policies that balance resource extraction with the needs and rights of local communities. The emergence of green extractivism illustrates a complex correlation between economic development goals and environmental sustainability in Africa. While framed as part of a green economy transition, it often exacerbates existing inequalities and environmental challenges rather than resolving them. Addressing these contradictions requires robust policy frameworks that prioritise local rights and sustainable practices over mere capital accumulation.

As Africa continues to navigate the complexities of extractive industries, it is important to place a high premium on transparency, accountability and inclusive governance. By leveraging regional cooperation, innovative policies and global participation, Africa can unlock the opportunities presented by its natural resources and transform extractivism into a catalyst for sustainable and equitable development. Ultimately, the future of extractivism in Africa depends on striking a fine balance between economic growth, social and environmental stewardship, and technological advancement. By purging its extractive industries of destructive colonial legacies and exploring alternative models based on careful management and a commitment to responsible practices, Africa can harness its extractive sector to fuel a brighter future for generations to come.

The gaps in understanding how extractivism links with Africa's political economy highlight a critical need for comprehensive policy reforms. Addressing these gaps requires a broad approach that entails policy reforms, increased transparency, community engagement and a shift towards more sustainable and inclusive development models. Dealing with these oversights will not only contribute to a deeper understanding of this phenomenon but also foster sustainable development across the continent.

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ENDNOTES

[1] This is illustrated by the global supply chain of a cell phone as explained in Webb (2022). The material composition of a smartphone is: 25% silicon, 23% plastic, 20% iron, 14%, aluminium, 7% copper and 6% lead. The extractive side of the manufacturing process is from mines with poor environmental and safety records, and are linked to armed conflicts and next to no protection. Webb notes that there have been ongoing conflicts in the DRC, related to various minerals. Mining in the DRC is also characterised by labour rights violations such as child labour and forced labour as well as bribery and corruption at a governmental level. A standard smartphone consists of several components each with its own value chains under problematic conditions.

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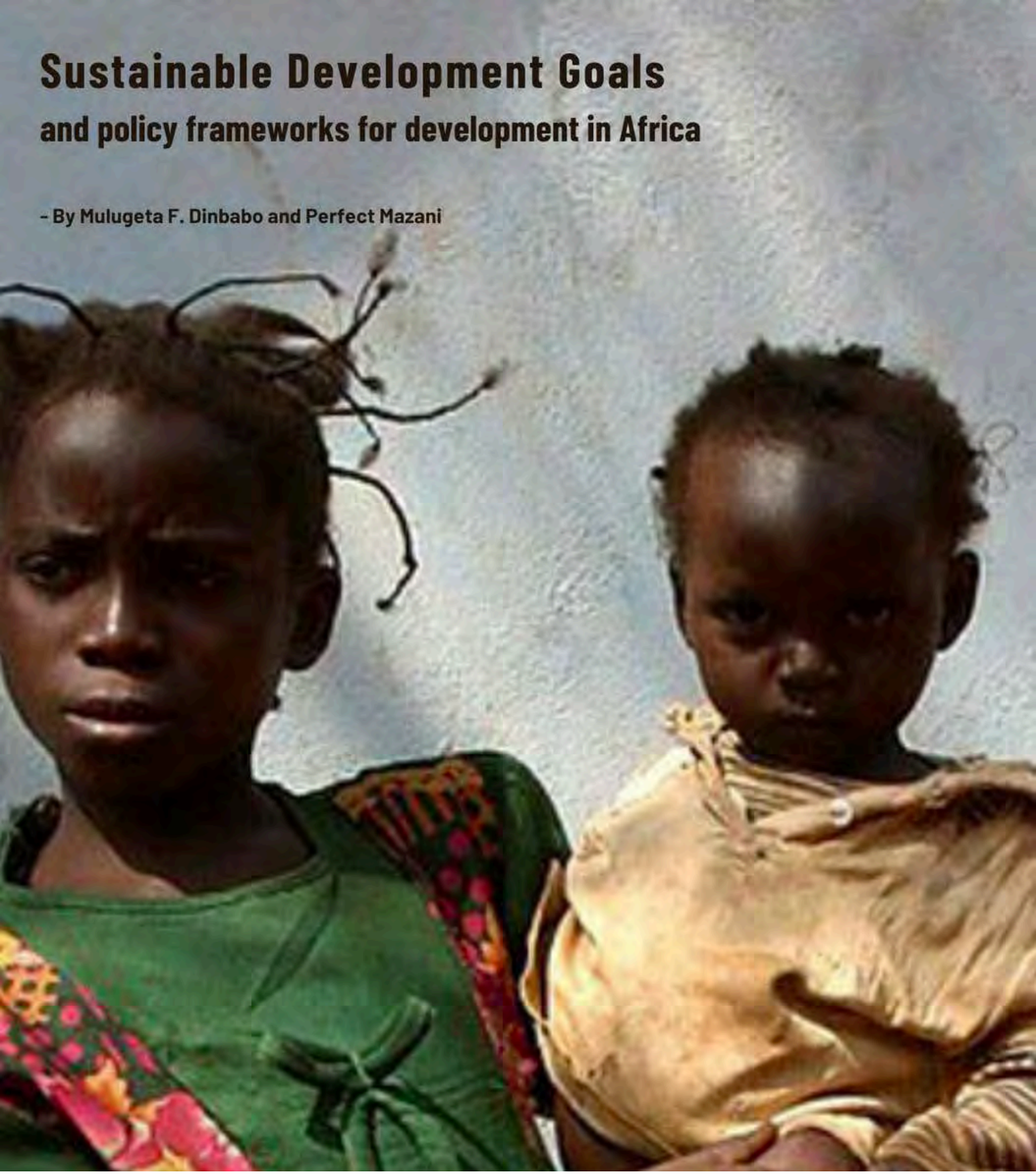
Sustainable Development Goals

and policy frameworks for development in Africa

- By Mulugeta F. Dinbabo and Perfect Mazani



The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer a comprehensive path for Africa to achieve its goals to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all by 2030. But first the continent has to address the challenges associated with institutional capacity gaps, lack of political will and the need to build international alliances. MULUGETA DINBABO and PERFECT MAZANI also emphasise the importance of effective monitoring and evaluation systems to track success, ensure accountability and promote adaptive policy approaches.

Sustainable Development Goals and policy frameworks for development in Africa

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Abstract

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a universal call to action adopted by all UN member states in 2015, aiming to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all by 2030. The SDGs promote inclusive development through sustainable economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection. Using secondary data analysis, this paper investigates the opportunities and challenges associated with the SDGs, examining how national policies connect with them and evaluating the implementation of relevant treaties and conventions. Key findings highlight institutional capacity gaps, the impact of political will and the importance of international alliances in achieving the SDGs. The study also emphasises the need for effective monitoring and evaluation systems to track success, ensure accountability and promote adaptive policy approaches. These findings contribute to the discourse on sustainable development and offer a roadmap for policy-makers and organisations committed to advancing sustainable development across Africa.

Key words

Africa, development, goals, monitoring, sustainability.

Introduction

Africa faces unique opportunities and challenges in development, reflected in the transformative Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) policy framework aimed at supporting equitable and sustainable global development (Nhamo, Dube & Chikodzi, 2020; Phakathi, 2019; Ufomba, 2020; Vhumbunu, 2022; Dinbabo, 2024; Dinbabo, 2003; Adeniyi and Dinbabo, 2019). Endorsed by all UN member states in 2015, the 17 SDGs address issues such as gender equality, environmental sustainability, poverty and hunger by 2030 (Dinbabo & Badewa, 2020; Efretuei, 2007; Hegertun & Mæstad, 2023; Maluwa, 2020; Mangala, 2016; Dugarova & Gulasan, 2017). International treaties provide the legal framework for implementing the SDGs in Africa, facilitating collaboration, resource mobilisation and policy alignment. For instance, the Maputo Protocol advances Goal 5 (gender equality), while the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement supports Goal 8 (decent work). Additionally, the Paris Agreement promotes Goal 13 (climate action) by encouraging sustainable environmental policies and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) directly supports Goal 15 (life on land) through sustainable land management (Byron-Cox, 2020).

Africa can tackle structural issues like hunger (Goal 1), access to quality education (Goal 4), clean water (Goal 6) and other essential needs through international accords (Mugagga & Nabaasa, 2016; Mballa, 2022). Goal 17 (partnerships for the goals) is reflected in the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad), emphasising global and regional collaboration for sustainable development (Efretuei, 2007). The SDGs framework offers a comprehensive path for Africa to achieve its goals, backed by treaties ensuring inclusivity (Miriti, 2022). However, Africa's diverse socio-economic and political landscapes pose challenges (Mballa, 2022). This study evaluates the integration of SDGs into policies, their alignment with development plans such as Agenda 2063 and offers recommendations for improving SDG implementation, aiming for a sustainable and equitable future for Africa.

The following section outlines the study's methodology, followed by an explanation of its background and contextual information. Additionally, a review of relevant literature is presented. The results and analysis of findings related to the SDGs, policy frameworks, and treaties and conventions for development in Africa are then examined. The study concludes with key findings, along with conclusions and recommendations.

Methodological approach

The study utilised a secondary data analysis approach to examine the SDGs, including reports, policy documents, official publications and academic research sourced from reputable global and regional organisations. This method enabled a comprehensive understanding of existing initiatives, aligning global targets such as the SDGs with Africa-specific frameworks such as Agenda 2063 and the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP). The analysis also focused on synthesising data from diverse sources to explore how African countries integrate these frameworks into their national and regional policies. Treaties and conventions such as the Paris Agreement, African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the Bamako Convention were critically examined for their role in guiding Africa's sustainable development. The study aimed to identify patterns, challenges and areas of synergy between global and continental goals. This methodological approach provided a holistic view of how African countries are navigating development challenges while contributing to global sustainability efforts, offering insights into policy integration and implementation across the continent.

Background and contextualisation

The comprehensive, global agenda known as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) policy framework, that aims to eradicate poverty, protect the environment, and guarantee peace and prosperity for all by the year 2030 (Arora & Mishra, 2022; Bali Swain & Yang-Wallentin, 2020; Colglazier, 2015; Fukuda-Parr, 2016; Hák, Janoušková & Moldan, 2016; Miriti, 2022), builds on the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (UN, 2015). In addition, it covers new areas such as climate change, economic inequality, innovation, sustainable consumption, peace and justice, and other crucial priorities.

The MDGs and their impact

The eight MDGs, established in 2000, aimed to ensure environmental sustainability, promote gender equality, reduce poverty and improve health and education by 2015 (Kabiru & Batsari, 2020). The MDGs were transformative, uniting global efforts around shared development goals and achieving significant successes, such as halving global poverty, increasing school attendance and reducing child mortality and diseases such as malaria and HIV/AIDS (UN, 2015). They also provided a framework for accountability and monitoring (Kumar, Kumar & Vivekadhish, 2016; Lomazzi, Borisch & Laaser, 2014). However, the MDGs had limitations, mainly focusing on issues pertinent to developed nations, and neglecting areas like sustainable production, climate change and economic inequality in poorer countries (Sachs, 2012). Critics highlighted their narrow scope, failure to address root causes of poverty and inequality, and lack of integration of environmental, social and economic development facets (Servaes, 2021). Additionally, human rights and governance issues, key to reducing inequality, were overlooked (Fukuda-Parr, 2016).

Transitioning from MDGs to SDGs

After 2015, recognising the limitations of the MDGs, the international community developed the more inclusive and comprehensive SDGs (Mabuza & Mabuza, 2020). Unlike the MDGs, the SDGs apply to all nations, addressing global challenges such as climate change, inequality and sustainable development through coordinated international actions (UN, 2015). The SDGs cover a broader range of topics, including resource management, innovation and climate action, integrating social, economic and environmental objectives (Bali Swain & Yang-Wallentin, 2020; Fukuda-Parr, 2016). However, implementing the SDGs is complicated by the need to integrate diverse policies across sectors and regions, requiring stakeholder engagement and adaptive governance (Bali Swain & Yang-Wallentin, 2020). By integrating these frameworks and focusing on inclusivity, the SDGs can support equitable and resilient development across regions (Bonsu, TyreeHageman & Kele, 2020). The table below provides a summary of the SDGs.

Table 1 Summary of the SDGs

SDG Number	*SDG Description*
Goal 1	No poverty
Goal 2	Zero hunger
Goal 3	Good health and well-being
Goal 4	Quality education
Goal 5	Gender equality
Goal 6	Clean water and sanitation
Goal 7	Affordable and clean energy
Goal 8	Decent work and economic growth
Goal 9	Industry, innovation and infrastructure
Goal 10	Reduced inequalities
Goal 11	Sustainable cities and communities
Goal 12	Responsible consumption and production
Goal 13	Climate action
Goal 14	Life below water
Goal 15	Life on land
Goal 16	Peace, justice and strong institutions
Goal 17	Partnerships for the goals

Source: Authors' compilation (2024)

Evolution of sustainable development

A vast body of literature exists on community-based organisations (CBOs) in both developed and developing countries, including research on the SDGs (Arora & Mishra, 2022; Bali Swain & Yang-Wallentin, 2020; Colglazier, 2015; Esquivel, 2016; Fukuda-Parr, 2016; Hák, Janoušková & Moldan, 2016; Miriti, 2022), policy frameworks (AUC, 2018; Bolarinwa, 2015; Dinbabo & Badewa, 2020; Mangala, 2016; Phakathi, 2019) and treaties and conventions for African development (De Feyter, 2022; Erinosho, 2013; Hajian & Kashani, 2021; Maluwa, 2020; Sáez de Cámara *et al*., 2021; Xiang & Maïnkade, 2023). The concept of sustainable development has evolved significantly. Prior to 1972, it focused on conservation and responsible resource use (Kirkby, O'Keefe & Timberlake, 2023), with little international coordination. The 1972 Stockholm Conference marked a pivotal moment, leading to the Stockholm Declaration on environmental conservation and economic progress (Atapattu, 2022).

The evolution of sustainable development (see Table 2) underscores the interdependence of economic growth, environmental health and social equity (Hall, Gössling & Scott, 2015). Initially emphasised at the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment, it gained traction through the Brundtland Report of 1987, defining sustainable development as meeting present needs without compromising future generations (Grosseck, Țîru & Bran, 2019). Global initiatives like the

SDGs address issues such as poverty and climate change (Popkova, Sergi & Bogoviz, 2023), with a shift toward a holistic approach that includes economic growth and social inclusion (Shi *et al*., 2019). Table 2 shows the evolution of sustainable development initiatives.

Table 2: Evolution of sustainable development initiatives

Period/Initiative	*Key Global Event*	*Description*
The Embryonic Period (before 1972)	Early environmental awareness	Initial recognition of environmental issues and industrial impact but no global coordination.
The Molding Period (1972–1987)	1972: United Nations Conference on the Human Environment	Known as the Stockholm Conference, this event established the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and marked the beginning of global dialogue.
	1987: Publication of "Our Common Future"	The Brundtland Commission's report introduced the term "sustainable development" and laid the foundation for global sustainability efforts.
The Developing Period (1987– present)	1992: United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio Earth Summit)	Focus on sustainable development with the adoption of Agenda 21, Rio Declaration and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.
	2000: United Nations Millennium Summit	Established the MDGs, which targeted poverty, education, gender equality and environmental sustainability.
	2015: United Nations Sustainable Development Summit	Introduced the SDGs, expanding the MDGs to 17 goals with a 2030 target, focusing on global sustainability and development.

Source: Authors' compilation (2024)

Before 1972, sustainable development was not a recognised research or policy focus (Ruggerio, 2021). Global attention centred on economic growth with little concern for environmental sustainability or social equity. However, as the adverse effects of industrialisation became evident, the need for sustainable practices gained attention. The 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm was pivotal, resulting in the Stockholm Declaration, which called for balancing economic progress with environmental protection. The 1987 Brundtland Report laid the foundation for the 1992 Earth Summit, which produced Agenda 21 and the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). The MDGs followed in 2000, addressing global issues like poverty and environmental sustainability. Sachs (2012) highlights the SDGs' broader, more integrated approach compared to the MDGs, emphasising inclusive and sustainable development (Esquivel, 2016; Fukuda-Parr, 2016).

African continental-level initiatives

Africa's development agenda is increasingly shaped by a combination of continental initiatives and global frameworks such as the SDGs (DeGhetto, Gray & Kiggundu, 2016; Dinbabo & Badewa, 2020; Efretuei, 2007; Mugagga & Nabaasa, 2016). Agenda 2063, the African Union's (AU's) strategic framework, aims for political unity and sustainable growth by 2063. Supporting policies include the African Mining Vision (AMV) for sustainable resource use and the CAADP for food security. Treaties like the Paris Agreement and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights reinforce these efforts (Hegertun & Mæstad, 2023; Maluwa, 2020; Mangala, 2016; Mballa, 2022; Mugagga & Nabaasa, 2016; Phakathi, 2019; Ufomba, 2020; Vhumbunu, 2022)

Table 3: Major policy frameworks, treaties, conventions and programmes in Africa

Policy Frameworks (Africa-specific)	
Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want	The AU's 50-year development plan for inclusive growth and sustainable development.
Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP)	Africa's agriculture policy to promote food security, nutrition and wealth creation.
Malabo Declaration (2014)	Focuses on accelerated agricultural growth, transformation and climate resilience.
Africa Green Stimulus Programme	Focuses on green economic recovery post-Covid-19, renewable energy and biodiversity conservation.
Treaties and Conventions (Africa-specific and global)	
African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981)	Also known as the Banjul Charter, this ensures the promotion and protection of human rights across Africa.
Maputo Protocol (2003)	An extension of the African Charter, focused on women's rights and gender equality in Africa.
Lomé Convention (1975-2000)	A trade and development agreement between the European Union and African, Caribbean and Pacific countries.
Abuja Treaty (1991)	Established the African Economic Community (AEC), promoting economic integration and regional trade.
AU Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption (2003)	A legal framework designed to fight corruption across the African continent.
African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (revised 2003)	Aims to promote sustainable use of natural resources and address environmental challenges.
Bamako Convention (1991)	Prevents the import of hazardous waste into Africa, protecting the environment from industrial pollutants.
Paris Agreement (2015)	A global agreement to tackle climate change by limiting global warming to well below 2°C.
United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)	Targets desertification, land degradation and promotes sustainable land management in African countries.

Source: Authors' compilation (2024)

Reconciling African Agenda 2063, Global Agenda 2030 and SDGs

Africa's long-term development is guided by two frameworks: the United Nations' 2030 Global Agenda for SDGs and the AU's Agenda 2063 (Mugagga & Nabaasa, 2016). Although their timelines and goals differ, both frameworks aim to promote sustainable development. Agenda 2063 is a 50-year vision focusing on inclusive growth, political stability and regional integration, while the SDGs provide a global framework to be achieved by 2030. DeGhetto, Gray and Kiggundu (2016) highlight the ambitious goals of Agenda 2063 and the challenges of implementing such a broad framework across Africa's diverse geography, stressing the need for good governance and regional cooperation.

To ensure that achieving one set of goals does not hinder another, the AU has worked to align Agenda 2063 with the SDGs (Dinbabo & Badewa, 2020; Hegertun & Mæstad, 2023; Maluwa, 2020).

Recognising the overlaps between the two frameworks, the AU formulated other measures such as the Continental Results Framework for Women (African Union, 2024) and the Continental Framework for Youth (African Union, 2020) among other initiatives to integrate the SDGs with Agenda 2063. In order to mobilise resources, coordinate policies and form alliances necessary to accomplish both agendas, it is imperative that this framework be used to evaluate progress and ensure coherence in execution. This framework is essential for mobilising resources, coordinating policies and forming alliances necessary to achieve both agendas.

Bentley and Pugalis (2014) challenge conventional wisdom in regional development and make the case for more inclusive, people-focused tactics. In Africa, remittances are crucial for enhancing household income, alleviating poverty and bolstering sectors such as education, health and gender equality. These financial flows drive sustainable economic progress, promote entrepreneurship and improve financial inclusion, collectively supporting the achievement of numerous SDGs across the continent (Akanle, Kayode & Abolade, 2022).

According to Bentley and Pugalis (2014), development initiatives that are successful must have their roots in local contexts and be directed by the goals and requirements of the communities they affect. Agenda 2063's objectives, which highlight the value of community involvement and local ownership in the development process, align with this point of view.

A lack of funding, unstable political environments and weak institutional capacity are significant obstacles Africa must overcome to effectively align and implement Agenda 2063 and the SDGs. Swain (2018) notes that these political and practical issues also affect Agenda 2063's implementation. Overcoming these challenges will require creative thinking, strong collaborations and persistent dedication from all stakeholders (Mballa, 2022; Mugagga & Nabaasa, 2016; Phakathi, 2019). Additionally, Kumar, Kumar and Vivekadhish (2016) stress the importance of addressing unresolved issues from the MDGs and strengthening partnerships to ensure the SDGs lead to meaningful, lasting improvements in people's lives. This perspective is especially relevant in Africa, where achieving sustainable development remains a critical necessity.

Achieving Africa's long-term SDGs will require continued collaboration, innovation and resilience ...

Implementation of Agenda 2063

A number of strategic programmes and activities aimed at converting Agenda 2063's goals into concrete results have served as a roadmap for its execution (Chevallier and Chesterman, 2022). A 10-year implementation plan that covers important sectors such as infrastructure, education, health and industrialisation and includes specific goals and projects has been established by the AU (Chevallier and Chesterman, 2022; Ufomba, 2020; Vhumbunu, 2022). The implementation of the agenda at both national and local levels by various AU institutions and regional groups is essential for its success. For instance, the African Development Bank (AfDB) plays a key role in financing infrastructure projects that align with the goals of Agenda 2063. A notable example is the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA), which seeks to enhance regional integration and cross-border connectivity (Ufomba, 2020). Notwithstanding these initiatives, there are still difficulties in turning Agenda 2063's lofty objectives into reality. Effective implementation is frequently hampered by problems such as insufficient money, unstable political environments and institutional capacity limitations (Hegertun & Maestad, 2023; Mugagga & Nabaasa, 2016). In order to gather resources and technical know-how, the AU has worked to fortify its alliances with global organisations, businesses and civil society.

Efforts to further strengthen abilities to implement Agenda 2063

Several steps have been taken to increase the continent's capacity to support the execution of Agenda 2063. One noteworthy initiative to improve monitoring and evaluation systems to track progress and pinpoint implementation shortcomings is the creation of the AU's Continental Results Framework (Dinbabo & Badewa, 2020; Mballa, 2022; Ufomba, 2020; Vhumbunu, 2022). To further promote accountability and good governance among member states -- both essential for the effective implementation of Agenda 2063 -- the AU has also created the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) (Froehlich, Ringas & Wilson, 2020). Enhancing the administrative and technical capacities of national governments and regional organisations has been the focus of capacity-building projects. This comprises educational initiatives, venues for exchanging

expertise and mechanisms for regional cooperation created to improve the manpower and resources available to carry out the projects and policies of Agenda 2063.

Progress on the fast track/flagship programmes and projects (2063)

Agenda 2063 includes transformative initiatives such as the Great Inga Dam, the African Virtual and E-University and the African Integrated High-Speed Railway Network (Deel-Smith, 2022). Notable progress has been made, particularly with the ongoing design and construction of key rail corridors in the High-Speed Railway Network, aimed at enhancing trade and communication. Similarly, the Great Inga Dam project, which seeks to harness the Congo River's hydropower, has advanced through feasibility studies and initial construction stages (Eyita-Okon, 2020). However, these projects face challenges such as political instability, regulatory hurdles, funding shortages and environmental concerns.

Although Agenda 2063 and the SDGs offer strong frameworks for Africa's development, challenges in implementation, institutional capacity and alignment with global frameworks remain (Hegertun & Mæstad, 2023). Achieving Africa's long-term SDGs will require continued collaboration, innovation and resilience, as evidenced by progress in these flagship projects and their strategic alignment with the SDGs.

Monitoring of SDGs new trends, progress and challenges

Trends in SDG monitoring

Current trends in tracking the SDGs show how innovation and technology can transform data collection and analysis, improving both its accuracy and scope. A significant advancement in this field is the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and big data into monitoring frameworks. AI-driven methods are now regularly used to analyze large datasets from various sources, offering real-time insights into multiple SDG metrics (Dinbabo & Badewa, 2020). This technological shift greatly enhances the ability to track SDG progress and make data-driven decisions.

Another key trend is the growing importance of disaggregated data to ensure inclusive and representative progress, especially for marginalised populations. This focus has led to advancements in data collection techniques that provide more granular insights based on gender, age, income and other socio- demographic factors. Disaggregated data helps identify disparities that aggregate statistics might overlook and informs targeted interventions to address these inequalities (UN, 2019; DeGhetto, Gray & Kiggundu, 2016; Phakathi, 2019; Vhumbunu, 2022). For example, new initiatives are gathering gender-specific data on health outcomes and education levels to ensure equitable progress across all sectors.

The rise of citizen-generated data is also reshaping SDG monitoring. With the growing use of digital platforms and mobile technologies, individuals and communities can now contribute data on local issues, fostering grassroots engagement and offering new insights into development outcomes. Crowd-sourced data platforms, for instance, are collecting information on healthcare access and water quality, complementing official statistics and providing a more comprehensive view of development challenges and successes (Elvidge *et al.*, 2020; Chevallier & Chesterman, 2022; Fukuda-Parr, 2016).

There is a movement toward integrating SDG monitoring into regional and national development frameworks. Many countries and regions are aligning the SDGs with their national budgets and policy frameworks, ensuring that local priorities correspond with global commitments. The AU, for example, has developed regional monitoring frameworks that emphasise localised approaches to achieving global goals (UNECA, 2014).

The use of big data and AI in SDG monitoring offers an additional benefit by creating a comprehensive framework that captures the full range of social, economic and environmental variables influencing the progress of the SDGs, as emphasised by Teh and Rana (2023). The comprehensive approach is vital for attaining objectives such as life on land (Goal 15) and climate action (Goal 13), with geospatial data and satellite imagery playing crucial roles as key sources of information. Additionally, AI can be utilised to analyse social media sentiment, providing valuable insights into public opinion on progress toward Goals 1, 4 and 5, which cover poverty, education and gender equality.

The private sector plays a crucial role in maintaining and achieving the SDGs. Businesses are increasingly leveraging technology to monitor their contributions to sustainable development and align their corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts with the SDGs. For example, consumer goods companies are using blockchain technology to ensure sustainable sourcing and reduce their carbon footprints, while tech companies such as Google and Microsoft are developing AI-driven solutions for environmental sustainability. Despite these advancements, significant challenges remain in effectively tracking SDG progress. Data gaps, particularly in low- income countries, continue to hinder accurate monitoring. Many of these nations lack the infrastructure and technical capabilities to collect and process the data required for SDG indicators, particularly in critical areas such as health (Goal 3) and education (Goal 4), where reliable data is essential for informed decision-making.

A comprehensive approach must consider the trade-offs and synergies between different SDGs. Pradhan *et al*. (2017) highlight the challenges in achieving the SDGs and the importance of balancing environmental sustainability (Goals 13, 14 and 15) with economic growth (Goal 8) to avoid unintended consequences. Effective monitoring and implementation also require collaboration across local, national and international levels, as noted by Kanie *et al*. (2017), who emphasise the need for multi-level governance to ensure accountability and transparency. To tackle these challenges, the international community has emphasised capacity-building initiatives (Boakye & Dinbabo, 2021; Adeniyi & Dinbabo, 2019). Programmes like the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data (GPSDD) support developing nations in strengthening their data collection and analysis capabilities, facilitating more effective monitoring of SDG progress (Dinbabo, 2003; Dinbabo, 2024). Additionally, technology companies contribute expertise and resources to improve data quality and accessibility through public-private partnerships, which play a crucial role in bridging data gaps.

Progress in SDG monitoring

The creation of international structures has advanced SDG monitoring. The Global Indicator Framework, developed by the United Nations Statistical Commission with over 230 indicators, provides a standardised method for assessing development across nations (Dinbabo & Badewa, 2020; Chevallier & Chesterman, 2022; Fukuda-Parr, 2016; UNSD, 2021). This framework enhances reporting consistency and comparability, facilitating more accurate evaluations of both national and international progress. Policy-makers benefit from detailed reports on SDG progress. Moreover, some nations have established national SDG frameworks that adapt to local conditions while aligning with international norms. These frameworks often include national metrics that reflect local aims and concerns. For example, the EU has implemented a comprehensive monitoring system that integrates national statistics and EU-specific indicators to provide a view of regional progress (Eurostat, 2021). This approach ensures that SDG policies and actions are more relevant and effective.

Notable advancements have also been made in improving the quality and accessibility of data (Fukuda Parr, 2016; UNSD, 2021; Ufomba, 2020). Initiatives to upgrade statistical infrastructure and fund data collection methods have produced better and more thorough data on various SDG indicators. For example, enhanced data collection techniques and increased financing for national statistical offices have led to more timely and reliable reporting on indicators like educational attainment and poverty rates (UNSD, 2020). These advancements support more efficient policy-making and targeted interventions. Furthermore, SDG monitoring has advanced significantly due to multinational alliances and collaborations. Global partnerships, like the GPSDD, unite governments, NGOs and private sector players to enhance data infrastructures and exchange optimal methodologies (GPSDD, 2021). These partnerships foster innovative approaches to tracking and achieving the SDGs while strengthening capacity-building initiatives.

Challenges in SDG monitoring

The availability and quality of data remain significant obstacles in monitoring the SDGs (Dinbabo & Badewa, 2020). Low-income and developing nations struggle with accurate data collection due to limited resources, inadequate infrastructure and insufficient technical expertise. This data gap hampers effective progress monitoring and informed decision-making, particularly in health and education sectors in sub-Saharan Africa (UNSD, 2020). Addressing these challenges requires substantial investments in capacity-building and statistical systems. Additionally, measuring success concerning the interrelated SDGs is complicated. The broad focus of the goals on social, economic and environmental issues makes tracking overall progress difficult. For instance, while income data can monitor progress toward Goal 1 (reducing poverty), evaluating its effects on education (Goal 4) and climate action (Goal 13) poses challenges (Sachs *et al*., 2019). Thus, integrated monitoring strategies are essential. The Covid-19 pandemic worsened these monitoring difficulties by disrupting

data collection and diverting resources from sustainable development initiatives. Delays in surveys and censuses have hindered progress tracking and assessments of the pandemic's impact on various SDGs (UN, 2021). This highlights the need for resilient data systems capable of withstanding international crises. Concerns exist regarding current monitoring systems' ability to adapt to new challenges. Thus, continuous improvements are required for monitoring frameworks to remain relevant and effective in tracking SDG progress (Dinbabo & Badewa, 2020; Efretuei, 2007; Hegertun & Mæstad, 2023; UN, 2021).

Conclusion and recommendations

The SDGs and various policy frameworks play a crucial role in guiding Africa's sustainable development (Chevallier & Chesterman, 2022; DeGhetto, Gray & Kiggundu, 2016; Dinbabo & Badewa, 2020; Efretuei, 2007; Hegertun & Mæstad, 2023; Phakathi, 2019; Ufomba, 2020; Vhumbunu, 2022). The integration of SDGs into frameworks such as Agenda 2063 reflects the continent's commitment to addressing poverty, inequality and environmental degradation. Treaties such as the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the Paris Agreement provide legal frameworks that enhance human rights and environmental protections (Mballa, 2022; Ufomba, 2020; Chevallier & Chesterman, 2022; Fukuda-Parr, 2016), fostering cooperation to tackle climate change and resource management. This synergy between the SDGs and African initiatives emphasises partnerships, innovation and sustainable practices, crucial for long-term resilience and prosperity. Recent technical advancements and improved data availability have facilitated progress in monitoring the SDGs, but challenges like data gaps, interrelated objectives and disruptions from crises such as Covid-19 limit effectiveness. Addressing these issues is vital to ensure SDG fulfilment as the world approaches 2030. The following recommendations aim to enhance policy implementation in Africa.

- *Strengthen data infrastructure and capacity*: Enhancing data availability, quality and collection requires investments in statistical infrastructure, especially in developing and low-income nations. Improving technical proficiency, updating data-gathering methods and guaranteeing national statistical offices have the means to generate precise and timely reports are all part of this. Building these capacities can be greatly aided by partnerships and support from international organisations (UNSD, 2020).
- *Develop integrated monitoring approaches*: It is critical to create comprehensive monitoring frameworks that consider the inherent interconnectivity of the SDGs in order to meet the challenge of gauging progress towards them. To facilitate a more thorough understanding of how progress in one area affects others, this entails developing tools that can track and analyse the interdependencies across various goals (Sachs *et al*., 2019). Using integrated methods will aid in the creation of interventions and policies that are more successful.
- *Enhance resilience of monitoring systems*: Resilient monitoring systems that can resist disturbances from around the world are essential, as demonstrated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Building adaptable data-gathering systems that can keep up with changing circumstances and guarantee the continuation of monitoring operations should be a priority. This entails using technology to facilitate data collecting from a distance and continuing data collection efforts in the face of major obstacles (UN, 2021).
- *Promote greater inclusivity and participation*: Extensive stakeholder engagement in the monitoring process can improve data relevance and accuracy, including civil society, local communities and the commercial sector. According to Elvidge *et al.* (2020), monitoring initiatives can be made more inclusive and representative of all population segments by utilising participatory methodologies and citizen-generated data, which can offer extra insights into local conditions and requirements. Enhancing responsibility and ownership of sustainable development projects is another benefit of this involvement.

Conclusively, despite notable advancements in the SDG monitoring domain, sustained endeavours are imperative to surmount current obstacles and adjust to a dynamic worldwide terrain. Stakeholders may assist the accomplishment of global sustainability goals and increase the efficacy of SDG monitoring by fostering inclusivity, building integrated monitoring methodologies, fortifying data infrastructure and improving system resilience.

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Ben Turok Memorial Lecture 2024

Face climate crisis with courage, creativity, compassion – Kumi Naidoo

- By Moira Levy

The president of the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative, Dr Kumi Naidoo, issued a challenging call on civil society, and the broad global left to urgently change its thinking and dialogue if we are to avert a climate and human rights catastrophe.

Presenting the Ben Turok Memorial Lecture in Cape Town he said the world is "on a suicidal trajectory" and spoke about the need to revive a new spirit and language for civil society activism.

Introduction

The world no longer has the time to indulge in pessimism or denialism as we get ever closer to the climate crisis cliff, and the urgent task at hand is to revise -- and revitalise -- the thinking of activists, academics and leftists world-wide who have taken on the responsibility of being changemakers in pursuit of a more just global order. This was the challenge thrown out to the civil society community by decades-long human rights and climate justice activist, Dr Kumi Naidoo, who delivered the fourth Ben Turok Memorial Lecture in Cape Town on 9 December 2024 on the anniversary of Turok's passing in 2019.

Speaking at the Desmond and Leah Tutu Foundation offices in Cape Town, Naidoo said: "In this moment in history, pessimism is a luxury we simply cannot afford. The pessimism that justifiably emerges from our analysis, our lived experience and our observations can, must and should be responded to by the optimism of our thoughts, our actions, our courage, our creativity, our compassion and our sense of humanity.

"How can we speak truth to power, but do it in a way that does not demotivate and depress and immobilise people? We have to find the correct balance between not sanitising the fact that humanity is in a fundamentally deep crisis on the one hand, and on the other hand, doing it in a way that seeks to galvanise and mobilise rather than contribute to despair."

The Ben Turok Memorial Lecture is held annually by the Institute for African Alternatives (IFAA), which was founded by the late Prof Turok in the 1980s and that he led as its Director until his passing in 2019. The Lecture is held in partnership with the Institute for Social Development (ISD) at the University of the Western Cape (UWC).

Naidoo said the lecture, titled "Reimaging Activism: Mobilising for Justice in a Fractured World", came at a moment of "ultra-fluidity", which he suggested created opportunities for doing things differently.

Naidoo was former International Executive Director of Greenpeace International (2009-2015) and Secretary General of Amnesty International (2018-2019). He served as the Secretary-General of Civicus, the international alliance for citizen participation, from 1998 to 2008.

"I believe passionately today that if we were to frame how we engage with people in a slightly different way, consciously inviting people to come in and help us shape the solutions, that could be much more impactful."

Naidoo was referring to a much-needed shift in political thinking to focus on civil society as an agent of change. He confessed that during his more than 45 years of activism he had made the mistake of devoting a disproportionate amount of time and energy to lobbying those in power instead of organising the powerless "to be able to speak with the eloquence and power that only they can".

He said in the early days of South Africa's democracy the flood of invitations received by civil society organisations for consultation from those in power was seen as an opportunity to impact the new government, but this turned out to be a tick-box exercise; bureaucrats ticked off the box for civil society consultation while activists ticked off government advocacy.

"We have to rethink the proportionality of how much time we spend appealing to those with power and how much time we spend mobilising and organising at the grassroots level. Sadly, we have not done enough of that. Sometimes, unwittingly, we actually end up believing that people have far less agency than they actually in reality have [despite] the legacies of colonialism, slavery, imperialism and so on. People have power as enforcers of transparency and accountability and as shapers of our own destiny."

Naidoo cited missed opportunities in recent times when world super-power leaders had come very close to recognising that the existing global economic system "does not service and meet the needs of the vast majority of people on the planet". After the 1997 'Asian Contagion', the 2008-2009 global financial crisis, Covid-19, the world promised it would "build back better". There had been talk of the need for a "radically different financial architecture". Yet when the crisis was over, the world reverted to those same failed systems and reasserted the status quo.

"When we are in a crisis it's all about system recovery, system protection and system maintenance. But what we desperately need right now is system innovation, system transformation and system redesign."

Referring to the 2011 Arab Spring and the subsequent Black Lives Matter, Rhodes Must Fall and Extinction Rebellion mobilisations, he said, "the lesson we have to take from these movements is that they were able to mobilise quickly and [in] much larger numbers than conventional organisations, including trade unions and NGOs.

"If ever there was a moment in history where we have to interrogate what kind of activism we actually need, I believe it is now. And it needs to be done in a way in which we are willing to be very, very self-critical."

Naidoo quoted Einstein's popular definition of insanity as doing the same thing over and over again, expecting to get a different result, and he invited the audience to close their eyes and reflect on their own lives of activism, scholarship and other ongoing efforts to be change agents. "I want to ask yourself: do you think your life meets that definition of insanity? And I want to put up my hand and say, mine does.

"We might have done it in good faith, but now we are at a moment of history where we have to challenge ourselves and say if big international NGOs like Greenpeace and Amnesty International have not delivered the kinds of justice that we want, surely we need to be rethinking."

He quoted Einstein again, who had said we cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.

Naidoo also urged the civil society community to urgently stop denying reality, especially with regard to the climate crisis, warning "we are in denial about how close to the climate cliff we are".

Naidoo was due to speak in person in Cape Town, but had to join the memorial gathering online at the very last minute after an unplanned and futile five-hour stayover at O. R. Tambo International Airport. He was stranded in Johannesburg -- after a gruelling more than 48-hour journey from Stanford University in San Francisco, where he is a visiting lecturer, via New York, Abidjan and then Addis Ababa – because of the jet fuel crisis that brought the airport to a halt for most of Monday 9 December.

He apologised for appearing online somewhat dishevelled, explaining that he had tried to fit in a quick shower before his connecting flight to Cape Town, only to find the water supply at his apartment in Johannesburg had been cut off.

"For five hours, there was no communication [at the airport], just chaos. Everybody was in a state of panic. What happened at the airport [and] what we are seeing with the breakdown of water infrastructure, was the complete lack of systems. And this is going to be the future that we are actually going to confront."

He reminded the audience that "this is what some of us have been saying for more than a decade now. As we move closer and closer to the climate crisis cliff, we will actually see a scarcity of resources of all kinds." He warned that emerging from the predicted contestation over limited resources would inevitably be "a rise of polarisation, fracturing, and the reiteration of fascism".

Naidoo emphasised the danger of treating climate change as a stand-alone environmental problem, saying, "the climate crisis is a cross-cutting issue. It's a failure of our broken and unjust economic system. It's a failure of our energy system, our food system, our agriculture system, our transport system, and so on."

Commending IFAA for giving him the opportunity to present the Ben Turok Memorial Lecture, Naidoo said he first met the struggle stalwart at the age of 22 in London having just fled South Africa into exile. "What I was struck by was how deeply respected he was by fellow Africans from across the continent. I would sit in awe in the audience and to be honest, I didn't have the confidence at first to even go and introduce myself to him because he had such stature."

It was only in 1988, when Naidoo was elected president of the Oxford University Africa Society, that they first worked together, hosting a successful UK-wide conference for about 250 African students on the social responsibility of the African graduate. "Ben responded to it very positively. We worked really closely together."

He said after he returned to South Africa he had the opportunity to me up with Turok, who he paid tribute to for his more than 70 decades as an activist, underground cadre, a founder of the Congress of Democrats and a long-standing ANC member who served three years in prison under the Terrorism Act before escaping to Botswana, mainly on foot. He became a much respected academic and on his return served as an ANC MP for the first 10 years of democracy.

This article was first published in the Daily Maverick on 16 December 2024.

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Africa Diary

News from the continent

1 December 2024 to 28 February 2025

2025

24 February: Broadcast journalist Blessed Mhlanga was jailed in Harare, Zimbabwe on charges of incitement. He had interviewed a disgruntled war veteran who had called on President Emmerson Mnangagwa to resign, accusing him of nepotism, corruption and failing to address economic issues. Mnangagwa says he will step down in 2028 after two presidential terms. However there have been calls for him to stay on to fully implement his "Vision 2030," based on "Democratic Principles, Rule of Law and Property Rights," which aims to transform the country into an upper-middle-income economy by this date.

18 February: Kenya permitted leaders of the genocidal Rapid Support Services (RSF) from Sudan to host a meeting with its allied civilian groups in Nairobi which aimed to establish a foundational charter for a "new Sudan". The conflict in Sudan has killed tens of thousands of people since April 2023. More than 12 million people – a quarter of the population - have been displaced by the fighting, including more than three million Sudanese who have fled to neighbouring countries, according to the UN. Kenya has pledged its support for peace initiatives in Sudan.

19 February: The South African government faced an unprecedented setback when its own Cabinet rejected the annual national budget moments before it was to be presented for parliamentary endorsement. The budget proposals, prepared by the National Treasury, can only be accepted, not amended by Parliament. The budget challenges are publicly disclosed in a process of world-leading transparency, but exact details are kept under wraps until Budget Day. Or, in this case, until Postponed Budget Day.

16 February: The intense, protracted conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) took a decisive turn as the Rwanda-backed M23 rebel group took possession of the city of Bukavu. This followed the capture of Goma, the capital of the North Kivu Province. Rwanda and its proxy militants now control the entire Lake Kivu region. The Congolese army fled. War atrocities have been committed by all sides and civilians have been killed, injured or displaced while peace talks continue.

15 February: Mahmoud Ali Youssouf, the long-term former foreign minister of Djibouti, was elected as the Chairperson of the African Union Commission (AUC), succeeding Chadian Moussa Faki. There were seven rounds of voting. He eventually defeated Raila Odinga, a former Prime Minister of Kenya who had started off as the leading candidate. The AUC is the secretariat of the African Union responsible for its day-to-day activities. The Chairperson is based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and is elected for a four-year term which can be renewed once.

8 February: Sam Nujoma, former three-term founding President of the liberated Namibia, died at 95 years.

7 February: South Africa will become the 184th member country of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage after Unesco ratified its membership in January 2025. The Living Heritage Network in Africa was formed in 2003 in accordance with Unesco's Global Priorities to form a worldwide network of countries dedicated to supporting communities in safeguarding their living heritage for the benefit of present and future generations.

"... the Africa we aspire to — a continent that is integrated, prosperous and peaceful — is within our reach." John Mahama, President of Ghana, speaking at the African Union Commission Headquarters, 16 February 2025.

31 January: An extraordinary summit of the heads of state and government of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) "noted with concern the recent attacks by the M23 armed group and Rwanda Defence Force (RDF) on the

Government Forces of DRC, the SADC Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (SAMIDRC) and the civilian population in various areas of North Kivu." This is the first time the SADC has called out Rwanda for effectively invading the DRC with its own army.

27 January: M23, the most potent of the armed groups contending for control of the mineral-rich eastern DRC, recaptured Goma, the biggest city in the region which is on the border with Rwanda. M23 previously captured Goma in 2012, when they held it just for a few days. This time, over 700 people were reported killed, including 17 peacekeepers, as rebel forces looted and pillaged. M23 is backed by Rwanda which also has its own troops fighting alongside them in the DRC.

A miner too weak to walk is carried on a stretcher during the government's rescue operations at the unused mine in Stillfontein in North West Province after hundreds of zama zamas were trapped in the mine for many weeks with little access to water, food and medication.

Source: GroundUp

24 January: Mannas Fourie, the head of South Africa's expert mine rescue company, Mines Rescue Services (MRS), told *BizNews* that the illegal miners who were rescued from an abandoned mineshaft in Stilfontein are likely to return, because there are still high-grade gold deposits in the disused mine and there is money to be made. MRS saved 246 illegal miners (zama-zamas) after a court ordered a rescue mission. Police had shut off food supplies as part of a government-planned crackdown on illegal mining in a months-long standoff in which hundreds of miners were stranded 1,280 metres underground. They were eventually hoisted up over several days using a unique mobile rescue winder capable of operating in vertical shafts up to 3,000 metres deep.

22 January: The governments of Angola, Zambia and the DRC established the headquarters of the Lobito Corridor Transit Transport Secretariat in Lobito, Angola to oversee their ambitious joint infrastructure project. Investments in new railways between the Lobito port and mines far inland will reduce transit times and logistical costs, enhancing Africa's competitive position in the global market and serving as a catalyst for intra-African trade. The Angolan transport minister, Ricardo Viegas de Abreu, commended the United States, the European Union, Italy and the United Kingdom for their support.

15 January: Frelimo candidate Daniel Chapo was sworn in as president of Mozambique following the blatantly rigged and fraudulent 2024 presidential election. Frelimo is the long-ruling governing party.

7 January 2025: John Mahama was sworn in as president of Ghana, in an election in Africa that dislodged an unpopular incumbent in a democratic poll. However Mahama is not exactly a breath of fresh air. It is his third time as President. Ghana faces its worst economic crisis in a generation, accompanied by corruption and unemployment.

2024

28 December: The "Mama Jasiri" (strong woman in Swahili) Project was inaugurated in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania to promote education and employment for women. This development project, which established a workshop to produce and sell products woven out of sisal fibres, is supported by the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) Türkiye has 44 embassies in African countries, up from 12 in 2008.

15 December: Leaders of the Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas) formally noted the withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger from Africa's most developed regional trade bloc, which was founded in 1975. The three countries are run by military juntas who gave notice of their intention in January 2024, after refusing a demand that they each restore democratic rule. They formed their own regional Alliance of Sahel States (AES) in July 2024. Ecowas gave the three countries a six-month grace period from 29 January 2025 (when their membership ended), to reconsider their decision.

Türkiye's Ambassador to Tanzania, Dr Mehmet Güllüoğlu, (fourth from the left) opened the "Mama Jasiri" Education and Production Workshop.

6 December: Attiéké, a food produced by the lagoon peoples of Côte d'Ivoire, was recognised by Unesco as part of "the intangible cultural heritage of humanity". The dish is made from steamed semolina which is produced by grinding and mixing cassava tubers grown and harvested in the area with fermented cassava. The Portuguese introduced cassava (manioc) to Africa from Brazil in the 16th century, along with maize. The introduction of these crops amounted to an agricultural revolution in Africa. Sadly, any benefits to the indigenous economy of Africa were discounted by the demands and disruptions resulting from the slave trade.

4 December: Environmental activists celebrated a South African high court ruling that the government's decision to authorise production of an additional 1,500 megawatts of new coal-fired power is inconsistent with the Constitution. The judge found that the Minister of Mineral Resources and the National Energy Regulator of South Africa (Nersa) failed to adequately consider the impact of new coal power on citizens' constitutional rights, particularly those of children.

2 December: Joe Biden became the first American president to visit Angola and the first to visit sub-Saharan Africa since 2015. President Trump was expected to visit South Africa in 2025, to attend the G20 summit, but he has said he will not attend.

2 December: The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (Sipri), a Swedish think-tank, reported that not one of the world's 100 largest arms producers has their headquarters in Africa. Despite all the wars, coups and conflicts and Africa, military expenditure on the continent totalled a mere US$51.6 billion in 2023 – 2.1% of the world total. The combined arms revenues of the world's largest arms-producing and military services companies (the Sipri Top 100) reached US$632 billion. Arms are used extensively in Africa but, largely, are manufactured elsewhere.

What lessons have we learned from Stilfontein?

By Bruce Kadalie

The Institute for African Alternatives (IFAA) hosted an online Forum titled "Lessons from Stilfontein: towards a sustainable future for artisanal and small-scale mining in South Africa." Chaired by Martin Jansen of Workers World Media Productions, the panel examined the socio-economic and political dynamics shaping artisanal and small-scale mining and considered the way towards a more just and sustainable mining future.

The Stilfontein disaster, which claimed the lives of almost 90 informal miners at the last count, has become a flashpoint for broader debates about governance, human rights, and economic justice in South Africa. As noted by Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR) the tragedy was not merely an accident but a "direct consequence of systemic neglect and the criminalisation of artisanal miners." The government's failure to address the dangers of abandoned mines and its punitive approach to artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) have exacerbated the vulnerabilities of marginalised communities.

Similarly, Christopher Rutledge, Executive Director of Mining Affected Communities United in Action (MACUA), in a recent op-ed for *Business Day*, argues that the Stilfontein tragedy demands urgent action from institutions like the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) to hold the state accountable for its "dereliction of duty." These perspectives underscore the urgency of reimagining South Africa's mining sector – one that prioritises the lives and livelihoods of its people over corporate interests and short-term gains.

The Stilfontein tragedy and the working-class struggle

Stilfontein is a mining town that encapsulates the struggles of the working class in South Africa. Speaking at the IFAA Forum, Rutledge powerfully articulated how the tragedy was a "qualitatively different phase in the struggle of working people and the working class," highlighting the growing divide between the economic elite and marginalised miners. The event served as a stark reminder that informal miners, often criminalised and dismissed, are victims of broader systemic failures.

David van Wyk from the Benchmarks Foundation in his analysis, traced the historical and economic shifts that have led to the proliferation of informal mining. "The mining industry," he observed, "has always thrived on cheap labour. The formalisation of this sector has been resisted precisely because someone benefits from keeping these miners in a precarious position."

Artisanal mining: criminalisation versus formalisation

One of the recurring themes of the Forum discussion was the need to shift the narrative around ASM from one of criminality to one of socio-economic necessity. Geologist and artisanal and small-scale mining specialist Kgothatso Nhlengatwa emphasised the distinction between "Zama-Zama" mining – often depicted as invasive and lawless – and community-based artisanal mining, which, if properly formalised, could offer a sustainable livelihood for thousands. She noted that "40% of the workforce in this sector are women," bringing a gendered lens to the discussion and reinforcing the argument that ASM is not a marginal issue but a critical aspect of community survival.

The panelists collectively argued for partial formalisation as a means to integrate ASM into the mainstream economy while addressing health, safety and environmental concerns. "We cannot talk about development while excluding those who are already in the industry," Rutledge stressed. The current approach of state repression, he argued, does not address the root causes of informal mining but rather exacerbates tensions between miners and authorities.

Environmental concerns and the question of mercury use

A major environmental concern discussed was the use of mercury in artisanal gold mining. Nhlengatwa, drawing from her work on mercury emissions, explained that small-scale gold mining remains the primary contributor to mercury pollution in South Africa. "We are trying to establish a baseline of mercury use in the country," she noted, "but the lack of formal oversight makes it difficult to track and mitigate its effects."

Van Wyk further highlighted the link between ASM and broader environmental issues, questioning why the government continues to issue new fracking licences while failing to rehabilitate abandoned mines. "There is potential for using mine infrastructure for alternative energy solutions – geothermal energy, solar farms on mine wastelands – but the political will is simply not there," he said.

The role of the state and the political economy of mining

The state's approach to ASM came under scrutiny, with panellists highlighting the economic imperatives that drive its resistance to opening up economic spaces for artisanal miners. Rutledge argued that the government's reluctance to recognise and support ASM is tied to economic protectionism. "The ANC and SAC's economic strategy is rooted in exclusion," he stated, "and this extends to how mining rights and resources are controlled."

Van Wyk added that collusion between mining corporations and syndicates ensures that ASM remains an underground, informal economy that benefits a select few. "Someone wealthy is supplying mercury to these workers," he pointed out, suggesting that the informal sector is not as disconnected from elite interests as it is often portrayed.

Mining towns and the future of ASM

The broader economic decline of mining towns like Stilfontein was also discussed. Van Wyk painted a bleak picture of these towns, where abandoned infrastructure and economic stagnation create conditions for exploitative labour practices. "If the government had any real interest in sustainable development, they would be investing in alternative economies for these areas, not just letting them rot," he argued.

The Forum also touched on how mining affects other industries, particularly fishing communities on the West Coast. "Ocean mining by companies like De Beers is destroying marine ecology and restricting fishermen's access," Van Wyk explained, warning that government policies continue to prioritise short-term extraction over long-term sustainability.

Pathways forward: policy, organisation and activism

The forum concluded with a series of actionable recommendations:

- **Policy reform and infrastructure investment:** There was consensus on the need for government intervention to formalise ASM, including the provision of proper health, safety and environmental protections. Panellists called for abandoned mines to be repurposed for energy production and community development.
- **Challenging the narrative of criminality:** Activists and organisations were urged to push back against the depiction of artisanal miners as criminals. Instead, ASM should be framed as a labour rights issue and a legitimate economic activity.
- **Community mobilisation and organising:** Rutledge stressed that "the working class must free itself from economic inequality through mass mobilisation." The need for strong, democratic organisations that can advocate for miners' rights was emphasised.
- **Holding the government accountable:** There were calls for the state to take responsibility for tragedies like Stilfontein and to adopt a human rights-based approach to mining regulation.
- **Research and investigation:** Further research is necessary to identify the suppliers of mercury and to explore alternative technologies for safer mining practices.

Conclusion: Towards a just mining future

The Forum provided a sobering yet hopeful examination of ASM in South Africa. It underscored the urgent need to rethink mining policies, not merely through the lens of economic growth, but with a focus on justice, sustainability and worker empowerment. "We cannot talk about transformation without centring the people who are actually doing the work," Rutledge said.

The lessons from Stilfontein are clear: South Africa must embrace a mining future that prioritises human dignity over profit, sustainability over short-term extraction, and inclusion over exclusion. The government's inadequate response to the disaster, as highlighted by LHR and Rutledge, reveals a profound disregard for the lives of artisanal miners. The SAHRC must step in to ensure accountability, and civil society must continue to demand systemic change.

Bruce Kadalie is the Research and Events Coordinator at The Institute for African Alternatives and runs its Forums project, which aims to foster community engagement and knowledge sharing.

Parliament joint committee meeting on Stilfontein disaster

The Stilfontein Mining Crisis was the subject of a rare, joint meeting of two Portfolio Committees in Parliament on 18 March 2025. The Parliamentary Monitoring Group (PMG) attended and has kindly allowed New Agenda to publish the meeting summary. Altogether 26 MPs, responsible for overseeing executive actions in mining and policing attended, as well as Mr Senzo Mchunu, Minister of Police and Mr Gwede Mantashe, Minister of Mineral and Petroleum Resources.

A joint meeting between the Portfolio Committee on Mineral and Petroleum Resources and the Portfolio Committee on Police focused on issues related to illegal mining and derelict mines, particularly in light of operations conducted in Stilfontein, North West Province.

The South African Police Service (representing the National Joint Operational and Intelligence Structure) informed the committees about Operation Vala Umgodi, which had been launched to combat illegal mining activities. The Department of Mineral Resources and Energy presentations addressed mine rehabilitation and the case of illegal mining at Stilfontein.[1]

The police delegation emphasised the growing threat of illegal mining across multiple provinces and outlined the strategies in place to address it, including intelligence gathering, law enforcement measures, and legislative reforms. The presentation highlighted the extent of arrests of people and seizures of equipment, and outlined challenges faced in enforcing the law, such as heavily armed syndicates and undocumented immigrants involved in the activities. Concerns had been raised about human rights issues linked to police actions when handling illegal mining cases. The Minister of Police said that illegal mining operations themselves involved severe human rights abuses.

The Minister of Mineral and Petroleum Resources described illegal mining as a "criminal activity that must be eradicated by all means necessary". Illegal mining had become a growing concern, particularly in areas like Stilfontein, where abandoned mines provided opportunities for unauthorised mining activities. Illegal mining posed severe risks, including environmental degradation, safety hazards, and socio-economic challenges such as crime and exploitation

The discussions revealed concerns over the effectiveness of law enforcement efforts, particularly in securing prosecutions, as the number of convictions remained low despite the high number of arrests. Members of the committees questioned the adequacy of existing legal frameworks and police resources, and asked about the role of private entities in either contributing to or combating illegal mining.

Police corruption was condemned, with at least one incident of officers allowing a key, arrested suspect to escape. Members called for stricter oversight and for holding mining companies accountable for failing to rehabilitate and secure abandoned mines. The involvement of foreign nationals in illegal mining raised broader questions about border security and immigration policies, prompting calls for interdepartmental collaboration.

Members asked what government's plan was for the Stilfontein mine, given that as long as it remained rich in mineral deposits, it would continue to be a major target for illegal miners.

The way forward included a strong emphasis on multi-stakeholder cooperation between law enforcement, regulatory bodies, and local communities. The need for a dedicated police unit to handle illegal mining was highlighted, along with increased funding for operations and better coordination between the South African Police Service and the department responsible for mineral and petroleum resources.

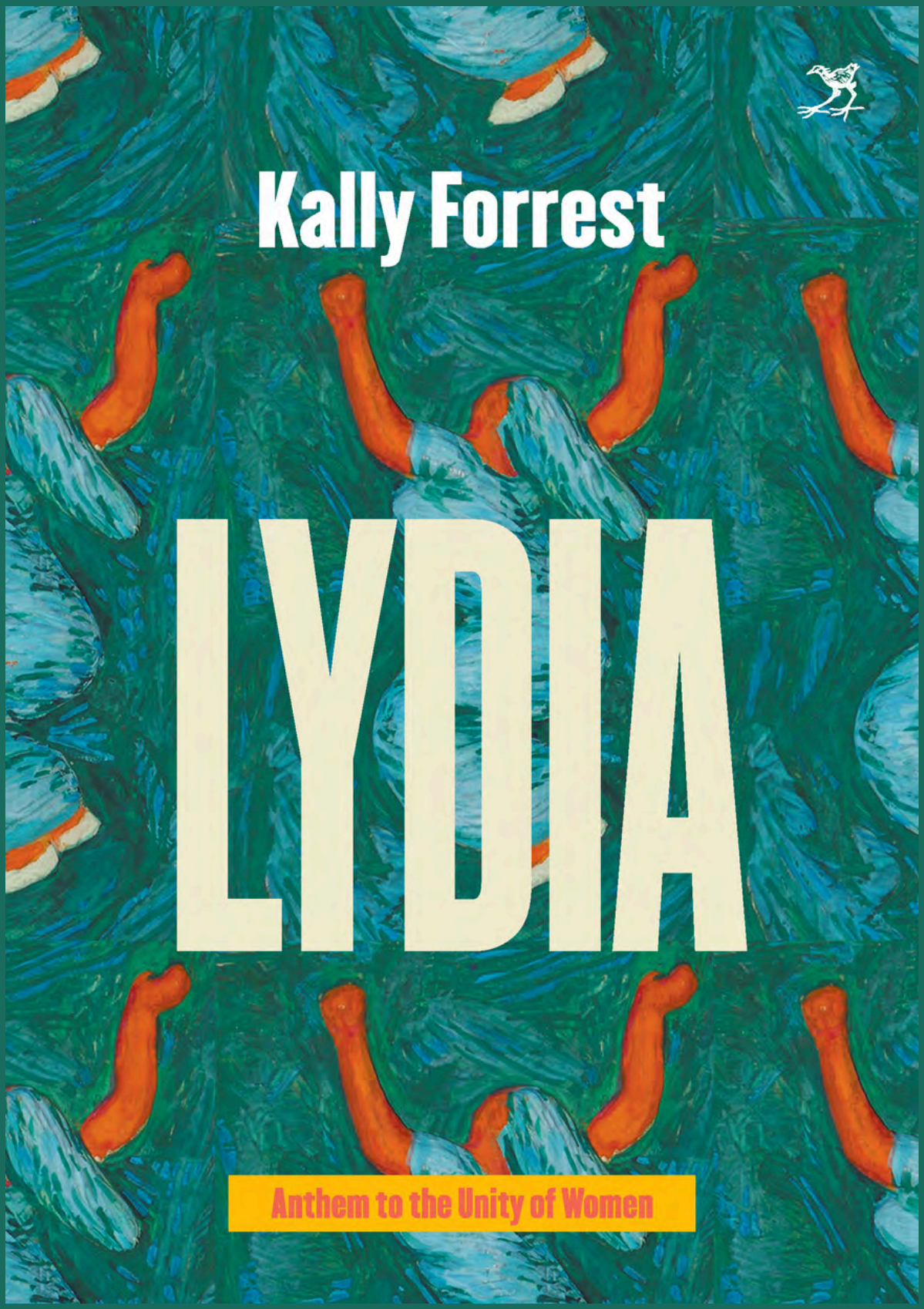
Members called for regulatory reforms to close legal loopholes that allowed illegal mining to thrive. The discussion also acknowledged the socio-economic factors driving illegal mining and emphasised the importance of formalizing artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) to provide legal alternatives for those currently operating outside the law. The meeting concluded with commitments to address systemic challenges, ensure more effective law enforcement, and improve the rehabilitation of abandoned mines.

The Parliamentary Monitoring Group is an information service, established in 1995, as a partnership between Black Sash, Human Rights Committee and Idasa, with the aim of providing a type of Hansard for the proceedings of the more than 50 South African Parliamentary Committees for these three advocacy organisations. This was because there is no official record publicly available of the committee proceedings - the engine room of Parliament - and this type of information is needed by social justice organisations to lobby the Parliament of South Africa on pieces of legislation, matters of democratic processes and parliamentary oversight of the executive.

ENDNOTE

[1] The Department of Mineral Resources and Energy formally separated on 1 April 2025 into two departments, one responsible for mineral and petroleum resources and one responsible for electricity and energy. The portfolio committees in Parliament – and the ministers and deputy ministers have been named to align with the new arrangements since the beginning of the Seventh Parliament following the national elections in 2024.

Book Extract



Joint winner of the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (NHISS) 2025 award for Biography: Non Fiction

This episode marked the beginning. Soon after, the union and the employers made an appointment for a meeting. The shock and desperation of the workers and the union's arguments and commitment had broken the barrier.

Extract from

Lydia: Anthem to the Unity of Women

By Kally Forrest

Jacana Media 2024, R300 pp.59-61 (also available on Kindle, for US$20).

Dr Kally Forrest, the author of *Metal that Will not Bend* – a history of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) – is a former trade unionist and editor of the South African Labour Bulletin. Now she has written a remarkable biography *Lydia: Anthem to the Unity of Women.*

With great care and meticulous research, she brings us the life of Lydia Komape, also known as Mam Lydia Kompe. Kally travels in Lydia's footsteps, with family, friends, comrades and ancestors from Limpopo and Johannesburg to Cape Town where Lydia sat in Nelson Mandela's Parliament. Mam Lydia became secretary of the Transvaal branch of the new Transport and General Workers' Union (T&G) in 1978. This book tells a story from those early years, as trade unions organised in defiance of employers and apartheid oppression.

Chapter Five

Women have shown bravery

Lydia stands in amazement. It's seven in the morning and she has just arrived at the union offices. They are full of women. She looks at them and they stare back at her very quietly, nervously. She recognises them immediately: a large group of Anglo American Property Services (Ampros) night shift cleaners, who are usually friendly, loud and talkative. She comes straight to the point. "Good morning, everyone. Why are you here?"

Elizabeth draws nearer. "Mama Lydia, Mam Lydia, we've all been dismissed. Everyone you see here has been fired." She stops, giving no further explanation.

"Fired! But I saw you yesterday. Nothing was wrong. Whatever's happened?

Elizabeth struggles for a while, trying to find some way of expressing herself. But there is really only one way of saying it: "We all stole a lot of toilet rolls."

Lydia's heart sinks. She sees the whole wall of toilet rolls in front of her in the storeroom in the building where they work. The cleaners have keys and easy access.

"We were sharing them out when the supervisor arrived earlier than we expected. We were caught. He dismissed us at once. We've been waiting for hours to come and talk to you. What are we going to do? We just can't lose our jobs. We can't. What'll out children do?"

Lydia leans against a wobbly desk. She feels upset. She sees the hard work, the fight that they have all engaged in over the months, suddenly disappear They are on the verge of signing an all-important house agreement which will allow them to negotiate changes at work. The women work eight hours in the dead of night, every night, cleaning up after the office workers have left at the end of the day. In this time they have no time to rest, and nothing to warm their cold food, which they have cooked in the afternoon at home. No hot water, tea, coffee or milk. No chairs or table to eat at. No changing rooms. At the end of their shift in the early hours of the morning, they lie down on flattened cardboard bones on the concrete floor and try to sleep for a few hours before they leave for home.

The bosses don't want to recognise the union. They're resisting it. But Lydia feels she has been making some headway recently, especially as the union threatened to go to the press and expose the women's conditions. The liberal Ampros would do anything to avoid this kind of exposure. And now this a perfect excuse for the company to bow out. The women are unskilled. They'll be replaced in a day.

She trudges out of the office and walks across town to face the manager, Mr. Osrin. He pretends to like her, but she knows he resents her and her needling complaints irritate him. She also pretends to respect him, but back in the office, in her usual joking way, she mimics his way of talking.

She enters his office full of contrition and humility. "Today don't call me Mrs Kompe. I'm your doormat today. You can come and have me clean your shoes. I'm prepared to get down on my knees. I'm pleading for your compassion and mercy. We've gone so far with negotiations we don't want to ruin anything." She sees he's angry, but her entreaties are slowly softening him and he's listening to her. He finally capitulates and agrees to give the women a last chance. She bursts out crying. She wants to hug him, but she knows you can't hug a manager, so she just gasps, "I can't believe you." He concedes that they're good workers, that he knows them, and he doesn't want to train up a whole new batch.

Lydia runs most of the way back to the office. When she gets there, she's in such an emotional state that she begins weeping when she sees the women Seeing her tears, they look back in shock, certain their dismissals have been confirmed. "I'm crying because I'm overwhelmed. He says you must go back tonight and do night shift." The noise is thunderous. They all start singing and the whole office joins them in ululation and excitement. "We'll go back now. We'll work now." Lydia chuckles and tells them to go home, have a wash, rest and return ready for work.[1]

This episode marked the beginning. Soon after, the union and the employers made an appointment for a meeting. The shock and desperation of the workers and the union's arguments and commitment had broken the barrier. Over the coming months the union negotiated the provision of two overalls and soap for washing for each woman, a changing room with showers, and a restroom with tables and chairs and a small stove for heating food and boiling water. The company also granted the cleaners permission to sleep until dawn in the changing room on newly laid carpets.[2]

Already in 1982 security guards had approached T&G to organise them at Ampros. The company was expanding and buying and developing shopping centres and offices in Benoni, Pretoria, Killarney, Sandton and Johannesburg's CBD. Part of its rental service was the direct provision of its own security and cleaning staff. Soon the women cleaners also approached the union. The latter was keen to organise women as a counterbalance to it mainly male members in municipalities and in trucking and bus companies where it had already won or was busy negotiating recognition agreements.[3]

The cleaners regarded Lydia as their saviour not only after she had helped them retain their jobs when threatened with dismissal but also for the huge improvements she had helped secure in their wages and working conditions. She enjoyed their appreciation, but she also knew, both from her rural upbringing and her work in the union, that no one person was responsible for making things change. The more people united, the greater the power to change things.

ENDNOTES

[1] Narrative and quotes based on interview with Lydia Komape, 16.11.2021.
[2] Russell, D. 1989. *Lives of Courage: Women for a New South Africa*. New York: Basic Books.
[3] Interview with Jane Barrett: former General Secretary T&G interviewed 5.5.2021.

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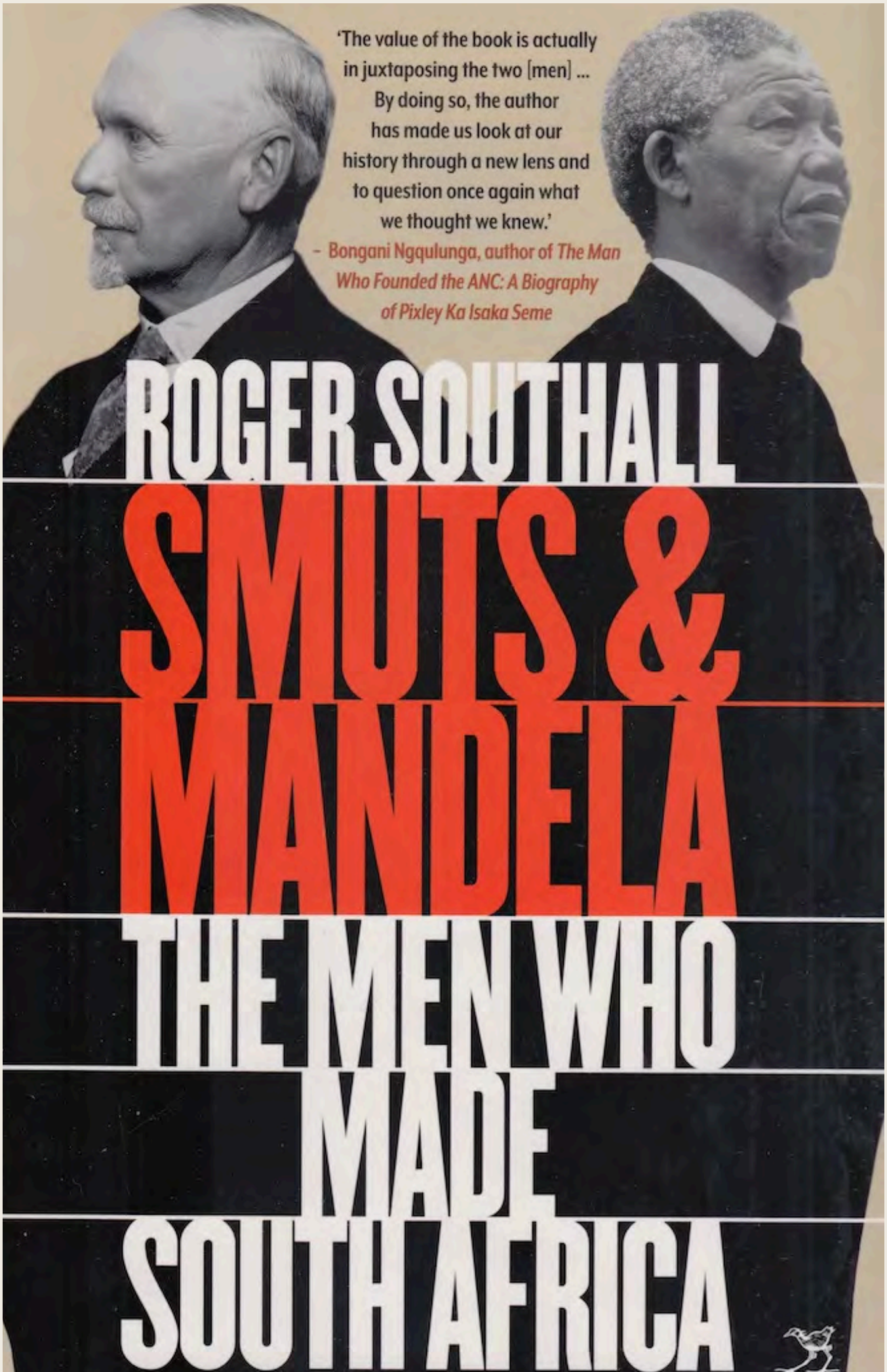

'The value of the book is actually in juxtaposing the two [men] ... By doing so, the author has made us look at our history through a new lens and to question once again what we thought we knew.'
– Bongani Ngqulunga, author of The Man Who Founded the ANC: A Biography of Pixley Ka Isaka Seme
ROGER SOUTHALL
SMUTS & MANDELA
THE MEN WHO MADE SOUTH AFRICA

They both came from a background in the rural gentry though in very different circumstances; … both were lawyers by training; both suffered defeat at the hands of their enemies; and both led their own people into political settlements of reconciliation with these former enemies.

Smuts and Mandela: The men who made South Africa

By Roger Southall

Review by Gordon Young

Jacana, 2024, R380 (paperback)

Roger Southall has written two-and-a-half good books in one. The first is a study of character, placing the two foremost South African statesmen of the 20th century in counterpoint to each other as it were. So we are shown the many unexpected similarities and resonances in their lives, as well as the great differences between the two men and their work.

It is not as if there is a shortage of biographies of these two men: over 30 in the case of Smuts, and seven or eight so far in the case of Mandela. Smuts does of course have the advantage of the semi-official full two-volume treatment by a serious historian, Sir Keith Hancock, which Mandela still awaits. Southall brings the two men together in a single treatment and it is illuminating.

They both came from a background in the rural gentry though in very different circumstances; neither was a conventional Christian though much influenced by Christian ethics; both were lawyers by training; both suffered defeat at the hands of their enemies; and both led their own people into political settlements of reconciliation with these former enemies. And then the differences: for example Smuts was rejected by his own people; Mandela never was. Smuts funked the great task of racial reconciliation while Mandela took it on headfirst. Smuts earned global respect as an international statesman; Mandela achieved immortal fame as South Africa's saviour.

Thus Field Marshall J C Smuts, P.C., C.H., K.C., D.T.D., and Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, prison number 11657/63. (He had several.)

The second of Southall's books is an excellent potted history of these men's times, and especially the two great periods of reconciliation, the first after the end of the Boer War ending in Union, and the second after Mandela's release from prison in 1990. "A 'new nation' twice born," as Southall puts it. Younger readers will find it a valuable read as the book's account of these times is thoughtful and well-judged and some of the incidents may come as a surprise to those whose only knowledge comes from crude newspaper and online sources. Some of their certainties might be challenged.

None of us alive today was present when the British Empire and the Boer republics made peace in 1902, or in the period of reconstruction which followed, so we have no personal sense of the enormous optimism and economic opportunities which arose in the ensuing years. Under the more-or-less benign umbrella of the British Empire, trade flourished. Union in 1910 provided the final step in the process of the elimination of borders and internal tariffs, unification of the railways and creation of a single civil service, legal system and so forth. Even such a jingo as Rudyard Kipling, largely unread today, was moved to write this paean to reconciliation:

Here, where my fresh-turned furrows run,
And the deep soil glistens red,
I will repair the wrong that was done
To the living and the dead.
Here, where the senseless bullet fell,
And the barren shrapnel burst,

I will plant a tree, I will dig a well,
Against the heat and the thirst.

Here, in a large and a sunlit land,
Where no wrong bites to the bone,
I will lay my hand in my neighbours' hand,
And together we will atone
For the set folly and the red breach
And the black waste of it all.
Giving and taking counsel each
Over the cattle kraal.

(From "The Settler", 1903. Not quoted in the book).

Only that the black population was excluded gives the achievement of Union the quality of our Original Sin.

The half-book is a thoughtful reflection on the practice of history. Smuts presents a particularly interesting case of a man whose global stature was undeniable when he was alive but practically invisible today. As Southall says, some historians today even seem to regard an interest in Smuts as a branch of antiquarian studies, suitable only for elderly white nostalgists. This is wrong: Smuts made this country as much as any man, for all his faults and mistakes - so obvious to us now! - which Southall does not brush away.

If anything Southall is a little unfair and perhaps slightly contradictory, in handling the key issue of Smuts' failure after the Second World War to promote liberal racial policies, in a period when any hint of liberalism meant electoral extinction. He presents Sir Garfield Todd as having offered a better solution to the problem, in his case in Rhodesia, yet cannot fail to observe that Todd was promptly ejected from Rhodesian politics and could play no better role thereafter than a prophet in the wilderness - which would surely also have been Smuts' fate, a sort of proto-Helen Suzman. One hates to point out that Southall is British born. But you really need to have lived through the period of the Nationalist Party ascent and the United Party decline to understand the hopelessness of any attempt by a white politician to alter the course of events. The successor to Smuts was J.G.N Strauss, and some of us know what that meant!

Southall is above all fair-minded in an era when writers seem duty-bound to be scathing about any historical figure who was not completely up to date - to today - in his or her righteous opinions. He rightly points out that Smuts' international achievements far exceed Mandela's whose 27 years in prison prevented him from doing anything at all except prepare himself and his comrades. Smuts on the other hand was a successful general (one of few) in the British Army in the First World War, a member of the British War Cabinet, and played a crucial role in setting up the League of Nations afterwards. In the Second World War he was again a member of the British War Cabinet (only Churchill himself had also served in both) and again was instrumental in the creation of the much more successful United Nations in 1946. Mandela has a highly successful mediation in Burundi to his credit, a peaceful settlement which outlasted him and survives to this day. But his central achievement was in bringing about a peaceful settlement in his own country, South Africa, displaying the very highest qualities of leadership. This period is well treated by Southall.

Younger readers would do well to study this book just for its treatment of the difficult process of bringing the ANC and the Nats together in the 1990s, not to mention the smaller and sometime troublesome smaller parties like the Inkatha Freedom Party, in a peaceful settlement of a struggle which my generation fully expected to end in a full-scale bloody civil war. This was Mandela's achievement and if it was not his alone, recall that there were many in the ANC who opposed any deal with the Nats, and many Afrikaners who considered any deal with the ANC to be a pact with the devil. Somehow, he brought them all into the same tent and ushered in perhaps the happiest period in South African history. Though we all have much to complain about today, the oppressors no longer have that heavy burden, and the oppressed are no longer oppressed.

The book is well produced by Jacana as usual, to whom we must be grateful for taking the risk on so many new histories, though there are typos on pages 259 (the dates are a century out) and 285.

Book Review

GANDHI'S AFRICAN LEGACY

Phoenix Settlement

1904 to 2024

A History Through Letters

UMA DHUPELIA-MESTHRIE

Winner of the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (NHISS) 2025 award for Best Non-Fiction Edited Volume

Gandhi's African Legacy Phoenix Settlement: 1904-2024+ A History Through Letters

By Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie

Review by Bernedette Muthien

UWC Press, 2024, 685 pages, R455

On the afternoon of Saturday 3 October, Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie's book, *Gandhi's African Legacy Phoenix Settlement: 1904-2024. A History Through Letters*, was launched at the Desmond and Leah Tutu Legacy Centre Foundation[1] in Cape Town under the theme of "Talking Rights". This launch was immediately followed by the Insurrection Ensemble's multi-media production, *Must Gandhi Fall?*, under the theme of "Performing Rights", at the historic theatre[2] at the District Six Homecoming Centre around the corner. These two successive events are inextricably connected. They were part of the Living Rights Festival with its focus on intersectional justice and realising constitutional rights through multi-genre arts.

The book launch was moderated by Nirode Bramdaw of African Sun Media and UWC Press. Discussant was the renowned award-winning writer-scholar-teacher, Imraan Coovadia of the University of Cape Town. Among others he authored *Revolution and Non-Violence in Tolstoy, Gandhi and Mandela* (Oxford University Press, 2020).

The star was undoubtedly historian Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie of the University of the Western Cape. Among her publications are *Cane Fields to Freedom: a Chronicle of Indian South Africans* and *Gandhi's Prisoner? The Life of Gandhi's Son Manilal* (Kwela Books, 2000, 2004).

The book is a commemoration of 120 years of Gandhi's Phoenix Settlement outside Durban, South Africa. Mesthrie is the great-grand-daughter of Mohandas and Kasturba Gandhi and grand-daughter of Sushila and Manilal Gandhi (second son of the Mahatma). Unlike most Gandhi scholars around the world who focus only on the Mahatma, Mesthrie locates the guru in his large and ever-expanding family, and within his various communities over decades, especially the Phoenix Settlement: "within four years [of its founding], sixty residents resided [at Phoenix] – families with husbands, wives, children, brothers, sisters, uncles and aunts. And Gandhi's own wife and children. He called it "a little village" (2024: 1).

She dedicates this book to her grandmother, Sushila, who with her husband, Manilal, managed the Phoenix Settlement for decades after the Mahatma returned to India and its struggle for independence from the British Empire. In this book and elsewhere, Mesthrie also lifts up the women in her extended family, remembering them, honouring them, appreciating them, showing that the Mahatma was a mortal man, located in a family and communities, and with many women and others supporting their just causes, from Kasturba to the youngest generation today.

The deliberately multicultural, multifaith, multilingual Phoenix Settlement was explicitly non-profit, a cooperative, with all residents participating equally in manual labour. It was from Phoenix that Gandhi's philosophy of *satyagraha*, nonviolent resistance to oppression, was born.

Gandhi was not born a Mahatma, or Great Spirit. He grew into one over decades of struggle, learning, transformation. In his youth he represented the privileged class and cultures from which he came, including racism against black Africans and sexism against women, particularly his wife, Kasturba. When Ghanaian students removed Gandhi's statue from their university during 2018, they were protesting against the ignorant young Gandhi, racist, classist and sexist as he was at the time, in the context of contemporary society. South African and other leaders, including Nelson Mandela, have publicly recognised that the youthful Gandhi was not the same man who had grown over decades into an international guru of nonviolent resistance, a man devoted to "universal egalitarianism of humankind" (2024:8).

Mesthrie draws on the memoirs of her own mother, Sita, who wrote about the 1930s and 1940s, about Phoenix and her own parents, Sushila and Manilal. The letters in the book range from the first letter in 1915 to the last letter in 1977, from Sushila, narrating the life of the Phoenix Settlement over 62 years. "The letters in this book reveal relationships, friendships, and networks" (2024:19).

"Letters have been extremely important in uncovering women's histories," says Mesthrie, who refers to the publication of Kasturba Gandhi's diaries in 2022, showing her as literate and agentic, indeed even a public protestor and political detainee, as well as a literacy teacher to her fellow detainees and other women in the community. So too Mesthrie recentres her grandmother,

Sushila, who took over the management of Phoenix after the demise of her husband, Manilal, and was the first woman to lead the settlement and its projects.

The author's mother, Sita, started leading the settlement press from the 1940s. "Through 'the performance of the self' that went with the letter-writing, the women shine through the book. Gandhi had meant from the outset … for Phoenix to be a place where women could be liberated from relentless domestic work and take their place in public work. The three Gandhi women in this book did just that (2024:26).

"My goal in compiling this archive is to see how Phoenix Settlement as a place and as an institution passed through many eras, encountered different people, and ultimately changed. Change, after all, is an intrinsic part of all biographies; that of lives and of objects … I am interested in the 'eras of its social life' (2024:29).

The Phoenix Settlement established an independent community clinic, which still exists, now as a government clinic. Based on community needs, the clinic focused on women's and children's health, including pre-and post-natal maternity care (2024:526).

The Settlement also conducted pathbreaking educational, multiracial/nonracial youth camps of up to 70 participants, with evenings "devoted to poetry, plays, and films" (2024:513). Several of South Africa's struggle stalwarts of the 1970s passed through the camp – and through the pages of this book. Indeed, over its many decades, international multi-faith gurus, and many ordinary people, have passed through the Settlement, and traverse this important book, too many to enumerate in a short book review.

Mohandas Gandhi grew alongside his extended family and many diverse communities in South Africa, India and elsewhere.

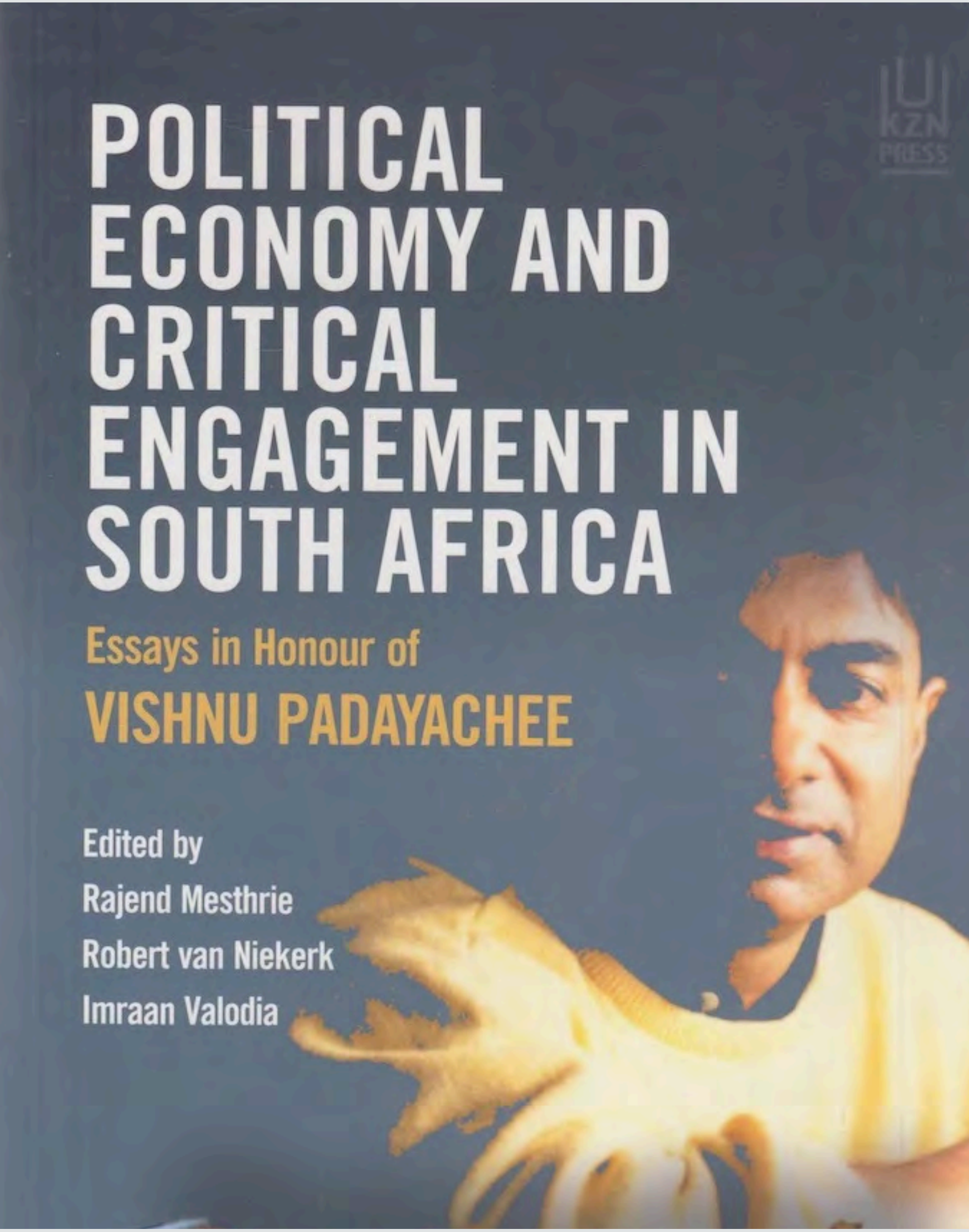
The Phoenix Settlement was destroyed by the Inkatha movement during the height of the 1980s anti-apartheid struggle (2024:585), with only the community clinic left intact (it was protected by the community). As South Africa rose from the depredations of apartheid in the 1990s, the Phoenix Settlement was re-established, albeit on a smaller plot, as an important heritage site. Thus the phoenix rose from the ashes, to continue inspiring new generations of activists for social justice.

Since Mohandas Gandhi was a mortal, not a deity, he was as fragile and fallible as any human, and hence there is no need to de-pedestalise him. We all fall, and hopefully rise again, like the phoenix, reborn from the ashes of the past.

This excellent, important book is an epic tome of 685 pages, which of necessity could not be done full justice in a brief book review. It begs for further engagement, not only with the text/s, but also in personal workshops and other creative and scholarly spaces, about Gandhi, his extended family and many communities around the world, *satyagraha*, and nonviolent struggles for justice in South Africa, India and the world at present.

ENDNOTES

[1] https://www.tutu.org.za/, accessed 18 February 2025.
[2] https://www.homecomingcentre.co.za/avalonauditorium, accessed 18 February 2025.


UKZN PRESS
POLITICAL ECONOMY AND CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA
Essays in Honour of
VISHNU PADAYACHEE
Edited by
Rajend Mesthrie
Robert van Niekerk
Imraan Valodia

... there are moments when heterodox ideas gain traction and periods when they seem to lose ground. But the necessity of critical economic debate, of scholars who challenge dominant paradigms and of engaged intellectuals who see their work as part of a broader struggle for justice remains constant.

Political Economy and Critical Engagement in South Africa – Essays in Honour of Vishnu Padayachee

Edited by Rajend Mesthrie, Robert Van Niekerk and Imraan Valodia

Review by Megan Bryer

University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2024, R400

Vishnu Padayachee was a brilliant intellectual, but more than that, he was an engaged scholar, an activist, a cricket enthusiast and a collector of rare books. The essays in *Political Economy and Critical Engagement in South Africa* pay tribute to his wide-ranging interests and contributions, offering both personal reflections and rigorous academic engagement with the ideas he championed. Many contributors – colleagues, collaborators and former students of his – wrestle with a question that preoccupied Padayachee: the role of the intellectual in shaping societal change, how scholars can move beyond academic inquiry to influence economic policy and progressive movements.

This was not just an abstract concern for Padayachee but one informed by lived experience, from his early activism under apartheid to his role in advising South Africa's liberation movement and, later, his critical stance as progressive economists were sidelined in post-apartheid policy spaces. His work, as this collection makes clear, remains deeply relevant for those committed to economic justice today.

The book brings together a range of contributions, from memoir-like reflections on Padayachee's formative years in Durban to extensions of his intellectual theories and applications of his interdisciplinary, historically grounded methodology to contemporary political economy. Many essays highlight the significance of place – particularly Durban as a crucible of radical thought and anti-apartheid resistance. There is a certain nostalgia in these accounts, not because they romanticise the past, but because they recognise the city's "vibrant interaction between academia, organic intellectuals of the struggle, […] student activists and a shop stewards' movement emerging in the unions" during the so-called '*Durban moment*' (Erwin, 2024: 351). This was a time when ideas were forged in semi-clandestine reading groups, where young scholars like Padayachee gathered to study political economy, debate strategy and build movements (Mesthrie & Van Niekerk, 2024: 346).

Many essays critically assess the failures of post-apartheid economic policy, particularly the ANC's rejection of the progressive strategies outlined in the *Macro-Economic Research Group (MERG)* report, in which Padayachee played a key role. MERG offered an alternative economic strategy to guide South Africa's transition to democracy but was ultimately sidelined as market-oriented policies became dominant, a shift that Padayachee and his colleagues critiqued extensively. The book does not shy away from acknowledging these disappointments – the persistence of inequality, poverty and unemployment despite the promise of economic transformation. But, as Sender argues, Padayachee's commitment to heterodox ideas reminds us that South Africa still produces "activist authors and progressive academics who, like Vishnu, are capable of arguing very effectively against economic illiteracy and orthodoxy" (Sender, 2024: 231).

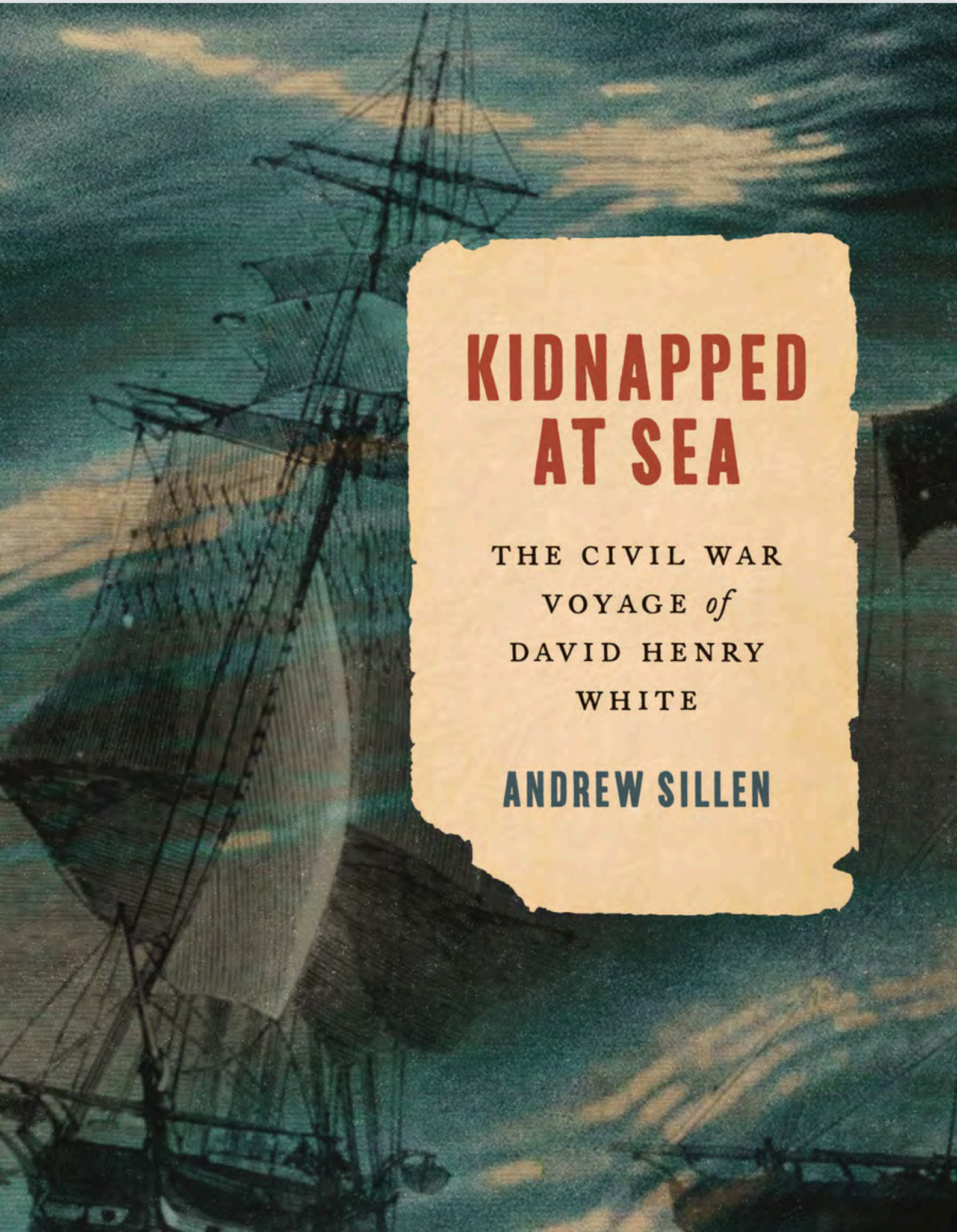
A recurring theme across the essays is Padayachee's commitment to building institutions and fostering collaboration. This was reflected in his leadership at the University of Natal's Development Studies department, where he played a crucial role in shaping a space for critical economic inquiry. As Morrell notes, Padayachee was not only a rigorous thinker but a "skilful negotiator and team builder" (Morrell, 2024: 51). His ability to bring people together, to work across disciplines and to create lasting intellectual networks was central to his impact. This focus on institution-building is especially relevant today, as the space

for progressive economic thought in South Africa remains contested, and as global disillusionment with neoliberal policies has not necessarily translated into a coherent alternative economic vision.

For those familiar with Padayachee's work, this book is a powerful reminder of his intellectual range and prolific output. For those encountering him for the first time, it offers a compelling portrait of how an engaged scholar can leave a lasting impact – not only through ideas but through mentorship, collaboration and institution-building. His career demonstrates that intellectual influence does not move in a straight line; there are moments when heterodox ideas gain traction and periods when they seem to lose ground. But the necessity of critical economic debate, of scholars who challenge dominant paradigms and of engaged intellectuals who see their work as part of a broader struggle for justice remains constant.

At a time when neoliberalism is under scrutiny yet progressive alternatives struggle to take root, the essays in *Political Economy and Critical Engagement in South Africa* serve as both a tribute and a call to action. They remind us that economic ideas matter, that institutions and intellectual networks must be nurtured and that the project of creating a more just economic order requires both rigorous critique and practical engagement. In a world where the wealthiest individuals openly deride institutions designed to address inequality – where figures like Donald Trump's adviser Elon Musk can boast of "feeding USAID into the woodchipper" without serious consequence – Padayachee's commitment to critical economic thought and progressive policy-making remains as urgent as ever.

This collection is not only for economists and policy-makers but for anyone concerned with the intersections of scholarship, activism and economic justice in South Africa and beyond.


KIDNAPPED
AT SEA
THE CIVIL WAR
VOYAGE of
DAVID HENRY
WHITE
ANDREW SILLEN

[This book] is at once a fine work of engaged scholarship, the rescue of a hidden life, a depiction of the global dimension of the Civil War, and a critique of the mythology of the 'Lost Cause'.

Kidnapped at Sea:

The Civil War Voyage of David Henry White

By Andrew Sillen

Review by Alan Hirsch

Johns Hopkins University Press, 2024, 336 pages, Amazon R1,156 (hardcover only available), Kindle US$37.89

Kidnapped at Sea tells the true story of a free black teenager, David Henry White from Delaware on the east coast of the United States, who was captured from a transatlantic merchant vessel where he served as a junior member of the kitchen staff and held as a slave on the rebel warship *Alabama.* Captained by slave-owner and committed rebel Raphael Semmes, *Alabama* roamed the north and south Atlantic and the Indian Ocean, capturing, burning or ransoming dozens of US merchant ships, fighting off one US warship and finally being sunk in battle by another. White, who could not swim, was abandoned and drowned.

The arc of the story sweeps from Civil War US, following *Alabama* from its shipyard in the UK to the US, and then back across the north Atlantic, down to Brazil, to Saldanha Bay, Cape Town and Simonstown, across to south east Asia, back to the south Atlantic, to temporary respite in a French port and its demise in international waters between France and the UK. The story demonstrates how the conflict impacted many and implicated some in its global theatre of war.

Though it represented the resistance of slave owners, *Alabama* was admired and immortalised in song – the Cape folksong '*Daar kom die Alibama*'.

It was the Cape connection that drew author Andrew Sillen to the story. Walking down Strand Street, one of Cape Town's oldest streets, he was drawn into the Cultural History Museum then located in the historic Koopmans de Wet House. In it he found, unexpectedly, a Confederate battle ensign housed in a glass display cabinet. An American archaeologist working on African prehistory as a professor at the University of Cape Town, his curiosity was aroused.

Sillen discovered that in August 1863, the Confederate commerce raider *Alabama* sailed into Table Bay and captured an American merchant ship, the *Sea Bride*, in full view of the city and watched by thousands. Later he learned the story of the captured young American, David Henry White, and he steadily gathered evidence that would help tell the true story of White and recover it from the *ante-bellum* 'Lost Cause' mythology that justified slavery and paved the way for segregation. He was inspired by the modern anti-racist struggles in the US and South Africa and the movement to recover hidden histories.

In addition to telling the story of White, whose life is painstakingly pieced together from disparate scraps of evidence, Sillen provides vivid insights into the trans-Atlantic shipping business in the 1860s and the naval theatre of the US Civil War. The stories of White, Semmes, and some of their shipmates are woven into a narrative that follows *Alabama* from its manufacture in a UK shipyard and arming with British artillery for the Confederate navy, through many successful assaults on the US merchant shipping, to its demise off the shores of northern France two years later.

The exploits of *Alabama* achieved great fame and notoriety world-wide. Its final battle was depicted in a contemporaneous painting by Édouard Manet who was probably not among the many onlookers who had gathered in Cherbourg witness to the event.

Only two lives were lost in dozens of conquests, when *Alabama* destroyed the *Hatteras*, a Union gunboat off the coast of Galveston, Texas. But when *Alabama* went down most of the officers were saved but many of the men drowned. Sillen interrogates the several varying versions of this event, highlighting the deceptive accounts which failed to hide that Semmes and his officers pushed ahead to take the lifeboats leaving some, like White who could not swim, to drown.

Aside from the lively yet meticulous writing, several characteristics lift this book out of the ordinary. One is the way that Sillen interrogates texts to show deception and bias. In addition to dissecting the drownings, Sillen thoroughly proves that Semmes and his colleagues' depiction of White as already enslaved when kidnapped at sea is false. White was born free and was first and only enslaved by Semmes. Also, notions of the benevolence of slavery, the warm relations between master and slave, and the Civil War as a contest over states' rights are dismantled.

Another special feature of the book is the richness of the pertinent artifacts, tables and diagrams presented as evidence throughout the book. These include ships' manifests, tables of conquests, illustrations and photographs of places, people and events, maps and architectural diagrams of *Alabama*, all of which enrich the book. As a seasoned archaeologist Sillen could have been expected to collect many artifacts, but the publishers deserve praise for including them, appropriately interspersed in the text.

The seed for this book was sowed more than 30 years ago in a museum in Cape Town and it finally came to fruition in a memorable work of history. It is at once a fine work of engaged scholarship, the rescue of a hidden life, a depiction of the global dimension of the Civil War, and a critique of the mythology of the 'Lost Cause'. These threads are held together in a vivid, cinematic narrative.

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