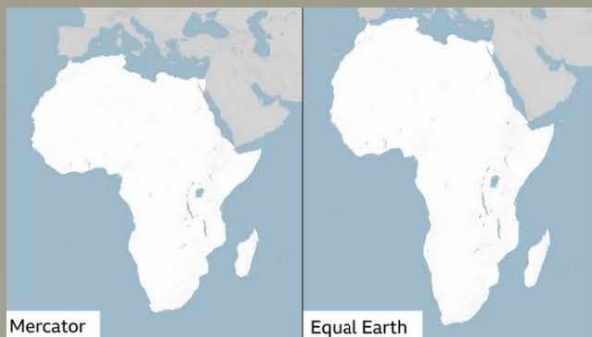
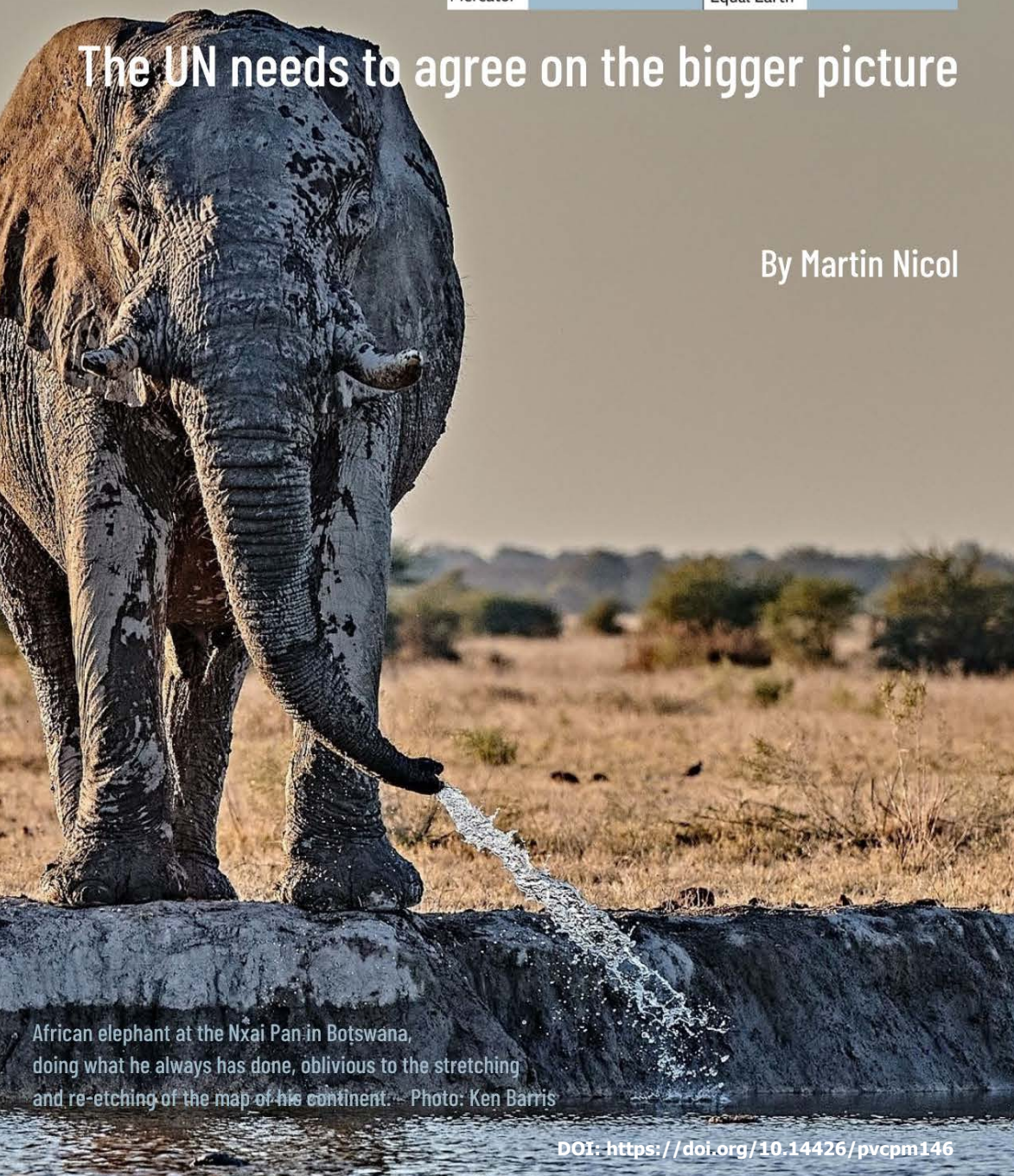


Editorial



The UN needs to agree on the bigger picture

By Martin Nicol



African elephant at the Nxai Pan in Botswana, doing what he always has done, oblivious to the stretching and re-etching of the map of his continent. — Photo: Ken Barris



In September 2026, the majority of United Nations member states endorsed a new map of the world that more accurately reflects the size of countries. The Chairperson of the African Union Commission welcomed the “more accurate cartographic representation of Africa and other regions of the world”. He congratulated the member states of the African Union for their mobilisation in support of this initiative.¹

Mobilisation on other issues has been less successful. The world has reached no agreement at all on action to address climate change, or rogue artificial intelligence (AI), or what to do about ending mounting humanitarian crises, many flamed by wars. There are more conflicts around the world today – 65 by one count – than at any time since 1946, after World War II ended.

“Changes in the world not seen in a hundred years” is the phrase used by President Xi Jinping of China to describe the geopolitical change we are experiencing now.²

The breaking world order has never been very good for Africa. Major powers have always been able to sweep aside rules that did not suit them. In many cases, they undermined rules they did not like. They did not even join many of the institutions that made up the mythical “rules-based order”. So African and international agreement on a new world map can look like quite some victory.

There was greater African scepticism when the United States President, in early September, signed a law to extend the expiry date of the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). The extension is just for two years, and it is not clear which African countries will continue to benefit from it. AGOA is not an agreement reached through negotiation. This was a unilateral offer of tariff-free access to the US to certain African countries (which can be changed at any time), and “terms and conditions apply”.



There are clear parallels here with the much-welcomed decision by China, earlier in 2026, to allow duty-free access for exports from African countries to China. This was announced (for the 53 African countries that have diplomatic relations with China), not negotiated. It runs for two years. It covers goods – such as raw materials – which are not subject to tariffs anyway, and many African countries (the poorer ones) already had duty-free access. Tariffs are not the main barrier for African exports to China – these include the impossibility of competing with Chinese manufactured goods (often subsidised by the state), and the presence of non-tariff barriers, such as packaging and phytosanitary requirements.

New Agenda was planning to include articles on the zero tariffs of China in this issue. But during our quality assurance process, we became aware of extensive errors in the references for the core contribution. In our experience, those sorts of errors are often the result of AI interference in the grammar and readability of the reference list. Consistency and accuracy in referencing is an absolute requirement for all content in the journal. AI has increased the burdens of the editorial team measurably, with its insertion of fake references, inaccurate titles and references that make no sense in relation to the subject of the articles.

Even the *South African Journal of Science* has had its own issues with AI manipulation of references. One of its reference lists features “Mahmood, M. University of Cape Town TB Davie Memorial Lecture...”.³ It’s surprising to see this kind of blip in the SAJS, which is cosseted by “an editorial team of ten disciplinary-specialist Associate Editors who are responsible for managing the peer review of submissions in their disciplines. The Editor-in-Chief works closely with a full-time publishing team consisting of a Managing Editor, an Online Publishing Systems Administrator and an Online Publishing Administrator led by the Scholarly Publishing Manager”.⁴



The *New Agenda* team noted that the SAJS, the noblest journal in South Africa, was an awardee – in 2024/5 – of a grant from the Electronic Information for Libraries (EIFL) project in Africa; *New Agenda* was granted the same award in 2025/26, with a somewhat smaller support team.

This issue of *New Agenda* features an article by Sem Mandela Uutoni and Mubanga Mpundu on the characteristics of government social protection grants in Namibia and whether they influence labour market participation and productive inclusion.

Judy Seidman contributes a commentary on the role and growth of resistance culture between the late 1960s and 1982, within the distinctive arts and culture discourse that emerged after the Soweto uprisings of June 1976. Her focal point is the MEDU Art Ensemble based in Gaborone, Botswana.

The article includes a harrowing account of the 1985 murders of 12 people in a cross-border raid into Gaborone by the apartheid state, including visual artist Thami Mnye. The Thami Mnye Foundation in the Netherlands, established in 1990, pays homage to an activist artist who, as a member of the MEDU Art Ensemble, utilised art as a tool of expression and communication during the struggle for liberation from apartheid in South Africa. The Foundation has provided artist-in-residence programmes to more than 130 artists from throughout Africa and countries elsewhere that are home to artists in the African diaspora. To mark its 35th anniversary in 2026, the Foundation has focused on Mnye, and in his spirit, “invited artists whose work has meaningful historical ties to South Africa, or whose artistic practice carries the echoes of its history and engages deeply with its social and cultural landscapes – continuing the dialogue between past and present through the transformative power of art,” according to the chairperson of the Foundation, Pauline Burmann.



This issue of *New Agenda* includes six book reviews.

Megan Bryer critiques two recent books on economics and capitalism. Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie considers Mahmood Mamdani's memoir on Uganda and life under Idi Amin and Yoweri Museveni. Rasigan Maharajh introduces readers to a collection of critical essays on BRICS/BRICS+. Keith Gottschalk offers reviews of Martin Plaut's controversial and challenging book on slavery in Africa over the last 5,000 years, and the unusual account of the Soviet-era advocate for African liberation, Vladimir Shubin.

Editor's note – The editor of New Agenda will be retiring after seven years in the post. The Institute for African Alternatives is looking for someone to take his place. This will be from the start of 2028, or before. We invite our readers to put forward proposals or nominations for the position.

ENDNOTES

¹ Communiqué of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission on the adoption of the "Correct The Map" resolution, 4 September 2026.

<https://au.int/sites/default/files/PR-%20CorrectTheMap-En.pdf>

² This formulation was used first in 2017. It featured in both of President Xi's statements to the 18th BRICS Summit, New Delhi, on 12 and 13 September 2026. See Chapter 9 of Rudd, K. (2024). *On Xi Jinping: How Xi's Marxist Nationalism is Shaping China and the World*. Oxford Academic.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197766033.001.0001>; English Edition of *Qiushi Journal*. https://en.qstheory.cn/2026-09/14/c_1213158.htm

³ Several other reference entries also incorrectly use the first name of the author as the 'index' name for articles. For example, see note 7 to Lewins, K. et al. (2025) Is silence in the face of global injustice in the "best interests" of South African universities? *South African Journal of Science*. 121(3/4), Art. 21191.

<https://doi.org/10.17159/sajs.2025/21191>. Note 7 reflects the author as "Mahmood" – the first name of the noted scholar Mahmood Mamdani.

⁴ See Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) (2026), vacancy advertisement: Editor-in-Chief of the South African Journal of Science.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/11nPRnAe23xel9nt4M_uSp7toyQjwvdBI/view?pli=1 (accessed 25 August 2026).



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