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## AGRICULTURE

Global coffee cultivation depends on biodiversity and climate action

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Change at the head of state further aggravates political climate



# Feminist development policy

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### FOCUS

## Feminist development policy

Women are still structurally disadvantaged. Their empowerment through education, reproductive rights and equal opportunities is crucial for a gender-equal world. Society as a whole must work on dismantling structures that have always favoured men. Women's rights must be part of any sound development strategy, because gender equality is essential to achieving all Sustainable Development Goals.

**Title:** Shop in an informal settlement in Nairobi.

**Photo:** picture-alliance/photothek/Ute Grabowsky/photothek.net







 **Our focus section on Feminist development policy starts on page 18. It pertains to the UN's 5<sup>th</sup> Sustainable Development Goal (SDG): Gender equality. It also has a bearing on other SDGs.**

Women, moreover, need a minimum level of formal education to understand how family planning works and to gain the self-confidence to plan their own future. Quite obviously, that is harder to do if they lack employment opportunities. Where women are empowered to take their fate into their own hands, they tend to have fewer babies. This is rather the case in high-income countries, where women are in a better position to plan their lives.

For the reasons listed above, any sensible development strategy must promote women's rights. Developmental action is therefore inherently feminist. Furthermore, it must be clear that the implementation of feminist development policy is an effort involving society as a whole. Men are especially challenged. Social structures and institutions have always favoured them. Men are the ones responsible for gender inequality, therefore they have a special responsibility to deconstruct it.

For good reason, the UN's Sustainable Development Goals include gender equality (SDG5). Eventually, the achievement of all other SDGs depends on it.



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# Sustainable development is inherently feminist

Development is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon. Essentially it is about the welfare of all human beings. More than half of them are female. However, compared to men, women are still structurally disadvantaged in many places.

Freedom matters – and it depends on empowerment. Every little girl around the world should have a broad variety of role models, enabling her to dream about her future. Every teenage girl must understand the biology of her body, know her reproductive rights and be empowered to reject abuse. Every young woman must have career opportunities. She must also have the right to decide whether she wants to marry, whom she wants to be with and, in doubt, whether she wants to quit that relationship.

At the same time, women need equal say in public affairs. They must be represented in governments as well as in all relevant authorities and courts. Far too often, they are side-lined in peace talks, and failure is more

likely when that happens. While women are very rarely perpetrators of violence, they all too often become victims – and not only in war, but even in the private sphere of their homes. As we elaborated in a previous focus section (see D+C/E+Z Digital Monthly 2023/02), female persons are still often disadvantaged in all kinds of education systems.

The average number of children per woman can tell us a lot about women's – and their families' – status regarding income, health and education. All three aspects are of course crucial indicators for a country's developmental achievement. Where parents worry that their children will not survive because of poverty and health risks, they will have more of them. After all, where governments do not provide social security, they will be the ones who will have to take care of the parents in old age. Using contraceptives, moreover, requires both knowledge and availability, with the latter again reflecting the quality of health infrastructure.

Marva Khan is assistant professor of law at LUMS (Lahore University of Management Sciences) and co-founder of the Pakistani Feminist Judgments Project. In her contributions for D+C/E+Z, she has already covered a number of topics. Among them are digital learning, the history of rape law in Pakistan and the country's informal sector. In



this issue, she explains why women are still underrepresented in Pakistan's judicial system – even though certain progress has been made (page 22).

► All contributions to our focus section will also appear on our website [www.dandc.eu](http://www.dandc.eu), where you will find other related content as well.



An internet café in Nairobi's Kibera slum.

May 2023, news reports indicated that hackers with links to China had hacked Kenya's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Finance when a government employee downloaded compromised files. In addition, they reportedly hacked into the cyberinfrastructure of Kenya's National Intelligence Service. The impact of such crimes can be devastating on reputation, finances and security in general. There are also many cases of digital identity theft. Credit and debit card theft matters too.

In Kenya and South Africa, digital financial fraud is very common. Usually, the scammers pretend to be calling from mobile phone companies. They ask for personal information. Once they have access to subscribers' identity module cards, they empty the mobile phone wallets and even bank accounts, if those accounts are connected to the phone number.

Furthermore, in Kenya, suspicion is spreading that some rogue employees of mobile phone companies as well as banks are withdrawing money from customers' accounts. Typically, the victims are elderly people who are not familiar with electronic transactions. But it is not only the elderly who fall victim. Young people are affected too.

Additionally, cryptocurrencies have become quite popular in Africa, and they offer a range of opportunities for cybercriminals. A much-used strategy is to invite people to invest in fake cryptocurrency accounts.

Digital blackmail takes many forms. Fake profiles on dating apps are used to prey on victims. People are tricked into revealing personal information and sharing compromising photos, which are then used for blackmail. Targets include public figures. Recent examples on the continent are Nigerian musician Tiwa Savage or former Kenyan governor John Lonyangapuo.

The compromise of business emails must be taken seriously too. Cybercriminals use the email accounts to hack into corporate systems and divert payments. As their networks and botnets become more sophisticated, they often no longer start with classic spam emails.

## SDG ACHIEVEMENT AT RISK

The widespread prevalence of digital fraud in Africa is detrimental to Africa's young and

### CYBER SECURITY

# The many faces of digital fraud in Africa

**Digital fraud is a major challenge in Africa. Its costs are mounting for citizens as well as for public and private companies. Criminals target ignorant people in particular, but they also hurt the budding e-commerce sector and other companies. For good reason, the African Union wants all governments to regulate the digital sphere in ways that inspire people's trust.**

By Alphonse Shiundu

Local and international fraudsters are stepping up their scam games, taking advantage of increasing internet use, the proliferation of social media and the growing number of Africans with smartphones.

In September 2022, the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) estimated that 40% of Africans had access to the internet. The UN agency considered these 560 million persons to be at risk of online scams, digital extortion, business email compromise, ransomware and botnets.

Interpol, the international criminal police organisation, shares the concerns. It sees online services exposed to risks due to

growing demand and "a lack of cybersecurity policies and standards".

Many online scams are based on deception. For example, they try to get victims to pay for counterfeit products. This crime is particularly serious on a continent where many people live in poverty. Scammers also exploit the desperation that comes with this. They pose as public figures or fake the pages of large companies, advertising job opportunities that do not exist. They then fleece applicants, for example by charging "application fees".

Covid-19 made things worse. Many people were ill, but health facilities were overburdened. Fraudsters took advantage of the situation and sold fake medicines. In view of spreading unemployment, moreover, fake visa schemes for the USA, Canada or Europe proliferated. Applicants were asked to pay a fee to obtain a work or school visa, but the scammers disappeared as soon as the money was paid.

Another problem is phishing attacks, which hack devices and data systems. Information is stolen from individuals, companies and authorities. For example, in

promising e-commerce industry. It leads people to distrust online companies in the first place. No one wants to end up paying a fake online shop for a non-existent product. Many customers thus prefer in-store purchases and cash payments. They do not want to leave a digital footprint in electronic transactions, as these might become digital entry points for fraudsters.

In Africa, the debate on digital fraud is currently a tangle of the many issues revolving around data security, privacy and the governance of online platforms. On the other hand, these discussions only involve a tiny minority of technology enthusiasts, entrepreneurs and often foreign profiteers who seek to expand their businesses by entering the emerging and so far poorly regulated digital market on the continent.

It is obvious that more must happen. Indeed, the African Union (AU) is now pushing for stronger digital regulation. In recent years, it has issued a number of important

papers, including the AU Data Policy Framework, the Digital Education Strategy and the Convention on Cybersecurity and Personal Data Protection.

The Digital Transformation Strategy for the decade to 2030 is probably the most relevant publication. It makes clear that moving towards a digital economy is crucial for the continent's development and the achievement of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It underlines that a lack of trust in digital technology will do serious damage in African countries. The strategy declares it to be essential that "African Union Member States have adequate regulation, particularly around data governance and digital platforms, to ensure that trust is preserved in the digitalisation".

Moreover, African governments need to work towards open standards and cross-border interoperability. That is needed to inspire more digital trust. However, digital

fraud exceeds African borders. Prosecuting cyber criminals requires international cooperation across multiple jurisdictions.

The continent's major economies such as Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana and South Africa have put laws and policies in place to tackle digital fraud. Too many regulations, however, only focus on financial fraud.

At the same time, a worrying development is that some governments use cyber legislation to restrict freedom of the press and of expression. In Kenya and Uganda, the courts have struck out some clauses of this kind, stating that they are unconstitutional and illegal. Other restrictive clauses have survived, jeopardising free speech in the digital public sphere.



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## Protect yourself on the internet

As African governments expand opportunities in the digital economy, they must also improve legal protection for internet users. However, users have a duty to protect themselves too, given that digital fraud is on the rise. Accordingly, private-sector companies must take adequate measures to protect their customers. Finally, the media have a duty to tell people how to protect themselves.

Key tips for preventing digital fraud include setting strong passwords, making sure software is genuine and up to date and paying attention to what is shared online. It makes sense to spell out a list of information that must never be shared, whether online or offline. The list should include passwords, bank details, personal identification numbers and physical addresses.

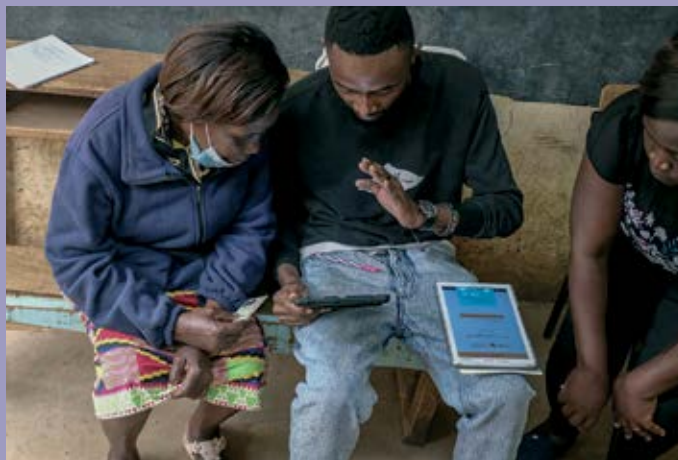
Important safety strategies also include:

- using antivirus programmes,
- recognising and avoiding suspicious links,
- using multi-factor authentication whenever possible,
- keeping an eye on bank statements, monitoring bank and credit card transactions for suspicious activity,
- shopping securely using trusted payment methods for online purchases,
- regularly updating a device's firmware, operating system and software,
- backing up data regularly,
- acting with extreme caution towards strangers on dating portals,
- exercising caution with high-return, low-risk investment offers shared online,

- limiting the amount of personal information shared publicly on social-media platforms,
- staying informed, educating others and promoting safe online practices while encouraging reporting of suspicious activities.

These things are basic digital security knowledge. Unfortunately, neither public

awareness raising, nor formal education systems are keeping pace with rapidly evolving digital innovations and expanding options. Companies and governments thus need to invest in education, but also in digital tools and systems to monitor, prevent and investigate digital fraud. Many parties have a role to play in holding culprits accountable and stopping cybercrime. AS



Voters are shown how to pick an aspirant on a tablet in a Nairobi school.



OVAHERERO AND NAMA GENOCIDE

# A mockery of reconciliation and justice

**The German-Namibian Joint Declaration regarding the genocide in the former colony South-West Africa falls short. It neither acknowledges German guilt appropriately, nor directly involves the descendants of the affected communities. The agreement reinforces power imbalances and does not promote true reconciliation.**

By Sima Luipert, Henning Melber and Jephta Uavavaera Nguherimo

In 2015, Germany rather half-heartedly acknowledged that genocide had been committed in the imperial colony of South West Africa between 1904 and 1908. However, it denied this admission of guilt had any legally valid consequences.

Since then, bilateral negotiations behind closed doors took place. On 21 May 2021 a Joint Declaration was initialled by the two special envoys. The coalition agreement of Germany's new Federal Government referred to it as a "reconciliation agreement". This euphemism was withdrawn in response to an interpellation in the German parliament on 12 October 2022.

Due to protests by Namibian civil society and opposition parties, the declaration's adoption has been shelved and not yet signed by the foreign ministers. On 27 October 2022, Namibia's Vice-President Nangolo Mbumba, who oversees the negotiations, stated that several points needed revision: the agreed amount of €1.1 billion, the full and unrestricted recognition of the genocide, the acknowledgement of reparations and the inclusion of the descendants of the victim groups in the diaspora.

However, the main shortcoming must be addressed too. The main organisations of the descendants of the genocide-affected communities, the Ovaherero and Nama, but also the Damara and San, remained excluded from the talks.

On 9 November 2022, Germany's Federal Government declared in parliament

that there would be no new negotiations to amend the declaration. However, it was prepared to take some grievances into account by means of an addendum. Results remain to be seen.



Monument commemorating the Ovaherero and Nama genocide in Windhoek.

Since then, opponents of the deal have taken further steps. In January 2023, the Ovaherero Traditional Authority, the Nama Traditional Leaders Association and the leader of the Landless People's Movement (Namibia's second largest opposition party) filed a lawsuit with the Windhoek High Court. They claim that the negotiations violate the Namibian constitution and a resolution adopted by parliament in 2006. The reason is that descendants of those directly

affected were not involved in the negotiations.

## GERMANY AND NAMIBIA VIOLATE RIGHTS

While the case is pending, their objections were supported by Special Rapporteurs of the UN Human Rights Council in letters sent to both governments on 23 February 2023. Indeed, the negotiations violated the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which was adopted in September 2007 with the votes of Germany and Namibia. It states that "indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decisionmaking

in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves". The rapporteurs also noted insufficient remembrance of the crimes committed and criticise that the Joint Declaration is no legal recognition of genocide and omits reparations.

Unsurprisingly, both the Namibian and German governments dismissed the criticism by referring to the intertemporal principle. This basically means that a law does

not apply to events that happened before it took force. In doing so, they ignore relevant perspectives of international legal norms.

The declaration admits genocide using the words “from today’s perspective”. It avoids accepting responsibility and so shies away from the consequences that would follow. The doctrine of apology without compensation, coined by former German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer some 20 years ago, seems to continue.

According to this approach, the declaration avoids the word “reparations”. It confirms the payment of €1050 million over 30 years as a grant by Germany “dedicated to the reconstruction and development support programme for the benefit of the descendants of the particularly affected communities”. This is roughly the same amount allocated since independence as German development assistance (ODA) to Namibia. Another 50 million are for “projects on reconciliation, remembrance, re-

search and education”. The implementation of both programmes rests with the two governments. It is agreed “that these amounts settle all financial aspects [...] relating to the past addressed in this Joint Declaration”.

The declaration reinforces an asymmetrical power structure. The Namibian government is obviously the junior partner. The document states “Germany apologizes and bows before the descendants of the victims [...] The Namibian Government and people accept Germany’s apology.” But the people have never been asked.

The descendants of the affected communities declare: If it is not with us, it is against us. In its present form, the declaration betrays justice. It makes the damage even greater. The German and Namibian governments should both be ashamed. Until negotiations are resumed in a transparent and inclusive process, giving the descendants not only a voice, but true co-ownership, there can be no reconciliation.



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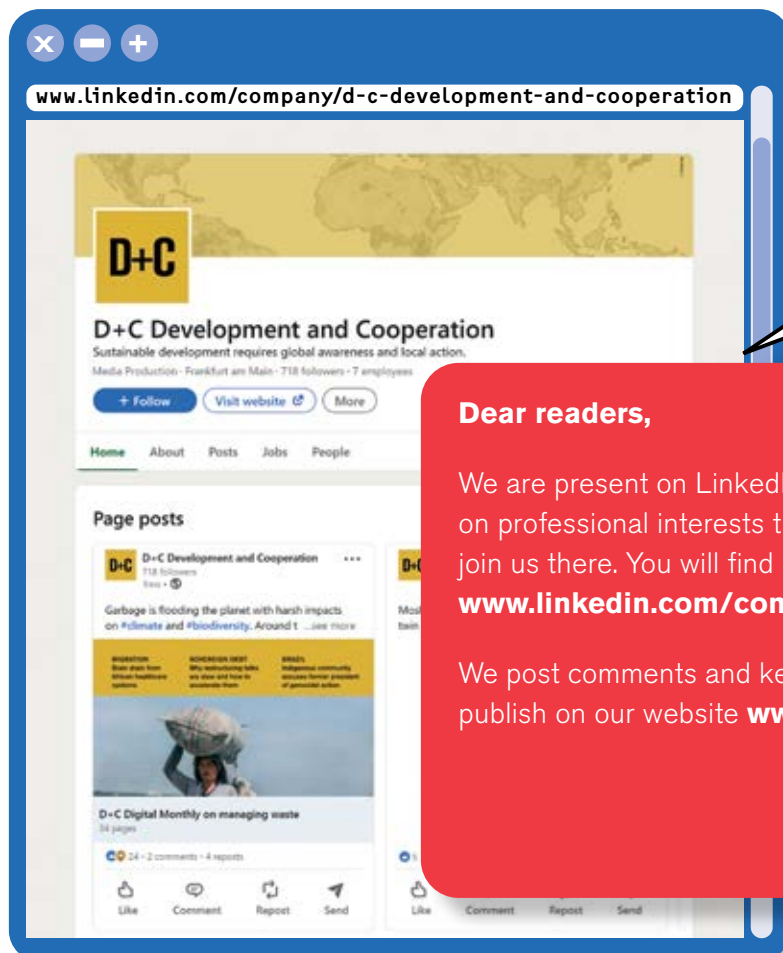
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The entrance to the Svalbard Global Seed Vault in the Norwegian Arctic, where humanity stores a backup of many crops.

## BIODIVERSITY

# Empty cups

**Coffee is becoming more and more expensive, in part due to the climate crisis. Extreme weather is threatening the livelihoods of many small farmers, as well as weakening coffee plants and reducing their diversity.**

By Kira Crome

In Germany alone, an average of 168 litres of coffee are being drunk every year. But having a morning cup of coffee is becoming more and more expensive. The retail price of coffee on commodity markets has sharply increased recently. As a result, Tchibo, Germany's leading coffee roaster, raised its prices at the beginning of last year for the second time in nine months.

There are many reasons for this trend. The climate crisis is causing crop failures in

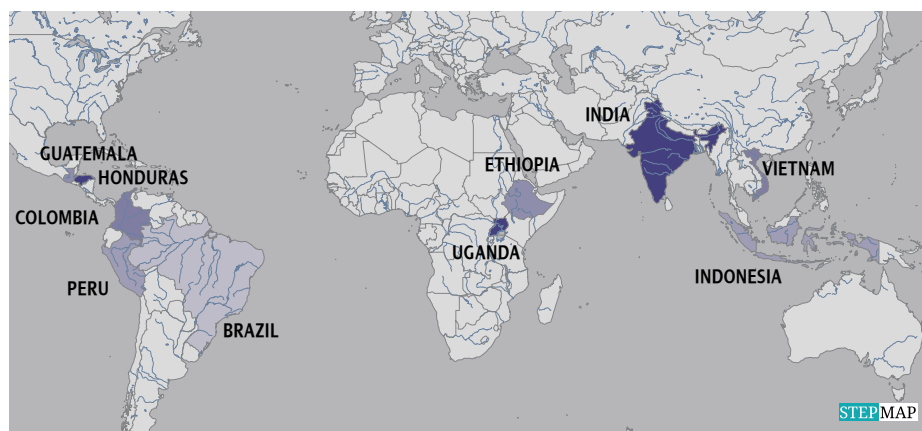
the producer regions along the coffee belt in the southern hemisphere. However, the focus on only two coffee varieties is also contributing to price increases. "There are 124 species of coffee. But only two – *coffea arabica* and *coffea canephora*, better known as robusta – together make up 99% of our coffee harvest," says botanist Aaron Davis of the Kew Royal Botanical Gardens in Sussex.

While robusta flourishes in lower, hotter conditions and produces beans that contain more caffeine, arabica delivers milder, more subtle coffees. Arabica represents about 60% of the global coffee production. Arabica plants are very sensitive to extreme weather, though: too much sunshine and temperatures that are too high or too low impact the yield and impair the flavour.

If the climate changes, yields and quality suffer. This means as well that the livelihoods of many people who depend on coffee cultivation are at risk. Recently, drought followed by snow and cold led to crop failures in Brazil, one of the largest coffee producers in the world. Climate researchers are now investigating whether in the future coffee plants will be able to thrive at all in the regions where they have always been cultivated.

The outlook is poor. "In the case of moderate climate change, the world could lose half of its best coffee croplands," write researchers from the Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW) in a recently published study. In the mildest global warming scenario, the most productive areas will decline by 76% until 2050 in Brazil alone. According to a similar study by the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK), southwestern Ethiopia could lose almost half of its cultivation areas in the coming decades. Most of the classic growing regions will probably have to be moved, the researchers believe.





The coffee belt.

The consequences will be grave not only for coffee drinkers. “If coffee regions lose their status due to climate change, the livelihoods of small farmers will be threatened,” says agricultural economist Christoph Gornott, co-author of the PIK study. If they were forced to switch to growing less palatable and more bitter coffee varieties, they would be competing with industrial cultivation systems, which are more efficient in other parts of the world.

### THE LAST RESERVOIR OF GENETIC DIVERSITY

Maintaining biodiversity for coffee cultivation as growing regions continue to shrink has become a race against time. It is unclear whether crop failures and the relocation of coffee plantations into previously atypical regions will have a long-term impact on quality. “We need local solutions and adaptation measures that give small farmers the necessary knowledge and tools to learn better soil management and practice sustainable cultivation,” says Stefan Ruge of the coffee industry’s “Coffee and Climate” initiative.

Yet small farmers throughout the coffee belt have been struggling with the consequences of the climate crisis for some time. Unusually high temperatures and high rainfall promote coffee leaf rust. This fungus covers the leaves and “suffocates” the plants so that they put out fewer blossoms and bear very little fruit. Other pests, like the coffee berry borer, are afflicting plants as well.

Arabica coffee has long been considered a threatened species on the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List. This status isn’t simply due to climate change. The decades-long restriction to

only two coffee varieties has reduced the genetic diversity of the plants grown.

But diversity is of particular importance right now because it determines how well a crop can adapt to changing environmental conditions. In a study on the economic situation of coffee cultivation, experts from the University of Bonn write that the genetic basis of global coffee plantations is relatively small, since most commercial coffee varieties descend from just a few wild plants from Ethiopian forests.

For the arabica species, wild relatives and old varieties of our coffee would be a plant genetic booster: coffee farmers around the world could crossbreed with wild coffee varieties in order to create offspring that can better withstand climate fluctuations and pests. Yet scientists warn that the reservoir needed to make that happen is being lost at an alarming rate.

Wild species of coffee primarily grow in natural forests in tropical highlands, which are being decimated by land conversion and overexploitation. In Ethiopia alone, the cradle of arabica coffee, 60% of forests have been lost in the past three decades – also to make space for new coffee plantations.

Nowadays, at least 60% of wild coffee species are threatened or at risk of extinction. Like in the case of wheat or maize, reserves can be found in seed collections. In these depots, the plant genetic material of wild ancestors and old varieties is preserved at permanently cool temperatures and secured for the future.

Yet unlike many other crops that support our basic diet, coffee cannot simply be stored as germinable seeds. Most col-

lections, therefore, are field collections: coffee plants that are cultivated solely for the purposes of preservation and scientific research. Such collections, like the international coffee collection of the Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Center (CATIE) in Costa Rica, safeguard traditional varieties and wild species. However, they are difficult and expensive to keep and maintain.

The cultivating countries in the coffee belt are reaching their financial limit. According to Ehsan Dulloo, collections are underfinanced around the world. The biologist led an assessment of existing coffee databases on behalf of the Global Crop Diversity Trust (Crop Trust). In Costa Rica alone, about 80% of the local collection is at risk of being lost for future breeding research.

“In order to ensure the coffee supply for the future, we as a global community must maintain and preserve these plant genetic reserves in the best possible condition. They must be made more accessible for growers and coffee farmers around the world. More money and above all more and better trained personnel are needed,” argues Stefan Schmitz, Executive Director of the Crop Trust.

The international organisation, headquartered in Bonn, Germany, preserves the genetic diversity of crops worldwide and finances important seed banks. For example, together with the Norwegian government and NordGen, the seed bank for Nordic countries, the Crop Trust maintains the Svalbard Global Seed Vault in Spitsbergen and has developed a multi-step strategy for coffee. It would cost \$25 million to secure the plant genetic diversity of our coffee around the world. That is less than half of the daily sales of the coffee chain Starbucks.

### FURTHER READING

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<https://www.croptrust.org/>



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Social-protection systems are key to access health services. Hospital in Jaipur, India.

#### INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

## Better data systems for better social protection

**Social-protection systems need to be able to share information with other data systems in order to better serve those in need. DCI, a global initiative, aims to develop international standards for such interoperability.**

By Anita Mittal

Countries around the world spent an average of two percent of their gross domestic product (GDP) on social protection in an attempt to address the hardships caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, according to a World Bank report (World Bank 2021). High-income countries had more means to do so than low-income countries. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has long highlighted the massive gaps that exist in social protection worldwide (ILO, 2017). Around two thirds of the global population have limited or no access to basic social protection, such as adequate health insurance or unemployment insurance.

The problem is exacerbated by fragmented social-protection information systems that are often unable to communicate

with other programmes or wider government systems. This lack of harmonisation not only affects social protection outcomes but can also lead to a wastage of public resources.

One way to address this issue is by promoting interoperability, which is the ability of different components of a social protection system to work together effectively and efficiently. Data systems, technology platforms and service-delivery mechanisms should be able to share information and coordinate services. Interoperability is important for social-protection systems because it allows for a more holistic and integrated approach to service delivery, which can lead to better outcomes for beneficiaries.

### FACILITATING BETTER SERVICES

Digital technology and information systems are increasingly used to improve social protection programmes. For example, they can facilitate seamless information sharing between various government agencies, such as the Ministry of Social Protec-

tion and the Ministry of Health. This allows governments to better target those in need and deliver services to them. Using biometrics, for instance, can accurately verify the identities of recipients and ensure that services are channelled to the right beneficiaries.

Social protection delivery systems typically involve interactions:

- amongst various programme specific information systems,
- with shared foundational systems like civil registry, digital identification systems and payment systems, as well as
- with sectoral information systems of, for example, health and education.

To ensure seamless interoperability, the implementation of common standards and protocols is imperative. While countries do make use of standards like OpenHIE or FHIR for health care data exchange, such standards are missing for the social protection sector.

### THE DIGITAL CONVERGENCE INITIATIVE

In a bid to tackle this issue on a global scale, the Digital Convergence Initiative (DCI) was launched in September 2021 under USP2030 (Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals), a global alliance of governmental and non-governmental organisations. DCI is a joint effort by USP2030 members, governments, development partners, civil society and the private sector. Its objective is to build a global consensus on open standards for integrated and interoperable social protection information systems.

Representatives from the bilateral German development agency GIZ, World Bank and ILO meet every week to steer the initiative. DCI envisages that the open standards will:

- foster an ecosystem for innovation in which technology providers can build products that are interoperable,
- reduce the time and cost of developing interoperable solutions, especially in low and middle-income countries,
- enable programmes to match interoperable components from different providers to build their integrated social-protection delivery systems and
- help design systems that are prepared for future needs, beyond the current level of maturity of policy and information systems.

To achieve this, the DCI has developed a multi-pronged approach to building consensus on standards.

Firstly, it hosts a series of monthly webinars where nations can share their experiences on achieving interoperability of social-protection delivery systems and talk about the challenges they face. This also helps to build a community that drives the development of global standards. To date, ten countries have shared their journeys which are recorded and made available along with presentations on the DCI website (see link below): India, Belgium, Turkey, Chile, Cambodia, France, Zambia, Brazil, Ghana and Uzbekistan.

Secondly, the Digital Convergence Initiative is organising a series of workshops to demonstrate how interoperability can be implemented. Use cases focus on the interaction of social protection systems with, for example, civil registry or payment systems.

Thirdly, the DCI sets up committees to formulate standards for such interactions. They include representatives from academia, international organisations, solution providers and other experts to help bring different perspectives and expertise in the formulation of standards.

Fourthly, the DCI builds partnerships with providers of both proprietary and open-source software that perform one or more functions in the delivery chain of social protection programmes. To help develop uniform standards for interoperability, DCI harnesses the potential of open-source software solutions, which are readily available to the general public free of charge.

While interoperability is critical to delivering better social services to those in need, data security must not be neglected too. Interconnecting different data systems poses data-security risks, and countries need to ensure that their citizens' data is protected at all times.

**FURTHER READING**

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## Improving services for persons with disabilities

Currently, DCI is exploring the interaction between social protection systems and disability registers. People with disabilities are a relevant target group as about 80% of them live in poverty. One of the mottoes of the UN's 2030 Agenda is "to leave no one behind". This means that the poorest and most disadvantaged people deserve particular attention when it comes to achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Things are particularly tough in developing countries, where, according to the UN, about 80% of the world's estimated 1.3 billion people with disabilities live. Tax revenues tend to be low in these countries, and government spending tends to be quite meagre as well.

Every project and programme should take account of the needs of persons with disabilities explicitly and right from the start. Better interoperability (see main text), especially between the countries'

social protection systems and their disability registers, can help achieve this objective.

Countries such as Rwanda, Cambodia and India have registers that store information about people with disabilities, including details of their disabilities. These details can be accessed by the respective social protection programmes to make decisions that may allow the programme to prioritise cer-

tain individuals or to provide additional benefits to them.

Information from the disability registers can also be used by the labour and skills information systems to select a training and job suitable for each person, depending on the type of disability.

Further discussions will be held with countries to explore the interactions between these systems. This will help to develop use cases. We will then set up a committee to work on standards based on this body of knowledge. Once adopted, these standards will promote "interoperability by design" of social protection systems with disability registries and contribute to the goal of leaving no one behind. AM



Rally for persons with disabilities in Bangalore, India, 2022.

**LITERATURE**

UN fact sheet on disability:

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/resources/factsheet-on-persons-with-disabilities.html>



## Drug shortages in public hospitals

In public health facilities in Zambia, there is an ongoing drug shortage and patients fear not getting vital medicine.

The country's national drug stock levels currently stand at 53.1%, way below the World Health Organization's stipulated minimum threshold of 70% to 80%, according to the Zambia Medicines and Medical Supplies Agency (ZAMMSA).

"The ongoing shortage of medicine in all government health facilities is worrying. As a diabetic, I take injectable insulin regularly. When I go to the public facility, I am told they have run out and must opt for the expensive private drug stores," Sarah Tembo, a Lusaka resident, says.

In many of these health facilities, several essential and life-saving medicines are in short supply. These include painkillers such as paracetamol, nifedipine for hypertensive patients and insulin used by diabetics. Health care workers in these facilities are helpless and cannot offer the needed care without the required drugs.

Critics have blamed corruption and embezzlement for the current drug shortage. As the drug and medicines supply chain continues to be a big business globally, some local pharmaceutical experts have hinted at the practice by individuals in the procurement and supply chain departments in public health facilities to steal medicines and sell them on the black market.

"There's a very big cartel in the procurement and supply of medicines. The government has been procuring quite alright, but there's an invisible hand which is reselling drugs using government resources. This powerful syndicate even went so far as to bring expired medicines into the country," Peter Makayi, a pharmaceutical expert, says.

Some stakeholders are calling on the government to declare a "state of emergency" in the wake of this ongoing crisis. They argue that this will allow the invocation of disaster management procedures and accord the issue the much-needed attention it deserves.

The government is however hesitant to take up the recommendation. They have instead announced that they have procured enough essential medicines for health facilities to address the nationwide shortage of drugs.

Mutale Nalumango, Zambia's vice president, acknowledges that the country faces the challenge of lack of essential drugs countrywide. She believes that part of the problem is the messy supply chain in the pharmaceutical industry which costs the state a lot of money. She also expresses frustration with unscrupulous individuals who steal drugs meant for public facilities. "When there is a middleman, there are challenges. My appeal is that we do away with most of these intermediaries," she suggests.



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## MASTHEAD / IMPRINT

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Sustainable development requires global awareness and local action.

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## CLIMATE CRISIS

# Reckless pragmatism

**Heat waves are breaking records across the globe. The damages are already vast, and things are set to get worse. Postponing climate action in this scenario is not “pragmatic” in any sense of the word. It is a recipe for disaster.**

By Roli Mahajan

Summer arrived early and often with record-shattering high temperatures in different parts of the world. On 29<sup>th</sup> May, Shanghai recorded its hottest day for the month in 100 years at 36.7 degrees Celsius. On 13<sup>th</sup> May, Singapore recorded the highest daily temperature for May since 1983. Vietnam’s northern province of Thanh Hoa recorded its highest-ever temperature of 44.1°C on 6<sup>th</sup> May.

During April, countries like India, Bangladesh, China, Thailand and Laos faced one of the worst April heat waves. Road surfaces melted in Dhaka while schools were closed, state assemblies could not function and some people died in India. The heat did not even spare the first cheetah cubs to be born in India in decades.

In the Mediterranean region, local temperatures were up to 20 degrees higher than normal for April. Affected countries

included Spain, Portugal, Morocco and Algeria.

Unusual heat exacerbates dryness and increases the likelihood of wildfires. More than 54,000 hectares of Russian forests were ablaze in the Urals in recent weeks. Smoke from Canadian forest fires clouded the north-eastern USA in smog.

Things are set to get worse. The World Meteorological Organization (WMO), a UN agency, expects global average temperatures to surge to record levels in the next five years. There is a two-thirds chance that the global average temperature will exceed the 1.5°C above industrial levels which the Paris Agreement has set as the goal.

Complex weather patterns in the Pacific Ocean play a role. According to the WMO, the cooling influence of the La Niña conditions will give way to the hotter El Niño. The prognosis is obvious. The combination of still rising greenhouse-gas emissions and El Niño will further heat the planet.

The EU’s Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) reckons that heat waves killed more than 20,000 people in Europe in 2022. People in southern Europe endured 70 to 100 days of heat stress. Even the UK had unprecedented high temperatures of more than 40°C.

People in tropical and subtropical countries are more accustomed to high temperatures than Europeans. However, many work outdoors, and they are dangerously exposed to extreme weather. When heat and humidity combine to produce “wet-bulb” conditions, mammals struggle to shed heat through perspiration. Survival may depend on immediate access to cooling. Air conditioning, however, is not available to the most vulnerable people, and even electric fans often are not.

Power failures, moreover, regularly leave the better-off unprotected too. A deep irony is that many countries’ electricity systems are powered by fossil fuels. They help right now, but their emissions compound problems in the long term. Scientists warn that the climate crisis will have far-reaching repercussions for health, food security and water management.

To a limited extent, adaptation is possible. Awareness about heat waves and preparing for such events is helpful. Finding low-carbon and low-cost means of cooling offices and homes is crucial.

In a very literal sense, what really matters is to stop heat increases. It is therefore disturbing to see how nations with high incomes and large per-capita footprints are dithering and backtracking. The British government is considering slower climate action. Germany cannot make up its mind to finally introduce a speed limit on highways to end petrol-guzzling speeding. Meanwhile, Republicans in the USA are doing what they can to delegitimise ethical investment strategies, which take into account environmental, social and government impacts (ESG).

Policymakers say they do not want to overburden economies. What they call “pragmatism” is really a recipe for disaster. Even today, major insurance companies say they can no longer cover homes in California because they cannot assess the climate risks accurately enough. In other words, they too know the damage is getting worse.

Something needs to be done. Fast. Prosperous nations with ample resources and excessive per-capita emissions must lead the way.



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New York City smog in June 2023.

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

# African responsibility for climate justice

**The impacts of the climate crisis hurt low-income countries, and African elites like to blame the rich nations. They should reconsider their own attitudes too.**

By Samir Abi

European tourists used to appreciate Togo's long miles of beaches. Today, the scenario is sad, however. Coastal infrastructures are in decay, and many buildings are being destroyed by the waves. Beach erosion means fewer tourists.

Entire villages and urban neighbourhoods are at risk, so people are forced to leave their homes. Some lose their fields, others can no longer make a living with fishing. In interior regions, both flooding and draught are occurring more often, and they too undermine entire families' livelihoods. People with some money or education move abroad, hoping for a better future in West African cities like Cotonou and Lagos or perhaps even Europe.

No coastal city in West Africa is climate safe, however. The rising sea level affects them all. Saline water is increasingly contaminating the groundwater, for example, making drinking-water provision much more difficult in the fast-growing agglomerations. Migration and high birth rates are overwhelming urban infrastructure. Slums are mushrooming, and pollution is getting worse.

The climate impacts are serious. Science tells us that the main cause is the greenhouse-gas emissions of industrial nations over decades. This is a fact African elites keep pointing out, but they shy away from discussing economic and developmental decisions of their own. The full truth, of course, is that they typically maintained colonial systems of exploitation after independence.

African economies still largely depend on the export of commodities. Without restraint, local elites opted for large-scale

plantations, mining and oil production, whilst belittling traditional, but more sustainable resource use. A tiny capitalist class has profited from exploiting nature and providing commodities to multinational corporations. Its rise was promoted by prosperous nations as well as multilateral institutions like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Not only was nature neglected. The fight against mass poverty also got far too little attention too.

There are many examples for how commodity-driven economies hurt the environment. Just consider that the construction of large ports disrupts marine ecosystems. As a result, densely populated coasts are being eroded even faster. Construction work, moreover, causes climate emissions – and the exported goods drive unsustainable growth in countries with higher incomes.

The construction of new highways or major dams is similarly destructive. The forests are disappearing, giving way to industrial interests. Logging, plantations and open-pit mining are causing massive harm.

In view of the ecologic and social disasters, demands for climate justice lack credibility unless African elites reconsider their own attitudes as well. They obviously bear some responsibility for the state of the continent. Two things matter in particular:

- We need a healthier approach to the natural environment. Our life depends on it, as our ancestors understood well.
- We need an idea of progress that serves our peoples' needs rather than multinational interests.

One implication is that we must rethink what international solidarity means. It is absurd to continue unrestrained resource extraction in low-income countries while reforms towards sustainability are slowly being implemented in high-income countries.

African countries need development models that emphasise decent work for everyone, fair distribution of incomes and clean energy for all. We need universal health care and good education opportunities even in remote villages. Unless African governments set the course accordingly, they cannot use official development assistance (ODA) and climate finance in ways that improve their people's welfare. And this is the only road towards climate justice.



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Artisanal fishing boats in front of the container port of Lomé, Togo's capital city.





Boat on Lake Tanganyika.

#### OVERFISHED WATER BODY

## Unenforced lake closure

The authorities planned to ban fishing on Lake Tanganyika for three months, starting in mid-May. The idea was to allow dwindling fish stocks to recover. The impact on the people living in riparian countries like Burundi would be harsh though, and the ban is not being enforced in three countries.

By Mireille Kanyange

Lake Tanganyika is the second deepest lake on Earth. It is the habitat of a large diversity of fish, many species of which do not exist elsewhere. Mukeke and Ndagala fish are among the most popular items of local cuisine.

The lake has been overfished. In order for stocks to recover, the governments of Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Tanzania and Zambia agreed to close the lake to fishermen for a lengthy period of time.

Burundi has 18 fishing beaches and several fishing ports. The country's governments initially only wanted the fishing ban to go on for a week, but it did not prevail.

People whose livelihoods depend on the sector were afraid of the measure. Georges, for example, is a fisherman who normally sets sail from the southern town of

Rumonge. The father of four has considered returning to his home in northern Burundi since he lacks an alternative source of income.

Claudette has two children. She normally earns money by selling Ndagala fish which she procures early in the morning at the port of Karonda. Her average income is equivalent to two or three euros per day. For her children, fish is the standard food. Claudette too wondered where she would find an alternative livelihood.

In early June, however, Burundi, the DRC and Tanzania are not enforcing the ban. No new date has been defined, but the ban has not been cancelled either. Life goes on as before – and so does overfishing. Zambia, by contrast, has stopped fishing temporarily.

### OVERFISHING AND POLLUTION

The full truth is that fish production has been declining. In 2016, the total catch in Burundi was 26,000 tons. Three years later, the figure had dropped by 6000 tons. The number of fishermen is in decline too. Some have given up because of increased fishing levies. Exports have gone down accordingly. Gabriel Butoyi, who heads the association of Burundian fishermen and consumers,

points out that production has not been keeping up with demand. One consequence is high prices, which make fish increasingly unaffordable for many families.

Relentless fishing and illegal equipment such as gillnets are at the root of the current problems. Water pollution is an issue too, as it kills fish and affects spawning areas. Agriculture and human settlements are expanding, adding to the problems. Environmentalists want Burundi's water legislation to be enforced. It states that buildings must be at least 150 meters away from the lake and 50 meters away from rivers, but it is all too often breached.

Fish farming is a sensible response to this crisis. In Lake Cohoha in northern Burundi, domestic and international investors have started breeding tilapia. The current production amounts to an annual 1000 tons.

Pisciculture is a growing sector in other regions as well. Aqua Burundi, a private company, specialises in sustainable practices. But it is challenging to process the fish, in view of lacking electric power and refrigeration. Smoking fish, however, requires a lot of firewood.

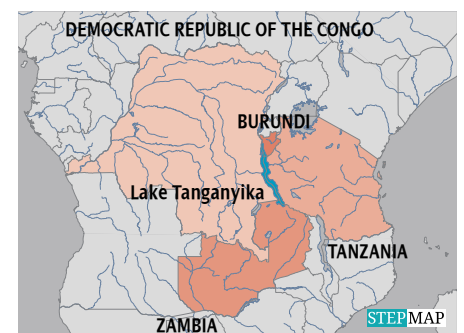
Burundians hope that fish stocks will recover, and production will increase once again. Without the lake closure, that is unlikely to happen. The supranational Lake Tanganyika Authority, which planned the fishing moratorium, has gone silent. Supranational governance is clearly not working.

Burundians find the situation confusing. They are happy to be spared short-term hardship but worry about the long-term outlook.



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Violent protests against Peru's President Dina Boluarte and the police in January.

## DEMOCRACY

# Peru's crisis continues

Ever since President Dina Boluarte took over from Pedro Castillo, the country's divide has deepened.

By Daniel Callo-Concha and Antonia Bihlmayer

For many years since the late 1990s, Peru was praised for its macroeconomic stability and growth, relying on principles like fiscal discipline, preventing debt and keeping reserves high. The beneficiaries of this model were the middle class, the economic elite and foreign investors, who lobbied for its maintenance. Hence, it was sardonically called the “automatic pilot”.

Peru's current political setting provides a stark contrast. All living ex-presidents are under investigation, in detention or serving jail sentences. One even committed suicide to prevent that.

In 2021, Pedro Castillo, a leftist rural teacher and union leader, was elected president. Under him, the country hit rock bottom. Castillo turned out to be remarkably unqualified, doctrinally inconsistent and presumably corrupt. He kept replacing ministers and changing political alliances. He even accepted opponents' dictates to survive politically. Confronted with fierce

opposition, his presidency was a permanent crisis of governance. After one and a half years, after attempting a coup d'état, he was impeached. His vice president, Dina Boluarte, succeeded him in December 2022.

The situation did not calm down, however. Castillo's supporters and others took to the streets. They called for new elections, an end to the terms of both Boluarte and the parliament and a new constitution.

The government ignored all these claims. Protesters were criminalised. More than 70 people died in the protests. Polls show an unpopular government, with all three branches close to dropping below a double-digit approval rating. A sense of instability and confrontation is brewing.

In every election since the 2000s, Peruvian voters were divided between economic liberalism and social protection policies. To win, candidates had to compromise both. Nonetheless, all previous administrations failed to deliver on social demands. They agreed to the “automatic pilot”, implicitly conceding power to those who benefit from it.

The result was chronic mistrust among voters. Especially in the provinces and rural areas, people kept looking for alternatives on the political fringes. Many felt increas-

ingly excluded, as classism, regionalism and even racism contributed to this trend.

One might say that political parties have practically disappeared from Peru. For quite some time, they have been replaced by circumstantial alliances, which are established right before elections with convenient agendas. None of them had a consistent doctrine or ideology. Electoral victories are rather seen as an opportunity to control government bodies and implement agendas in favour of interest groups.

Investigative journalists publish stories about political and corruption scandals daily. Examples include police repression causing 17 deaths in a single event, a congressman raping his assistant and ministers and judges faking academic degrees. However, such revelations do not have decisive consequences. The establishment protects perpetrators until public attention subsides.

Peruvian politicians rely on post-truth and culture-war strategies, with the result of movements of both the extreme right and the extreme left ascending from ideological catacombs to the highest political stage. Lately, Boluarte's illegitimacy eased the ascend of right hardliners, who have seized key government positions and invigorated their positions. This dynamic further splits the country – and exacerbates institutional dysfunction.

In the context of Latin America experiencing a “Pink tide” of left-of-centre governments (see box), Peru's recent development is certainly unique. There is ample reason to doubt that a political and social consensus can be reached to find a common direction for the country.



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## The second “Pink Tide”

The Pink Tide was a political trend in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Left-of-centre leaders won elections in Latin America and backed off from market-orthodox models. “Socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century” was considered an alternative. Its pillars were:

- the shift away from US-American influence,
- a fairer redistribution of the countries’ wealth and
- the continental economic and social integration.

The Pink Tide was strong. Six out of 10 South American countries were affected. How-



Electoral wins by leftist leaders like Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Brazil, left) and Alberto Ángel Fernández (Argentina) have raised the hopes of progressists.

ever, the popular preference swung to conservative alternatives in subsequent elections. Pink Tide leaders were accused of power abuses, poor macro-economic management and wide-spread corruption.

Twenty years later, however, a second Pink Tide has occurred. Several electoral triumphs have renewed the hopes of progressists. The winners were Alberto Ángel Fernández (Argentina), Andrés Manuel López Obrador (Mexico), Pedro Castillo (Peru), Luis Arce (Bolivia), Gabriel Boric (Chile), Gustavo Petro (Colombia) and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Brazil).

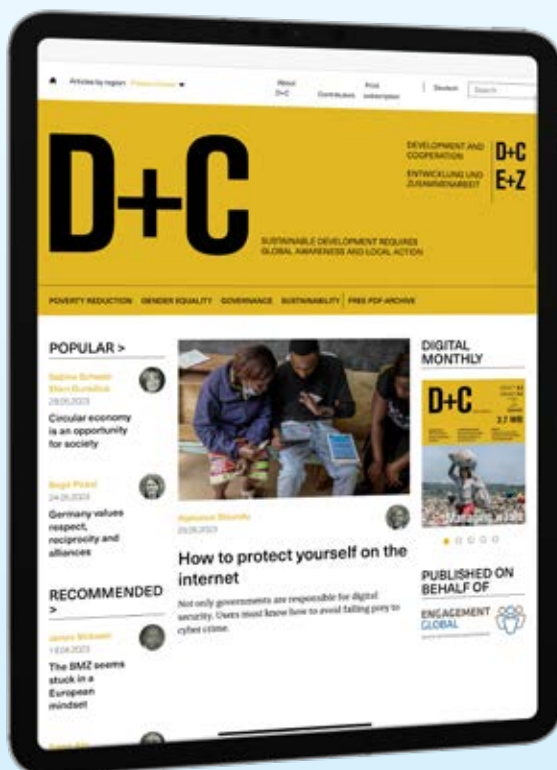
However, there are serious setbacks. The global situ-

ation is difficult. The Covid-19 pandemic and the impacts of the Ukraine war limit the scope for additional social spending. At the same time, highly polarised internal politics leave little room for negotiation and consensus building. Moreover, trade with external players – in particular China – has reduced the interest in continental integration.

These developments are leaving their marks across the continent. Each government is responding in ways that reflect its specific situation in regard to governance, institutions, ideological coherence and political education. Peru is probably in the most difficult situation (see main text). DCC, AB

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A woman dances during a demonstration of the Iranian community in Barcelona.



FOCUS

## Feminist development policy

“Protests against veiling duties are about women demanding their rightful place in society.”

**SHORA AZARNOUSH, P. 19**

“We need a global political consensus that gender equality is a human right.” **SVENJA SCHULZE, P. 20**

“The road to full gender justice remains long, but important first steps have been taken in Pakistan.”

**MARVA KHAN, P. 22**

“Teenage brides are not empowered to determine their fate.”

**MAHWISH GUL, P. 24**

“To improve women’s lives one must not only address women.”

**MARIAME RACINE SOW, P. 26**

“By endorsing feminism and supporting feminist policies, we men can rise to our responsibility in achieving gender equality.” **FABIO ANDRÉS DÍAZ PABÓN, P. 28**

“Most politicians have only adopted feminist rhetoric because it is useful.”

**VIRGINIA MERCADO, P. 30**

“Alliances within society at large are necessary for more inclusive development.”

**TINA ZINTL, P. 32**



Not wearing a headscarf has become common in Tehran.

AUTHORITARIAN DRESS CODE

## The collective mindset is changing

**The hijab is not just a piece of clothing. This traditional headscarf holds deep cultural and political significance in Iran. The Islamist regime demands that women wear it for the sake of morality and order. Nonetheless, a considerable number of women have stopped doing so entirely.**

By Shora Azarnoush

The trend started in a wave of protests which erupted in September last year after 22-year-old Jina Mahsa Amini died in police custody. She had been arrested for not wearing her hijab tight enough. For quite some time, many Iranian women have been wearing it somewhat loosely.

Sepideh Rashnu, an Iranian writer, has expressed her anger in poignant words. “In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, while NASA is sending its most powerful telescopes to explore black holes in the Milky Way, and artificial intelligence is attempting to simulate human sleep, in Iran, I find myself confined to an interrogation room, forced to write on interrogation papers that I have the right to protest against the compulsory veiling as a citizen.” Rashnu endured imprisonment for protesting against state-imposed hijab rules. Countless women share her frustration.

The piece of cloth is emblematic of women’s oppression. The extremist regime, which is dominated by men and uses Islam to justify its authoritarian rule, requires its use. The obligation to wear the headscarf infringes upon women’s freedoms, restricts their autonomy and reinforces gender inequality. This duty helps the regime to control women at a time in which the female share of the student population in universities is larger than the male share. That is even true in fields that are still male dominated in the west.

Protests against veiling duties are therefore about more than opposition to a simple piece of clothing. They are about women demanding their rightful place in society. They challenge the entire theocratic system which disregards women’s rights as well as human rights.

In recent months, Iranian women have shown incredible determination and resilience. Especially in the cities, many have stopped covering their hair in public. This trend started in September last year after protests erupted across the country because of Amini’s death. The morality police had arrested the young woman because she was not wearing her hijab properly. She did not survive her detainment.

The motto was “Woman, Life, Freedom”. The regime responded with brutal repression. Observers estimate that, from September to April, more than 500 persons were killed during protests. Moreover, four death sentences were carried out.

While the security forces were busy stopping demonstrators and controlling large groups of people, they were unable to enforce the hijab rules in daily life. It became common not to wear one anymore. For a long time, the authorities pretended not to notice such individual acts of defiance.

Now, however, they want to enforce the hijab mandate once more. Whether they will succeed, is an open question. Quite obviously, the regime is afraid of retriggering the protests, but it does want to show it is still in power.

The police have started installing surveillance cameras in public spaces to identify women without headscarves. Many women have received warning messages on their mobile phones, alerting them to recorded hijab-rule violations. Moreover, the police have closed down some shops and restaurants because they did not enforce veiling rules on their premises. The economy is in crisis, so such action is very tough on business owners and their families. However, customers have begun to stay away from places that do enforce the traditional dress code, which also means reduced revenues.

The battle against mandatory hijab is not over. Various campaigns have emerged in support of the women. Some initiatives, for example, invite men to wear short trousers or headscarves to level the playing field and reduce the risk of women being singled out. In a similar sense, some individuals display civil courage by expressing solidarity with women who are verbally or physically attacked for not covering their hair.

Indeed, even people from religious backgrounds are showing more empathy. Traditionally conservative people see that the regime’s oppression is excessive and unjust. The collective mindset is changing. The regime will try to slow this trend down, but it will not be able to stop it.



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GERMAN DEVELOPMENT POLICY

# Sanitary pads, visas and loans – what really helps women worldwide

Germany's Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development explains how feminist development policy contributes to making societies more equitable, resilient and stable.

By Svenja Schulze

I recently attended this year's re:publica – Germany's biggest digital conference – where the focus was on women and finance. Female experts from the Global South highlighted the fact that there is a data bias that often leaves women invisible, and that this is preventing them from accessing financial services tailored to their needs. They explained how this is fuelling structural poverty among women and pointed out other

power structures that hinder women from becoming researchers, business founders or experts in their field.

Kenyan data expert Linda Bonyo talked about some of the challenges facing women in her home country that often go unrecognised. 40% of all 18- to 26-year-old women in Kenya are single mothers. Most of them have not studied, and they often lack the time and money for training that would help them get good jobs and achieve financial independence. Single women also experience other forms of discrimination: they cannot rent a home for themselves, rarely have assets in their own name, have no access to loans and are less likely to be granted a travel visa. Society thus deprives them of many of the tools they need to start a business.

This illustrates just how complex and intertwined the various forms of discrimination against women are. Which is why we need to fundamentally change the power structures in place. That is the goal of my feminist development policy.

If the world's systems are designed and run by men, we will always be lacking women's perspectives. That means we are missing out on 50% of the potential ideas and input on how to make our societies fairer, safer and more prosperous. If we want everyone to be able to participate equally in our societies, then women and other marginalised groups need equal rights, equal representation and equal access to resources.

Existing inequalities are no coincidence. Discriminatory social norms, laws and gender stereotypes in the Global South can often be traced back to colonialism. This means that Germany and other countries in the Global North now bear particular responsibility for promoting gender equality worldwide and minimising the repercussions of that colonial past.

Women in the Global South are demanding three main things in order to improve their economic opportunities: quality education, legally enshrined equal rights and access to the right financial instruments.

Decent jobs are only available to educated women. So how can feminist development cooperation support education for girls in our partner countries? By providing school meals, sex education and sanitary pads. Poor families are more likely to send their daughters to school if they will be fed. Sex education enables girls and boys to prevent early pregnancies, which frequently lead to girls dropping out of school. And sanitary products enable girls to continue attending school during their period.

At the Ikwera Negri School in Uganda, for example, Mary Alori explains to the students what menstruation is and how girls can use sanitary pads so that they can still play football during their period. As part of the Sanitation for Millions programme, the Ugandan government has provided the school with period products as well as washrooms. This ensures that girls from poorer families have access to the hygiene items they need and can continue to attend lessons.

These efforts are essential in order to prevent girls from falling behind their male



Distribution of free sanitary pads to women in Kiambu, Kenya.





In Pakistan, there is a shortage of female doctors who actually practise medicine.

peers during this formative phase of their education. But women often face further hurdles when entering the world of work and participating in the economy.

Education therefore also needs to address gender roles and stereotypes in order to dismantle discriminatory social norms and the structural causes of gender inequality. Gender-transformative education in schools can help to reduce sexual and gender-based violence, child marriage and teenage pregnancies. A gender-transformative approach means tackling structural discrimination and its causes.

### COMBATING DISCRIMINATORY NORMS AND RULES

In addition to discriminatory laws – such as those that grant land rights only to men – many countries in the Global South have additional discriminatory norms that obstruct women’s economic progression. In Pakistan, for example, the phenomenon of “doctor brides” is widespread: 70% of qualified medical professionals in Pakistan are women, but only half of them actually practise medicine. The other half either studied medicine solely as a way of boosting their status on the marriage market or stop practising after they get married. As a result, the country is short of thousands of doctors.

Iffat Zafar Aga and Sara Saeed Khurram have set out to address this shortfall

with the “Sehat Kahani” app. The app enables female doctors to offer digital consultations from home, primarily for patients in rural areas. The two founders have set up dozens of e-health clinics in low-income communities. Patients are charged only 80 Pakistani rupees (\$0.43) to see a nurse, who can then get in touch with a doctor via the online platform.

With support from the Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative (We-Fi) – which is co-funded by Germany – the two women were able to access financial products and services, grow their network and find mentors. This has helped them to overcome discriminatory norms.

In many countries in the Global South, women have no access to loans, or have to accept worse terms than men. This is because loans are not granted based on cash flow but are usually secured against assets such as land. Unmarried women rarely own land, and if they marry, the land is officially owned by their husbands. So, women often lack access to the money they need to start or grow their business.

Mary Ellen Iskenderian, CEO of Women’s World Banking, points out that women face other significant financial barriers, too. Women are less likely to feel confident navigating financial or technical services. In addition, financial-service providers still do not see women as attractive customers. For financial products to become more attrac-

tive to women worldwide, they need to be pragmatic, trustworthy and confidential. In their role as daughters, mothers, wives and caregivers, women’s time is extremely limited. Financial products need to be readily available, fast and straightforward – otherwise women simply won’t use them. Women also place great importance on data privacy. Confidentiality, as well as trustworthiness, plays a crucial role. No one but the woman herself should know how much she is saving and for what.

To drive this process forward, KfW Development Bank and Germany’s Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) have joined forces to help fund Women’s World Banking. Together, we have invested equity in a specific fund that is used to offer loans to companies that promote gender equality. The fund also provides a first-loss guarantee in order to motivate private investors that otherwise see lending to women in the Global South as high risk. Women’s World Banking then works with the companies to create a binding action plan that empowers women. These investments enable us to ensure that women are represented from the working level through to the board level of the company.

To make sure that girls can go to school and do not drop out and that women have access to training and can achieve financial independence, we need to fully understand their lived realities. And no one understands these better than the women themselves. Which is why it is so important that women are able to develop their own solutions and spread the word in their communities – like Linda Bonyo is doing in Kenya, Mary Alori in Uganda and Iffat Zafar Aga in Pakistan.

But sanitary pads, visas and loans alone are not enough. We need a global political consensus that gender equality is a human right. And that societies are fairer, more resilient and more stable when all people are treated as equals. My feminist development policy is supporting this process. It is not a policy by women for women – it is a policy by everyone for everyone.



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## GENDER JUSTICE

# Progress made in Pakistan

**For several reasons, women tend to be disadvantaged in Pakistan. The situation is not hopeless, however, and better than many foreigners probably imagine. For example, gender parity is now within reach in the prestigious Central Superior Services.**

By Marva Khan

Aurat March (Women's March) is an annual event in Pakistan. On 8 March, the International Women's Day, rallies take place in all major cities against gender-based violence and discrimination. Participants also demand greater mobility and more opportunities.

Indeed, they have ample reason to protest. Gender disparities are substantial in Pakistan, though things differ somewhat from place to place. In urban settings, opportunities regarding education and employment are generally better than in rural areas. However, even urban women must cope with recurring issues such as harassment, and poor transport infrastructure limits their access to various places.

Illiteracy is a major problem that particularly affects girls and women. However, education as such is not necessarily a guaranteed path towards women's emancipation. One often finds educated people holding rather misogynistic views, and conventional gender roles confine women to the household. Even open-minded families often struggle to overcome gender stereotypes. One reason is that there are too few childcare facilities, so mothers cannot stay fully employed. The lack of maternal leave is another problem. Things like this make financial independence difficult to achieve.

Why Pakistan's society is so far away from gender justice is a matter of debate. Some explanations point to cultural reasons, others focus on religion and yet others stress historical issues. All of these factors play a role.

Around the world, traditional norms tend to be particularly strong in villages, and they typically are biased against women.

Islam is a multi-faceted faith, and Muslim identity politics certainly has an

anti-women edge. This was particularly evident under the rule of Muhammad Zia ul Haq, a military dictator, from 1977 to 1988. His was an agenda of Islamisation. However, his repression did not prevail. A few months after his death in an airplane crash, Benazir Bhutto became the Muslim world's first female head of government.

respect some women enjoyed. For example, the *twaiif* at Mughal courts were not simply "courtesans" or "prostitutes", as the British believed. They were among the highest taxpayers, trained in the arts and generally held in high esteem. In the subcontinent's first, but failed, liberation war of 1857, many *twaiif* supported the insurrection. They were harshly punished afterwards. Unfortunately, the image of these women today is still marked by the arrogant attitude of the former colonial masters.

Today, 75 years after Pakistan was founded, women remain underrepresented in government institutions. That is true of



Protesting in Lahore on 8 March 2023.

The full truth, moreover, is that European imperialism contributed to restricting women's liberties in the colonial era. Victorian norms still shape Pakistan's rape laws, for example, which hardly protect victims from sexualised violence. The ruling of colonial British judges generally show that they did not recognise women as independent human beings with agency and autonomy of their own.

Indeed, South Asia had seen powerful women in positions of authority before British rule. They were influential members of royal families and sometimes ruled as *ranis* (queens). Moreover, the colonial power systematically underestimated the status and

judicial, legislative and executive bodies. Progress is noteworthy, nonetheless. For example, a few female judges have risen to positions of considerable influence (see box).

The constitution reserves seats for women in the federal and provincial legislatures. From 2008 to 2013, Fehmida Mirza served as Pakistan's first female speaker of the National Assembly. She also established the Parliamentary Women's Caucus in 2008, which has been instrumental in uniting women from different political parties to push for meaningful reforms. Results include more stringent legislation regarding honour killings or tribal practices in which



women and girls are traded to settle disputes.

**ON TRACK TOWARDS GENDER PARITY IN TOP-LEVEL ADMINISTRATION**

The most striking progress, however, may be that the Central Superior Services (CSS) is moving towards gender parity. The CSS is the elite cadre of officials in the national bureaucracy. It recruits its members in annual competitive exams, and female applicants obviously perform well in this merit-based system. In recent cohorts, gender parity was achieved, so the CSS’s 10% quota for women is not really needed at this point.

Women’s success in CSS exams reflects a more general trend. Large numbers

of female students are graduating from higher education. As a result, the number of women teachers in primary and secondary schools is growing. The same is true in health care. Admissions for medical colleges are very competitive, and women are progressively faring better than men.

Indeed, some now demand a protective quota for male applicants. They argue that too few of the women who graduate keep practicing medicine in the long run. The main reason, of course, is not that women do not want to work, but that mothers face serious obstacles such as lack of day-care facilities, adequate public transport and a generally more empowering social environment.

Pakistan is a diverse society, composed of a mix of cultures. Islam is the

dominant religion, but various practices that affect women do not emanate only from the faith. Tradition and culture matter too, and the attitudes of colonial power compounded problems. Progress is possible – and necessary, given that inequality makes the current economic and political crisis worse for women and girls. The good news is that progress is evident in some important areas.



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## Important first steps

Women are underrepresented in Pakistan’s judiciary. That is particularly so at the top level. Nonetheless, some female judges wield considerable power.

Justice Ayesha Malik was appointed as judge to Pakistan’s Supreme Court in January 2022. She is the first woman to achieve that rank. Before, she had been one of only six female high court judges, though the five high courts have 113 judges. Some of the women play important roles, however. Tahira Safdar, for example, has been chief justice of the Balochistan High Court since 2018. Mussarat Hilali became chief justice of the Peshawar High Court in May this year.

A flawed appointments process is the main reason why women are underrepresented in the superior courts. The process has allowed the men who dominate the courts and the bar politics to give preference to male candidates. Accordingly, women’s representation

is greater at the lower level of courts, where appointments are based on competitive entrance exams. Similar trends are evident in other fields (see main story).

Unfortunately, women judges in lower courts are often side-lined. For example, some are only deemed fit to work in family courts. This is the branch of the judiciary in which women first gained a role as early as in the colonial era. An important reason was prob-

ably that fees – and illicit bribes – were comparatively low.

On the other hand, Islamist radicals have not succeeded in preventing women from serving as judges. This was attempted under military dictator Muhammad Zia ul Haq in the 1980s. Due to reforms of evidence law under his rule, female witnesses were no longer considered equal to male witnesses. A petition was then filed, which argued that women could therefore not be judges. It also insisted that women must cover themselves and should not interact with the opposite gender openly.

The Federal Shariat Court, which rules on religious matters and was established by Zia in 1980, dismissed the petition. It ruled that neither Islam nor Pakistan’s constitution barred women from serving as judges. Nonetheless, the judgement did reiterate anti-women biases which are not of a strictly legal nature. Instead of limiting their decision to a legal and jurisprudential analysis, the judges delved into social and cultural biases which should have no place in a judgment.

These biases, moreover, are precisely what prevents Pakistani women from tapping their full potential. The full picture today is that women judges, lawyers, and especially litigants regularly must cope with aggressive men’s intimidation. At the same time, even the physical space of court rooms is not designed to accommodate women. They typically lack sitting areas for women and feeding spaces for nursing mothers. Most courts do not even provide adequate toilets for women. The road to full gender justice remains long, but important first steps have been taken. MK



Tahira Safdar is the chief justice of the Balochistan High Court.



## DEMOGRAPHICS

# Family planning is a woman's right

**The world population now exceeds 8 billion people. Fertility rates vary widely – and tend to be high in low-income countries. Sustainable development depends on sensible family planning. Strategies must embrace women's rights and empower young people to take their lives into their own hands.**

By Mahwish Gul

At the end of 2022, the world population exceeded 8 billion for the first time, according to the UN. In 2010, there had been 7 billion of us. Another billion was added in only 12 years. In the past 100 years or so, the number rose by 6 billion.

The reasons for population growth include improvements in health care, better nutrition, and advances in medical science. Nowadays, people live longer.

Population growth is slowing down though. It is anticipated that the next billion milestone will be passed in 15, not 12 years. Experts estimate that the world population will peak at approximately 10.4 billion individuals by the end of this century.

Since the 1960s, the growth rate has consistently declined. In the early 1960s, the world population was increasing by an

annual 2.1%. The current rate is slightly below one percent. The global fertility rate has accordingly decreased from 5.3 births per woman 60 years ago to 2.3 births now.

The global experience is that, as people live healthier and longer, fertility rates decline, and populations become older on average. Data from the United Nations Population Fund (UNPF) show that the global share of persons aged 65 or older has grown from approximately five percent in 1950 to around six percent in 1990. Last year, it reached 10% and is expected to rise to 16% by 2050. The global figures, however, do not reveal the full picture. Indeed, the numbers vary widely around the world.

In high-income countries, there is consistent decline in fertility rates, according to World Bank data, with women currently having only 1.5 children on average. Middle-income countries have also witnessed a downward trend, with fertility rates now at 2.2 births. That is slightly above the 2.1 births, which is the average number of children per woman required to maintain a stable population size. In stark contrast, low-income countries continue to exhibit significantly higher fertility rates of 4.7 births per woman on average.

The countries with the lowest per-capita incomes also tend to have the highest fertility rates. A look at the World Bank's fertility data shows that 32 of the 36 countries with a fertility rate of four births or more per woman are in Africa. The other four countries are Afghanistan, Samoa and the Marshall and Solomon Islands.

A crucial issue is that people in poor countries typically lack proper social-security systems. If they want to be taken care of in old age, they need children. The next generation is seen as future providers. It serves as a safety net. At the same time, high infant mortality and poverty mean not all are likely to survive to adulthood.

## TRADITIONAL GENDER NORMS

It also matters that many women marry at a young age. They normally lack opportunities of education and employment. Teenage brides, in other words, are not empowered to determine their fate. Due to traditional gender norms, they are not even in a strong position to negotiate with their husbands and his relatives, who collectively tend to dominate their lives. It is therefore good news that fertility rates in Africa have begun to drop. In many parts of the continent, populations are not growing as fast as they did even 10 years ago.

The plain truth is that if women have choices thanks to better education (very much including sex education), advanced infrastructure and greater prosperity, they tend to have fewer children. That is what the global statistics show. They also show that the desire to live without any children at all is not predominant even in prosperous and secularised societies.

On the other hand, countries experiencing low levels of fertility face a distinct set of safety-net challenges. The share of dependent old-age people is growing, while the working age population is shrinking. The implication is significant costs associated with social security, health care and long-term care. To address these challenges, countries with low fertility rates need to devise sustainable policies. So far, policies to encourage women to have more babies have largely failed. Options therefore include encouraging migration or raising the retirement age.

Migration, of course, is a double-edged sword, especially when skilled people who are needed at home, move abroad. On



Choice matters – distribution of free condoms in South Africa.

the other hand, remittances benefit their extended families and can drive development. When migrants return home, moreover, they bring along newly acquired skills and knowledge.

It is striking, moreover, that advanced nations do not treat immigrants well. The European Central Bank has reported that

approximately 15% of households in the eurozone are headed by migrants, with two-thirds originating from outside the EU. However, these migrants earn approximately 25 to 30% less than their non-migrant counterparts. At the same time, they contribute more to taxes and social-protection systems than they receive in benefits. Nonetheless,

populist politicians keep claiming that migrants only want to exploit welfare systems.



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## Slow decline of African birth rates

According to a long-standing rule of thumb, sub-Saharan Africans on average consider five to be the ideal number of children. Recent data suggest that families in countries like Senegal and Ghana have fewer children today.

In low-income countries, children are seen as future providers. They offer a safety net in old age. Having many children is thus linked to prestige and honour. It fits the picture that sub-Saharan Africa, the poorest world region, has the highest pregnancy rate (218 per 1000 women per year) worldwide, according to the Guttmacher Institute, a US-based think tank that specialises in reproductive health.

Nonetheless, babies are not necessarily considered to be blessings. The Guttmacher data show that the region has the highest rate of unwanted pregnancies, estimated at 91 per 1000. In other words, about 42% of pregnancies are unintended. Almost 40% of them are aborted, according to Guttmacher numbers.

Sub-Sahara Africa, moreover, has the highest rate of child marriage, with 35% of the female youth experiencing their wedding below the age of 18. Experts reckon that the

birth rate of adolescent girls in sub-Saharan Africa is twice the global average. The number of young people entering child-bearing age is also correlated with abortions, maternal illnesses and deaths.

Research funded by USAID has concluded that child marriage leads to poor family planning and bad health outcomes. In a similar vein, an essay in the journal BMC International Health and Human Rights reported that child brides are eight times more likely to have three or more children than their peers who marry later.

Sub-Saharan Africa has the lowest contraceptive prevalence rate at 29%. Less than

half of the demand for modern contraceptive methods is met in the region. The unmet need is greatest in rural areas and poor communities. Young people are affected in particular.

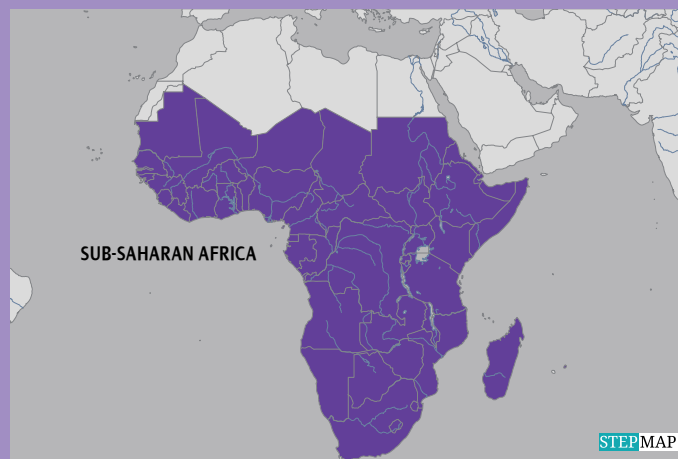
No doubt, there is need to invest more in issues that concern youth. This includes education – not only regarding reproductive health. It also includes better health services and ensuring contraceptives are available to all who need them. Obviously, it also includes creating more job opportunities by building infrastructure and developing the economy.

Without such investments, African countries cannot reap a demographic dividend. They will not benefit from their populations' large shares of young people, but keep struggling with unemployment, destitution and mass frustration.

Teenage girls matter especially. They must not be condemned to early motherhood. Instead of raising large families with many needy members, they should be empowered to find jobs, earn money, contribute to their country's economic success and determine their own fate. Large numbers of children are not simply a result of poverty. They are a cause of poverty too.

The good news is that progress is happening. Recent data show declining birth rates in several countries. In Nigeria, for example, women are now said to have fewer than five children on average. The country's population is still growing fast and is set to double to 430 million by 2060. Earlier forecasts, however, expected it to rise by yet 100 million more. Birth rates are even lower in several other African countries, including in Senegal (3.9) and Ghana (3.8). The figures for Ethiopia, Rwanda and Guinea are slightly above four. It obviously helps that some faith leaders have begun to endorse family planning.

Experts have long wondered why sub-Saharan Africa is slow to follow the demographic path of other world regions. The Economist offers an answer. The reason may well be that education efforts were reduced in the course of austerity measures in the 1980s and 1990s, depriving many girls of the education they deserved. MG





Campaigning against female genital mutilation in Liberia.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

## “It is crucial to involve men”

**Mariame Racine Sow moved to Germany from Senegal in 1989 and has been campaigning for women's rights for decades. In Frankfurt, she started the non-governmental organisation Forward for Women. It wants to end female genital mutilation and offers advice to affected migrants. As a diaspora activist, she also supports women's health projects in Senegal.**

**Mariame Racine Sow interviewed by Sabine Balk**

**What does the term “feminist development policy” mean to you?**

It is well coined, but the message must be defined sensibly. I have been involved in developmental programmes for many years, and to me, the new strategy Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) on feminist development does not seem all that innovative. The BMZ declares that it wants to mainstream women's empowerment in all programmes with an eye to changing male-dominated power structures. But that's what we have been doing for years – very much including the BMZ. Emphasising these issues even more won't hurt, of course. To improve women's lives, however, one must not only

address women. It is crucial to involve men as well as entire extended families.

**For what reasons?**

In European society, the idea is common that a woman decides for herself and determines what happens with her body. Things are different in African and Arab societies. The husband, the mother-in-law and even aunts have a say in when a woman has children – and in how many children she has. The cultural conventions differ substantially from those in Europe. My goal is to end female genital mutilation (FGM), and if I want to succeed, I must convince all parties concerned that they would benefit from achieving that goal.

**How do you convince men and extended communities of female FGM affecting them negatively?**

Well, it certainly doesn't help to start by emphasising human rights, because disadvantaged women who hardly went to school have no understanding of the concept itself. FGM has deep cultural roots among many ethnic groups. It defines collective identities. The origins of the tradition are spiritual, not tied to religion or culture. Ac-

ording to scholars, the ritual dates back to ancient Egypt, where only circumcised persons were given access to the temple. That applied to men and women. Many African ethnic groups descend from the Egyptians and later migrated across the continent. Circumcision has survived millennia and is practiced by both Muslims and Christians. So, what I do is to tell the women that no one needs that link to the ancestors anymore. This approach worked out in my family. At one point, my brothers said they did not want FGM anymore, and no girl has been circumcised in my family since 1995.

**What made you understand that feminist activists must reach out to men?**

I always saw things that way because it is how I understand gender relations. The emphasis is on community and cooperation. In my eyes, African and European mentalities differ in this regard. In Europe, women and men are considered opposites and even seem to wage war on one another sometimes. In Africa, people stress harmony. Everyone has their role in society, and far fewer things are put in question. Policy interventions must consider this fact. Otherwise, failure becomes likely.

**Please give an example?**

Well, consider a Ghanaian case I know. Women were given plots of land to grow maize or tomatoes. What was neglected in the project design was that it is men who manage the transport of agricultural prod-



duce to the markets. Accordingly, the women struggled to sell their goods and actually suffered considerable losses.

### How do you involve men in what you do?

My NGO, Forward for Women, has launched a project called “Saraba”. The target group is the African diaspora in Frankfurt, including refugees who are staying at the shelter where I am employed as a social worker. Saraba serves the prevention of violence. Migrants and refugees tend to come from male-dominated societies. Many have suffered domestic abuse or have become victims of brutal state action. To empower and encourage the persons concerned, Forward for Women runs training courses. We also host public discussions. We invite the diaspora communities, and we go to refugee shelters. The point is not only to address women, but to reach out to men as well. We do not see them as potential perpetrators, but as allies who are part of the solution.

### But aren't the perpetrators normally men?

Yes, of course, but I am convinced that we will only move on to non-violent attitudes

if all genders are involved. Men need to understand that they benefit themselves when non-violent attitudes are dominant. Hurting women and children has negative impacts on society in general. We want people to reconsider things and learn to deal with disagreements in different forms. By the way, I think this kind of preventive action is an important precondition for opening up more to German society and becoming better included. In refugee shelters, we are now running special courses for men. They often feel excluded because, for example, there really are hardly any language-learning programmes specifically for them. Nor are collective events organised like meetings for coffee with others, including Germans.

### So there is a need for specific programmes for men?

Yes, I think so. It is a general problem that we see a lot of funding for women's projects, while hardly anyone wants to spend money on men. This is strikingly evident when it comes to refugees. Therefore, we launched a men's group at the shelter where I work in 2018. The group meets once a month to dis-

cuss issues like gender roles, women's rights or children's education. A football team has emerged from this group. It is quite active. It is most promising that the team meets German teams for practice and games. There are far too few opportunities of this kind. After the games, we invite all of the men to meet for discussions regarding things like group identity, gender stereotypes, democratic principles and so on. Opportunities of this kind promote inclusion in Germany because they teach the newcomers the basics of the host country's culture. On the other hand, it would be great if Germans had more opportunities to meet migrants and learn more about them as well.



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A Sudanese woman in a makeshift refugee camp in Chad's desert.

#### WOMEN IN CONFLICT

## Men must be held accountable

**Women become victims in wars and conflicts that are waged between men. Men must assume responsibility for their actions. They must also endorse an emphasis on women's rights in policymaking.**

By Fabio Andrés Díaz Pabón

Men have more opportunities than women and are exposed to fewer risks. This state of affairs has been normalised throughout history. It is reiterated around the world and becomes most evident in times of violence and war. However, those are precisely the times that show that men do not deserve their supremacy at all.

The victims who bear the greatest burden of violent conflict are women. Their needs, already widely ignored in peacetime, become even more neglected in war. Indeed, sexualised violence becomes a war strategy. Typically, men who claim that wars are fought to defend women's rights become perpetrators too.

Women are more at risk of dying in war than men. That is true even though wars today are fought with sophisticated weapons such as guided missiles. Those weapons are not gender sensitive, and they are often used to attack civilian areas. According to

UN Women, 90% of current war casualties are civilians, the majority of whom are women and children. A century ago, 90% of the casualties were military personnel.

When food becomes scarce during war, women are the first to suffer hunger. Unfortunately, moreover, it doesn't take situations of strife to put women at risk – domestic violence around the world is a terrible and deadly phenomenon too (see box).

Unsurprisingly, women hardly play a role in peace talks. Treaties are typically concluded without much female input. Women are underrepresented in peacekeeping operations, in the diplomatic procedures and in the documents that result from successful peace talks. Their role is often limited to secretarial tasks. A cursory search for pictures of peace agreements being signed will prove that women are largely absent.

Their exclusion is foolish. According to the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), a US think tank, women's participation both in the negotiation process and in peacekeeping operations increases the likelihood of war not flaring up again. If women and civil-society organisations are involved in peace talks, subsequent agreements are 64% less likely to fail according to data from UN Women.

#### WOMEN ARE NEEDED FOR PEACE

Unless women are heard, the causes of conflict are not fully understood. Women must be at the table if all relevant information is to be taken into account. Their perspective, moreover, helps to understand the needs of communities. After all, they make up a little more than half of the world population. Their contributions help to better target development initiatives and peacebuilding.

Without women's experience and knowledge, conflicts cannot be resolved in the long term. Accordingly, countries with strong gender equality are less prone to conflict. At the same time, these societies are more equal and inclusive in regard to issues like ethnicity, skin colour and faith.

There is reason to hope that these things are becoming increasingly clearer to male policymakers. The awareness for gender issues, after all, is growing. Indeed, the input of women in peace processes is slowly increasing.

While the growing emphasis on gender justice in foreign and development affairs is welcome, there is a risk of gender issues only being dealt with superficially. It is not enough to simply tick the right boxes. Proposing projects with a gender focus may be mere window dressing with an eye to getting more funds. Policymakers must ensure that women's rights are not only trumpeted before funding decisions are taken. They must matter in implementation too. We need to move beyond the idea that a poster featuring strong women can eliminate gen-

der inequality or that a single initiative's token women will empower half the world's population.

Intersectionality is important as well, but often overlooked. Many women are not only disadvantaged because of their gender. It is bizarre that white and privileged women often serve as examples of female empowerment. But it is not only about skin colour: Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission, and Śekha Hāsinā, the prime minister of Bangladesh, are the daughters of influential politicians and do not represent the majority of marginalised women.

### MEN ARE NEEDED FOR THE FEMINIST AGENDA

Real support for women requires a commitment to lasting inclusion in all spheres of life. That is particularly important in peace processes and conflict prevention. How-

ever, related efforts cannot be left to women alone. We cannot expect the main victims to also be self-assured negotiators, peace brokers and healers.

It is common to state that gender justice is a task for society as a whole. This statement misses an important point. The marginalisation of women results from how society's institutions operate. Women's oppression is socially constructed. Those who hold power in these institutions are still predominantly men. We, the men, are thus the people who have done most to build this construct. Accordingly, we bear responsibility for deconstructing it too.

We men have an obligation to listen to women and to take their views seriously. When they tell us that they are being attacked or discriminated against, we have no right to ignore them or – even worse – blame them for their victimisation, as so often happens.

It is usually us who are responsible for the attacks on them, the systems that keep

them down or the conflicts that destroy their lives. It is therefore our moral duty to help and support them as they need it. Anything else would mean that we stay complicit in violence.

Men must take responsibility for their actions. Moreover, we must recognise and openly address gender-based injustices. We have a duty to challenge social structures that have directly favoured us in all areas. By endorsing feminism and supporting feminist policies this way, we men can rise to our responsibility in achieving gender equality.



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## The invisible war

In 2020, some 47,000 women and girls were killed by their partners or other family members worldwide, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). A World Health Organization (WHO) report showed, moreover, that one in three women are subjected to physical or sexual violence in their lifetime. Often, the perpetrators are intimate partners.

These numbers show that not only war and strife have a devastating impact on women's lives (see main text). They indicate that a war on women is being waged in their homes and in their most private space. The full devastation is not documented, but the number of victims is similar to that of armed conflicts.

A World Bank report has confirmed that 35% of all

women experience one of these forms of violence.

It happens in all cultures, regardless of religion or GDP.

Certainly, there are places where patriarchal structures are still more pronounced, and women are at greater risk in war than in peacetime. But women are abused, and their rights are violated daily all over the world. It happens in the USA, Germany

and Colombia, as well as in Myanmar, Nigeria and Afghanistan.

This reality must not be ignored. Sex education must teach teenagers how to prevent sexualised violence, how to respond to it and how to engage in relationships without violence. Governments and civil society have a duty to take action. Without sustainable gender justice in all social spheres, including the most private ones, the 5<sup>th</sup> UN Sustainable Development Goal – gender equality – cannot be achieved.

Chilean feminists made a song a few years ago called “El violador eres tú” (You are the rapist). It is usually mistranslated as “A rapist on your way”, possibly to dilute the harsh indictment of society.

Their song started with this verse:

*“Patriarchy is a judge  
That judges us for being born  
And our punishment  
Is the violence that you don't  
[want to] see”* FP



Women protest against femicides in Mexico City.



## SOCIAL CHANGE

# Women's rights in spite of machismo

**Mexico is inching towards gender justice, but progress remains too slow. Policymakers' statements are strong, but many are not driven by deep convictions, so too few reforms are actually implemented. What really causes change is the pressure exerted by international organisations and the women's rights movement.**

By Virginia Mercado

The numbers look good. The government of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador is proud of promoting women who are serv-

de Mexico, which is often called Edomex to avoid confusion with the eponymous capital city and, indeed, the nation itself, which has the official name Estados Unidos Mexicanos (United Mexican States). For the first time, both leading candidates were female. The winner was Delfina Gómez, who belongs to Morena, the centre-left party of President López Obrador. She will be the first woman to serve as governor of Edomex.

Of 32 Mexican states, 10 are now run by women. Moreover, women head eight of 19 federal secretariats (ministries). On the other hand, only 525 women currently serve

are paying attention to women's rights, but they mostly do so under the pressure of international institutions and women's rights groups. Only few politicians are personally committed to the matter, while most have only adopted feminist rhetoric because it is useful. Women vote after all.

In spite of all the talk, machoism and blatantly gynophobic attitudes remain widespread. Again and again, we read reports of high-ranking officials who support gender mainstreaming in public, but then refuse to grant maternity leave or ignore complaints about underlings sexually molesting women. Even worse, they sometimes are sexually abusive themselves. It is common for politicians and civil servants to pay lip service to gender equity because that is expected of them. The same persons, however, often belittle women's achievements and dignity, for example on social media. There is also a pattern of members of the security forces making headlines by perpetrating violence within their own families.

The plain truth is that a culture of machismo marks Mexico and probably all of Latin America. This toxic understanding of masculinity is at the root of various forms of gender-based violence. Since it is deeply rooted in traditions and norms over centuries, many people do not really notice it. Internationally, however, Mexico has a reputation of femicide due to the large number of murdered women.

## FEMICIDE IS ALL TOO COMMON

On the occasion of international women's day on 8 March 2023, López Obrador declared that his presidency, which he likes to call "the fourth transformation", is feminist. Whether that is so, remains to be seen. In view of the angry demands made by rallying women, he may yet declare feminists to be his adversaries. It is quite possible that the president will try to divert attention from the fact that his government is ignoring legitimate demands of women by blaming them of undermining his government.

In spite of his grand words, femicide is still all too common. Impunity is common too, as neither prosecutors nor the police show much eagerness or efficiency in tackling the problem (see box).

As a matter of fact, much of the progress made regarding women's rights results from international institutions and agree-



Delfina Gómez, the first female governor of Edomex, with President Andrés Manuel López Obrador.

ing in its ranks in roles of leadership as well as in Congress and various public agencies. Indeed, the female share among top officials and policymakers has increased.

State elections were held this year in Mexico's most populous state, the Estado

as mayors, whereas men are in charge of 1486 municipal governments.

These numbers can – and should – be read as progress. Nonetheless, the nation is only inching towards gender justice slowly and still has a long way to go. Policymakers

ments. The Inter-American Commission for Human Rights is important, for example, and so are UN Women, UNICEF, ECLAC (the Economic Commission for Latin America) as well as civil-society organisations like Save the Children. International agencies regularly publish reports on things like child abuse, child marriage, human trafficking, labour exploitation and various forms of violence. Experience shows that demands raised in the international arena do indeed have impacts at the grassroots level.

An important step this year was the reform of alimony law. Parents who do not contribute to their children's sustenance will henceforth be registered. The idea is to protect minors, but the law also helps single mothers who often bear the costs of their children's upkeep and education alone.

Women's rights groups now regularly rally on 8 March, and their demands far

exceed the issue of gender-based violence. They want other topics to figure in public debate as well. State agencies are responding.

This year, for instance, Inmujeres (Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres – National Women's Institute) announced it would do more to promote science and technology education for girls. The UN had earlier emphasised the relevance of ensuring that women and girls get “full, equal and meaningful” involvement in science, technology and innovation. In education and employment, gender disparities remain large in Mexico.

In the past decade, women's organisations have also focused increasingly on reproductive rights. One result is governmental efforts to reduce the high rate of teenage pregnancies.

In 2021, Mexico's Supreme Court decided that the general prohibition of abor-

tion was unconstitutional. Abortion is now allowed when rape is the reason of the pregnancy, when the mother's life is at risk or when the child is genetically disabled. Five states even permit abortion for any other personal reason in the first 12 weeks.

Facing many difficulties, feminist groups in Mexico and various public institutions are committed to gender equality, the 5<sup>th</sup> UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG5). At various levels of governance, efforts are being made to achieve it – or at least to appear to be doing so.



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## Femicides and feminism

Since the 1990s, the many murdered women in Mexico, for instance in the border town of Ciudad Juárez, have caused anguished debate. However, state agencies have only responded slowly.

There was an international uproar when dead bodies were found in 2001. It led the government to establish Inmujeres, the Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres (National Women's Institute). It reports to the president and its mission is to promote conditions in society that reduce discrimination and lead to more equal opportunities as well as gender justice.

The Inter-American Human Rights Court took note of the femicides in Ciudad Juárez. Its 2009 judgement in the Campo Algodonero case showed that Mexico's judicial system was inefficient and that state agencies largely denied any responsibility for gender-based

violent crime. In response to the judgement, the government uttered excuses, designed action plans, paid some compensations and launched various reforms. Government officials, for example, have been getting specific awareness training if

their duties include dealing with matters such as domestic violence, sexual abuse or femicide. So far, we lack research on whether that has changed officials' mindset however.

Funding on protective facilities for women has increased, and there are more offices committed to gender-specific issues at the municipal and state levels. Mexico now

has 65 women's rights centres, and some public prosecutor's offices have specialised in gender-based crime.

Migrant women across Mexico on their way to the USA are exposed to an especially high risk of violence. Femicide rates are high in some Central and South American countries too. In Honduras, El Salvador and Bolivia, there are actually higher than in Mexico. Poverty, organized crime and the illegal drug trade compound problems.

Under President Andrés Manuel López Obrador the number of homicides has been slowly declining in Mexico (from 29 per 100,000 people in 2019 to 28 in 2021 according to World Bank data). However, the number of murdered women has doubled in the past 10 years. In 2021, 0.8 cases per 100,000 were reported. This figure may seem comparatively small – but the victims are often killed in private spaces which they believe to be safe. VM



Commemorating a murdered woman.





Protest against gender-based violence in New York's Washington Square Park.

#### FEMINIST DEVELOPMENT THEORY

## Feminist development policy for more inclusive social contracts

Germany's focus on a feminist development policy provides a new impulse for fairer and more inclusive societies. If the development community looks at rights, resources and representation from a social contract angle, it can design projects for more gender equity in a way that leverages its full transformative potential.

By Tina Zintl

On 1 March 2023, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the German Foreign Office jointly announced their feminist develop-

ment policy and feminist foreign policy strategies. They aim for a gender-sensitive and transformative policy.

However, it is crucial to go beyond mere rhetoric and fully realise the transformative potential of the feminist strategy, ensuring it transcends being a mere provocative accentuation of the “leave no one behind” paradigm. Development agencies have a unique opportunity to utilise feminist development policy as a foundation for comprehensive and profound change, addressing structural inequalities and dismantling oppressive power dynamics. After all, the BMZ has set the ambitious target of allo-

cating 93% of all of its project funds to measures to promote gender equality by 2025.

Germany's feminist development policy aims for two guiding principles:

- **Intersectionality:** it seeks to improve the situation for “women and marginalised groups in all their diversity”. The strategy thus acknowledges that a person can be disadvantaged in several ways and due to a combination of their individual characteristics, such as ethnic or religious identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic background or origin from rural, disadvantaged regions. For example, female refugees may be stigmatised for their gender and their migratory experience.

- **Postcolonialism:** the strategy's postcolonial claim intends to critically reflect entrenched power structures and contribute to dismantling unequal treatment based on patriarchal or racist power gaps.

Key areas of the strategy are “three Rs” and respective measures:

- Rights of women and other marginalised groups must be protected by replacing



discriminatory laws with gender-responsive laws and supporting their implementation. They include sexual and reproductive rights, prevention of violence, human rights, land rights or digital rights as well as rights to health services, education and economic opportunities.

- Resources need to be equally accessible to and controlled by all genders. They comprise access to education, labour markets, financial systems, land, digital technologies, social protection, health, sanitation and funding as well as protection from climate risks and food insecurity.

- Representation means the equal and meaningful participation of women and other marginalised groups in important social, political and economic decisionmaking processes at all levels. They range from planning and budgeting decisions in economic and tax systems to equal participation in peace processes and a stronger role for women in the development and use of digital technologies.

The strategy is timely and much needed – but a tall order. Underlying power imbalances are difficult to identify let alone to reduce, and the “three Rs” offer a list of good things that do not necessarily go together. Priority setting must be key. At the same time, there is no prioritisation that can consider all the diverse interests and local conditions.

The social contract framework offers a possible starting point to deal with this. It helps to understand how different groups in a society have rights and responsibilities, and how power dynamics and compromises play a role. It shows that the government provides goods and services to its citizens in return for their acceptance of its authority. Social contracts contribute to establishing stable relationships between the government and society by avoiding the need to constantly renegotiate the terms of their interaction.

Whether social contracts make the relationship between state and society more predictable, resilient and equitable, depends on who is entitled to which goods and services within state and society. According to researchers from the German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS), these goods and services can be categorised as the “three Ps”. These “three Ps” are similar to the “three Rs” of the feminist policy and can help to prioritise between them:

- Protection differentiates between collective security (e.g., against external threats), human security (e.g., against physical threats or criminal attacks) and legal security (e.g., enforcing human and civil rights, rule of law).

- Provision means basic public services, especially access to resources, infrastructure, social services and economic opportunities.

- Participation refers to the state’s willingness to give its citizens a voice in political decisionmaking processes on different levels.

## GOVERNMENTS FAIL THEIR DUTIES

Ideally, governments fulfil their responsibilities and provide all three Ps to every citizen. However, governments often fail to meet one or more of these duties. This may be due to budgetary constraints, for example if the cost of universal health care is too high. Political motivations are another reason. Authoritarian leaders may prioritise security and service delivery but expect citizens to give up their rights to participate in decision-making and legal protection. Sometimes rights are denied to all citizens, sometimes a policy of “divide and rule” gives some groups more rights than others.

Women are particularly often disadvantaged. This was most recently demonstrated by the Covid-19 pandemic. They had to do the additional care work as schools and kindergartens were temporarily closed (that is, the state had to reduce provision). Moreover, women are often in less stable employment with fewer workers’ rights and are more at risk of losing their jobs (that means they lack protection).

Considering state-society relations and changing social contracts helps stakeholders in the development context to identify which issues are most disputed in a given context and which rights, resources and representative positions are currently inaccessible to certain groups. It also helps policymakers to understand which development interventions are transformative and cannot simply be reversed later.

The development community can expand its influence in promoting gender-sensitive policies by paying attention to social contracts. For example, this approach helps to realise that simply increasing the

number of female representatives in a country’s decisionmaking bodies may not necessarily lead to transformative change. In some cases, it may even reinforce existing power imbalances if the chosen representatives are not only female but also part of a longstanding privileged elite.

Alliances not only with feminist organisations but also within society at large are necessary for more inclusive development. It is crucial to also include men, ethnic leaders or religious elites to understand their interests and reservations. Development actors should take this into account when selecting their cooperation partners and beneficiaries. Feminist policy calls for role models with whom women and other marginalised groups can truly identify.

In the face of crises as well as future challenges such as climate adaptation or digitalisation, feminist policies are more necessary than ever for truly transformative and inclusive development. While the formulation of feminist policies was a step in the right direction, it is now crucial to find innovative and effective approaches to implement them in an equitable and sustainable way.

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### FURTHER READING:

**BMZ, 2023: Feminist development policy. For just and strong societies worldwide (also available in German).**

<https://www.bmz.de/resource/blob/153806/bmz-strategy-feminist-development-policy.pdf>

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**Friesen, I., and Wisskirchen, A., 2022: Ten recommendations for Germany’s feminist development policy. Bonn, German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS).**

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Better interoperability between data systems can ensure that people with disabilities receive suitable job offers. **Page 11**

