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LGBTQ RIGHTS

African countries deal very differently with sexual diversity

DIGITALISATION

How technological developments affect women's daily lives

CULTURE SPECIAL

Part 2: The D+C editorial team reviews four novels and a TV series



Water infrastructure

Editorial

- 3 **JÖRG DÖBEREINER**
Increased cooperation and investment in infrastructure are essential to meet UN water targets

Magazine

- 4 **LISSA JANET, OPIO AND ISABELLA BAUER**
In most African countries, LGBTQ persons are still oppressed and face severe penalties

- 6 **INTERVIEW WITH PAYAL ARORA**
Digital technology can empower women, but also serves as an instrument of oppression

- 8 **DASMANI LAARY / MASTHEAD (IMPRINT)**
Nowadays: Ghana's prisons are congested

Culture special

- 10 **HANS DEMBOWSKI**
Novel: An Iranian woman in 1960s Frankfurt

- 11 **MAREN VAN TREEL**
Novel: Father and son travel to Peru – and to each other

- 12 **SABINE BALK**
Novel: Tsitsi Dangarembga about a girl growing up in Zimbabwe's patriarchal society

- 13 **MUSTAFA SHRESTHA**
TV series: How the Chernobyl disaster happened

- 14 **DAGMAR WOLF**
Novel: Living Feminism in Uganda

Debate

- 15 **ISAAC SAGALA**
Violent protests in Kenya

- 16 **AFRICAN MEDIA**
Press coverage from the continent on the Russia-Africa Summit

Focus: Water infrastructure

- 19 **ELAINE T. LAWSON**
Ghana's water supply improves only slowly

- 21 **CHRISTOPH SCHNEIDER-YATTARA**
The conflict-torn Horn of Africa suffers from drought

- 23 **RONALD SSEGUJJA SSEKANDI**
Kampala has numerous sanitation problems

- 24 **RAFIQUL ISLAM MONTU**
Chittagong in Bangladesh is being flooded every day

- 27 **NAND KISHOR AGRAWAL AND SANJEEV BHUCHAR**
Communities in the Himalayas must preserve their springs

- 29 **DANIEL NORDMANN, DIETER ROTHENBERGER AND JÖRG DUX**
Urban water suppliers need better support

- 32 **BENJAMIN KIERSCH**
FAO launches "Global Dialogue on Water Tenure" for sustainable and fair water governance

- 34 **PRINCE THOMPSON**
UN report: SDG6 unlikely to be achieved

FOCUS

Water infrastructure

One-fourth of the world's population has no access to safe drinking water, and almost half lacks basic sanitation. Water consumption is increasing. The climate crisis is exacerbating the situation. To achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), significant investments in efficient infrastructure are vital. Cooperation at all levels is essential too: between local communities sharing the same watershed as well as between countries connected by rivers. Only then can water conflicts be avoided.

Title: Women fill jerry cans at a water pump in Ethiopia.
Photo: picture-alliance/Caro/Trappe





Our focus section on water infrastructure starts on page 18. It pertains to the UN's 6th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG): Clean water and sanitation. It also has a bearing on other SDGs.

Working together for the human right to water

In March, the UN 2023 Water Conference took place in New York. Governments, businesses and civil society organisations made hundreds of commitments forming a new “Water Action Agenda”. It aims to support the 6th UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG6): “Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all”.

While the conference highlighted the importance of water as a vital resource, the commitments are unfortunately non-binding. This raises concerns of repeating mistakes made in addressing the climate crisis and biodiversity loss: abundant pledges followed by insufficient funding and implementation.

“The UN Sustainable Development Goals can only be achieved by creating a reliable water infrastructure for all.”

Globally coordinated, sustainable water management is essential, however – not only for its own sake, but also for other UN goals like food security (SDG2) and health (SDG3). These goals can only be achieved by creating a reliable water infrastructure for all.

Current trends will cause the global community to miss its water targets. A quarter of the world’s population has no access to safe drinking water; almost half lacks basic sanitation. Water use has been increasing by about one percent per year over the past decades according to the UN, possibly continuing until 2050. Low- and middle-income countries, often lacking infrastructure already, face the highest increase in usage.

MORE EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS

The climate crisis exacerbates the situation. It leads to more extreme weather events cutting people off from drinking water supplies and damaging infrastructure. Malnutrition and diseases follow. Water scarcity has already displaced millions.

Socio-economic issues play an important role too. Many cannot afford clean water due to privatisation or pollution from waste, mining, agriculture and industry. Fetching water, often a task for girls and women, forces long journeys. This hampers education and future opportunities.

Positive shifts are feasible. The UN notes better global water efficiency. Local endeavors thrive, like safeguarding springs. Inclusive community engagement, not mere supply, is key for sustainable water management.

AGRICULTURE OFFERS POTENTIAL

There is an urgent need for investments in efficient and climate-resilient infrastructure, including drinking water, sanitation and wastewater treatment. Agriculture, consuming more than 70 % of the freshwater used, offers untapped potential. However, more reliable data is needed to implement efficient irrigation and develop new water sources sustainably.

Access to water is a human right. To ensure it, working together is crucial, not only among communities sharing the same watershed but also among countries connected by rivers. Only through increased cooperation can water conflicts be avoided – and can the UN goals be achieved.



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LGBTQ RIGHTS IN AFRICA

Between progress and backlash

Legal and social attitudes towards LGBTQ persons in Africa vary significantly within societies and between countries. Currently, only a few African countries have decided to recognise and protect their rights. In most countries, LGBTQ individuals are still persecuted.

By Lissa Janet, Opio and Isabella Bauer

Homosexuality is currently considered a crime in 66 countries worldwide according to the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA). 33 of them are in Africa. Countries such as Nigeria, Sudan, Somalia and Mauritania have laws in place that impose severe penalties, including imprisonment and in some cases even death sentences.

Most recently, Uganda's "Anti-Homosexuality Act" led to an international outcry from human-rights activists. It was ratified by president Yoweri Museveni in March. The law foresees up to 20 years of imprisonment for homosexual practices. In cases of "aggravated homosexuality", the consequence is death penalty. "Aggravated homosexuality" includes sex with people under 18 or the involvement of a HIV-positive person.

Anyone who provides medical care to homosexuals, accommodates them or represents them in court is liable to prosecution as well. The "promotion of homosexuality" is a criminal offence too. Media organisations that share information on LGBTQ issues face serious consequences, including a hefty fine of 1 billion Ugandan shillings (€250,000) and a ten-year licence revocation.

The few organisations that supported the LGBTQ community in Uganda were deprived of any legal basis. Support from western organisations or Ugandans living abroad is severely hampered as well. This law makes it impossible for LGBTQ persons to live and express their true selves. Essentially, it aims to eradicate queerness in Uganda (see box).

At the same time, there have been positive developments in a few African countries. Namibia recently recognised same-sex

marriages concluded outside the country. South Africa has offered full legal protection to LGBTQ persons for some time. But even here, social acceptance is limited outside the three major cities of Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town.

Other countries, including Botswana and Mozambique, have made legal progress in recognising LGBTQ rights, but are still far from legal equality and even further from social acceptance. In April, the NGO Plan

There is no restriction on the discussion or promotion of LGBTQ issues in the country.

"UN-AFRICAN"?

One reason for the continued oppression of LGBTQ persons and the sluggish progress towards equality in just a few countries is a certain narrative put forward across Africa: homosexuality is an import from the west, a neo-colonial attempt to weaken the continent. Kenya's President William Ruto described homosexuality as incompatible with African culture and religion. In Ghana, journalists launched an anti-queer campaign in response to the opening of a LGBTQ centre in Accra, calling homosexuality "un-African". Moreover, there are countless con-



Members of the LGBTQ community protest at the Munich Christopher Street Day – in Uganda they might go to jail for this.

International launched the "Amahitamo Yanjye ("My Choice") Comprehensive Sexuality Education Toolkit" in Rwanda, which targets adolescents and young people under the age of 24. It aims to address teenage pregnancy and includes information on homosexuality and other sexual orientations.

spiracy stories circulating on social media, which essentially boil down to the West trying to eradicate Africans by spreading homosexuality.

As a matter of fact, this narrative is simply wrong historically. There is evidence, for example, that King Mwanga II was open-

ly gay in the kingdom of Buganda, which comprises part of present-day Uganda.

He is perhaps one of the most famous gay pre-colonial African figures, but he was not the only one. Before European colonisation, many African societies had different understandings and expressions of same-sex relationships and identities according to Sylvia Tamale, a Ugandan human-rights activist and law professor who researches the history of sexuality in Africa. The ancient cave paintings of the San people near Gurusu in Zimbabwe, for example, show two men engaged in a form of ritual sex. The “mudoko dako” or feminised men among the Langi in northern Uganda or the “mawali” in Zande society in central Africa were treated as women and could marry men.

The vocabulary used to describe same-sex relationships in African languages is further evidence of their existence in pre-colonial Africa, as Tamale’s research shows.

Basotho women in what is now Lesotho engaged in long-term relationships called “motsoalle” (special friend), the Shangaan in southern Africa referred to same-sex relationships as “inkotshane” (man-woman), and the Wolof language spoken in Senegal has always had a word for this as well (“gordigen”).

However, Tamale emphasises that same-sex activity in Africa was not always an expression of desire and differs to some extent from the contemporary Western concept of sexual identity. According to her research, same-sex acts also took place for spiritual and ritual purposes and as part of sex education among peers.

As much as these studies can prove that homosexuality was hardly brought to Africa by western powers, they should not hide the fact that same-sex relationships were widely rejected in pre-colonial times too. The colonisers and Christian mission-

aries then further criminalised them and introduced laws and moral codes that reflected the attitudes prevalent in their home countries at the time.



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A free life is impossible

“Homosexuals in small numbers have always existed in our part of black Africa ... They have never been prosecuted. They have never been discriminated against,” Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni said on the BBC programme “Hard Talk” in March 2012 (see also main text). Today, simply identifying as lesbian or gay can lead to lifelong imprisonment, according to the “Anti-Homosexuality Act” just signed by the same president. What has happened?

President Museveni came into power in 1986 and has since been very strategic in his cooperation with international allies and supporters. In the 1990s, sexual and reproductive health approaches received massive financial support – mainly from the US government under Bill Clinton. Uganda was one of the most successful African countries in fighting the AIDS epi-

demic. With the ABC approach (stay abstinent, be truthful, use condoms) the government managed to reduce infection rates.

With the election of President George W. Bush, right-wing politicians determined health policy. Some of them were fundamental Christians. “Abstinence only” was the new directive. Development-aid recipients had to change their rhetoric and approach. As the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) reports, free condoms were banned from health facilities and hospitals in Uganda, and more and more fundamental Christians spoke out publicly. Their main message was: AIDS is God’s punishment for homosexuality.

The influence of fundamentalist Christian churches has increased dramatically

since then. Under the label of “human rights advocacy”, groups such as the US-based Family Watch International organise seminars in which they label homosexuality a mental illness, promote conversion therapies, oppose sex education in schools as well as the right to abortion. The drafting of the first so-called “Kill the Gay Bill” in 2014 was also influenced - and funded - by the religious right in the US. While the first bill was invalidated by the Constitutional Court due to a procedural error, this time it passed and will cause immense suffering.

It is impressive that despite these challenges, the LGBTQ community has made progress in the area of inclusion, especially in the health sector. They have worked with the Ministry of Health to fight AIDS and promote the right to health, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. However, at the signing of the recent bill, the Minister of

Health, Ruth Acheng, praised Museveni, raising concerns about the future alignment between the Ministry and the LGBTQ community.

It seems that the Ugandan parliament often uses the LGBTQ community as a scapegoat, especially when there are scandals in the country. By exploiting deeply rooted religious norms, they believe that the public will support their agenda. Since the introduction of the law, there have been numerous attacks and arrests targeting LGBTQ organisations and their members. LJ, O, IB



STEPMAP



A Bangladeshi teenager taking a selfie.

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

“Unsupervised access matters”

Payal Arora of Erasmus University Rotterdam explains why neither textual literacy nor foreign language competence is needed to grasp digital opportunities. She also says that gender bias in artificial-intelligence systems need not be accepted.

Payal Arora interviewed by Hans Dembowski

How does digital technology help to empower women?

Well, as the cliché goes, technology is not inherently good or bad. It can be used to empower women, but also to suppress them. It is a fallacy that women’s rights become stronger by default as technology and education spread. We know that harmful traditions – consider dowry in South Asia, for example – very much mark middle-class life, despite increased literacy rates and generally good education. Patriarchal societies and religious institutions can use tracking technologies to further tighten their grip on the movements of women in public places. On the other hand, women have been using

digital spaces to self-actualise, professionalise, connect and build community, and even make visible their oppressive conditions through digital campaigns. The question we should be asking ourselves is how can we design technology to ensure that it enables women and other disadvantaged groups while reducing digital harms.

So how can digital technology support feminist causes?

Networking is very important. Women need to be in touch with their peers and be free to share their experiences. We were involved in research in Bangladesh, where disadvantaged female artisans produce traditional clothing, safeguarding a precious cultural heritage. A quite lucrative market depends on their artisanship. However, the women who do the work tend to be very poor. Many are not aware of all the ways in which they are being exploited. Intermediaries make a lot of money, but they don’t pay the producers well. Indeed, many of the women don’t even identify themselves as workers. They think they are helping their families.

Our research shows that they become more assertive and more keenly aware of their situation if they become involved in a digital network of peers. They exchange tips on how to get better bargains, work conditions, and how to find relevant information. For example, they check out what foreigners pay for their products in souvenir shops. Used this way, digital technology is very effective in empowering women.

What education do women need to use tech this way?

Formal education is overrated in our everyday learning with digital tools. People learn from one another and through trial and error by playing with new tools and digital spaces. It helps of course when apps are designed in ways that facilitate intuitive operation. What really matters, is that women – and girls – get unsupervised and uninterrupted access to digital devices and the internet. Throughout South Asia, arranged marriages are common. Very often, the husband will control his wife’s mobile phone, if she has one at all. She cannot have a secret password and he can at any time check her browser history, social-media posts, and WhatsApp messages. This leads to women self-censoring and limiting their expression and overall potential. The extended family, moreover, also pays attention to what she is doing online. But we have seen that

things change when the wife needs a phone for professional purposes. In the best case, she'll get one from an employer or someone she works for on commission. Given that she earns money, her job-related digital autonomy leads to incremental but important steps in expanding her freedoms. Obviously, she will then also use it for things that are not closely related to her work. So, we need to rethink the old adage of the personal is political to one where the professional is personal.

So, are things better in urban areas because of greater female employment there?

No, not necessarily. The idea that rural areas are inherently backwards needs to be reconsidered. Life in the villages is no longer what it used to be, and many people, including women, are involved in some kind of services or supply chains that extend far beyond their village. The Bangladeshi artisans I just mentioned are an example. They work at home, but their clothing is sold in distant places. Mobile phone networks now cover most areas of low- and middle-income countries, and people take advantage of them enthusiastically.

Isn't literacy essential?

Traditional literacy helps, but it is not as important as you probably think. Audio-visual applications have become very common. You do not have to read to gather interesting information, and you do not have to write to share your views. Many semi-literate populations have learnt to communicate through audio-visual ways online on themes and topics that are relatable across borders and cultures, which allows for virality and shared empathy.

Isn't one cut off from global interactions if one does not speak English, Spanish or another global language?

No, not really. For young people in rural South Asian communities, the digital sphere is incredibly liberating even if they only speak their local language. They can communicate with other netizens who speak the language. The reach of previous generations was limited to their own and maybe a few neighbouring villages. Perhaps they would go to the district town every once in a while, but that was it. Now they can interact with people anywhere. So, if you are a teenager with a smartphone in small village in the In-

dian state of Punjab, you can make friends all over that state, but also in the Pakistani province of the same name, as well as in Britain, Canada or Australia and other places that have large Punjabi diasporas. Things are similar if they speak a different Asian or indeed African language. Youngsters traditionally do not get much attention, so they channel their creativity to connect and build an audience for themselves – for instance, by inventing a funny dance and posting it on TikTok. Unsupervised online access can provide potentially more freedoms to experiment and explore for young people who are also watched closely and are often confined to stringent cultural norms.

If unsupervised access is the point, teenage girls are probably disadvantaged.

Yes, unfortunately they are. Entire families worry about their daughters' reputation and understandably so due to the conservative values dictating many of these contexts. What will the neighbours say if she posts a photo in which she shows just a little too much of her shoulder? What will far-away cousins think if she posts a picture of herself alone on a beach? They'll wonder what she is doing there and who her chaperone is. So even if a teenage girl has her own digital device and connectivity, what she does online will be monitored closely. Nonetheless, female teenagers nowadays have more options and opportunities than their mothers had.

I think social-media platforms are not as free as generally assumed. Their algorithms tend to support well-established narratives, are designed more to keep people engaged with trivia or outrage than to involve them in serious debate and are often used for populist propaganda. So, I think that the global online sphere needs better regulation.

Yes, there are indeed serious problems, and yes, we do need global regulation. Nonetheless, you must not underestimate how much freedom there is on the internet. Numerous individual influencers have built amazingly large audiences and huge followings. To achieve that, they have to offer something genuinely interesting. They cannot simply reiterate standard narratives or promote sponsored goods. Both happens, of course, but the result is that their audiences begin to dwindle. Some of the influencers are female, and they certainly find the options empowering.



Artificial intelligence (AI) is often known to have a gender bias. What can be done about it?

Well, the algorithms mirror the biases that are in the data sets they are trained with. The data sets are created from past data which document patriarchal attitudes. Moreover, WEIRD societies are overrepresented – the acronym stands for western, educated, industrialised, rich and democratic. The discrimination of women and girls is inherent in the data sets which inform the algorithms. We cannot change the past, but we need not accept it as the future. Data sets can be modified. I am involved in an EU-funded project that aims to reduce discrimination in AI-enabled recruitment decisions. It is called FINDHR (Fairness and Intersectional Non-Discrimination in Human Recommendations). We are creating semi-synthetic datasets which pay more attention to women of colour, for example. This is, of course, a response to numerous debacles like the classic case where Amazon's hiring system was actively recommending men for top positions because the underlying data showed that primarily men populated top positions. Different data sets will probably result in different recommendations. Ultimately, employment decisions must be made by humans, but we know that they appreciate automated assistance. Trained appropriately, AI can serve a liberating purpose.



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Decongesting prisons

For years now, Ghana has tried without success to pass law reforms that would introduce non-custodial sentencing for offenders with light offences. This could be the solution to decongest the country's prisons.

There is severe crowding in many of the 46 prison facilities around the country. While inmate populations have grown, there has been little or no investment in improving the infrastructure. As such, many facilities are run down, and prisoners live in conditions that do not meet acceptable standards.

Prisoners too have human rights. The state of Ghana's prisons has put many inmates' health at risk. They also lack education and vocational training programmes helping prisoners to reintegrate into society upon release. This has triggered calls for rapid action to address the problem and ensure detainees are treated with dignity and respect.

Organisations such as the Crime Check Foundation and Amnesty International Ghana have repeatedly urged the government to reform its criminal justice system to reduce incarceration and improve conditions for the inmates. According to Ghana's Prison Service, the country's prison population has grown

from 10,265 to 15,208 prisoners. 1,494 prisoners are foreigners.

Ibrahim Oppong Kwarteng of the Crime Check Foundation and ambassador extraordinary of Ghana Prisons urges the Ghanaian government to review the country's criminal justice laws. "Ghana's reputation as a champion of human rights and a shining example of democracy in Africa could be damaged by certain flaws in the Criminal Offences Act 1960," he said, citing the absence of a non-custodial sentencing law, harsh judicial sentences, alleged police extortion and extreme prison overcrowding.

Activists also advocate for increased support and resources for ex-convicts to help them effectively reintegrate into society and reduce the likelihood of reoffending, leading to a safer and more just society for all.

Recently, the Ghanaian government has responded to this call by working on introducing in parliament a non-custodial sentencing bill, also known as the Community Service Bill. The bill aims at reducing prison populations by providing alternative forms of punishment for minor offences. If passed into law, it will allow offenders to carry out community service instead of being jailed.

Speaking at a graduation ceremony for 43 inmates at the Ankaful maximum security prison in the central region recently, Robbin Kwesi Asamoah Fenning, a deputy director of prisons, prayed that the bill would not "gather dust" on the shelves of Ghana's Parliament. He urged the government to expedite its enactment.

This congestion is worsened by budgetary constraints, restricted space, insufficient resources and personnel and a lack of staff development for officers, all of which contribute to difficulties in reforming and rehabilitating offenders.

Ghana's Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice contends that non-custodial sentences such as parole, community service, probation or alternative dispute resolution can help address this problem.



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STEP MAP



Culture Special

As every summer, the D+C/E+Z editorial team presents books, music and films that we appreciate and would like to recommend. The oeuvres are tackling issues of developmental relevance, and we would be pleased if our recommendations inspired you to read, watch or listen to them. This year we are presenting our culture special in two Digital Monthlies – in August and September.



Student protest in Frankfurt in 1969.

MIGRATION

Adapting to a fast-changing foreign society

Nassir Djafari's novel "Mahtab" tells the story of a migrant mother from Iran in Frankfurt in the late 1960s. One of the book's strong points is that it describes not only how the protagonist adapts to an unfamiliar culture, but also gives many little hints regarding how Frankfurt itself was changing in those years.

By Hans Dembowski

Mahtab, the main character, is a woman in her late 30s who works as a nurse in a Frankfurt hospital. She has been living in Germany with her family for about a decade. Her husband, Amin, runs a small store with great dreams but moderate success. Their youngest son was born in Frankfurt; their daughter and first son were born in Iran.

Mahtab is focused on her family. When her shift is over, she hurries home to prepare dinner for the kids. She does not socialise much with female colleagues, who seem to be obsessed with their looks and whether they are attractive to men.

The Iranian mother pays far less attention to the outside world than her husband and children do. Her husband listens to shortwave radio and always knows the latest news about the atrocities of the Shah dictatorship back home. He also follows what is going on in other countries of the so called Third World. On the other hand, he is constantly trying to grasp new business opportunities – but not with much luck.

Mahtab finds his tendency to flirt with German women deeply irritating. She is equally bewildered by the attention a senior doctor pays her at the hospital.

The children go to German schools and accept their peers' views and ideas. Azadeh, the 21-year-old daughter, in particular, is increasingly independent-minded and expects much more personal freedom than seems appropriate to Mahtab. The parents want all three to get a good education and have a great future.

In the first of 27 chapters, Mahtab and Amin are stuck in a traffic jam which is caused by young students protesting against the Vietnam war. Mahtab is surprised to see Azadeh in the crowd. It turns out that the young woman has a boyfriend, so Mahtab does not permit her to go out anymore. Nonetheless, she must discover that she has become unable to control her daughter's life.

While Mahtab disapproves of her daughter's miniskirt, she is ignorant of many German mothers sharing those feelings. In an interesting twist, Djafari describes not only how his main character changes, but incidentally also gives account of the massive changes Frankfurt was undergoing.

The underground metro system was being built, so the downtown area was a permanent construction site. Consumerism had set in, and people were eagerly buying washing machines and TV sets. Birth-

control pills had become available, and a side effect was that extra-marital affairs were no longer the scandal they had been in the past. Young people were rebellious, keenly aware of what was going on in Vietnam and other countries formerly or still under colonial rule. They objected to western governments' involvement in the crises of far-away nations – and likened such involvement to Germany's Nazi past. Of course, immigrants were changing the city too – it had started to become Germany's hub of multiculturalism.

Mahtab takes everything for granted. She is struggling to cope with many challenges. Annoyed because her husband seems to have an affair with an employee, Mahtab decides to move out and take along her sons. She finds refuge in the home of a former patient, an elderly lady. Azadeh takes advantage of the chaotic situation and starts to share a room with her boyfriend. Her mother thinks she is still at home, while her father believes she is with his wife. The family's reunification starts when the parents begin to look for their daughter.

In the meantime, Mahtab's elderly friend has helped the nurse to become more self-confident and independent. Mahtab now has a bank account of her own, for example, and she has started to take swimming lessons. When she first accompanied her friend to the public swimming pool, she felt embarrassingly naked in her new swimsuit. The protagonist increasingly makes Frankfurt her home, and no longer feels bound by her childhood's more restrictive gender roles.

Nassir Djafari is an immigrant himself. His family moved from Iran to Germany when he was four. He used to work for KfW Development Bank as an economist and has written several non-fiction contributions for D+C/E+Z. Mahtab is his second novel. His first one was about a father-son relationship in crisis (see following page).

BOOK

Djafari, N., 2022: Mahtab. Bremen, Sujet Verlag (in German only).



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Cusco is one of the stops that Timm and his father Hamid make on their trip through Peru.

NOVEL

A father-son relationship in crisis

In his debut novel “Eine Woche, ein Leben” (“One Week, One Life”), Nassir Djafari tells the story of the relationship between Timm and his father Hamid – and their trip to Peru.

By Maren van Treel

What would you do if your son hardly ever left his room? In Nassir Djafari’s debut novel “Eine Woche, ein Leben”, Timm’s father Hamid is almost out of ideas. But by approaching his son cautiously, he manages to open the lines of communication again. Then the father proposes a trip to Peru. It becomes clear that not only the son, but also the father has lost his way in life.

The trip to Peru brings about a fundamental shift in their relationship: instead of being separated by a closed door, father and son now share hotel rooms. An unexpected event causes their roles to reverse, and the son, who was a mystery at the beginning of the novel, proves himself in an impressive way. During their short time abroad, a life comes to light that was only

dimly hinted at before: the father has a past in Peru.

Whereas the first part of the novel takes place in Frankfurt on the Main, Germany, and is told from Hamid’s perspective, we see Peru through Timm’s eyes in the second: the naive point of view of a young man who knows little of Peru is mixed here and there with information and socially critical analyses provided by his father and his father’s friends. Racism, corruption and poverty are just a few of the topics that are touched on. But Peru’s positive aspects are described as well. In general, a believable portrait emerges. For his part, Timm becomes increasingly critical of his surroundings.

The conflict between father and son is due in part to the fact that the father has certain expectations regarding the son’s achievements and life choices, which he is not always able or willing to fulfil. While the son yearns for his father’s approval, he has other concerns as well. The pair’s Iranian roots also play a role in everything. The novel doesn’t lecture readers; it’s not pretend-

ing to be an instruction manual for a successful father-son relationship. Instead, it sensitively portrays a caring but strict and career-oriented father and his son, both of whom are plausible figures with strengths and weaknesses, and tells their shared story.

Whereas a few storylines and events from the first part seem to get lost or remain unresolved until the end, the second half more than makes up for it. Both are rapidly narrated in short chapters, which maintains suspense throughout. The story makes twists and turns until the end and concludes unexpectedly and emotionally moving.

Nassir Djafari has written a multi-faceted, readable novel that incorporates major themes like family background, identity and belonging alongside the father-son relationship. It remains up to the reader to determine to what extent father and son really see and understand each other, and whether they have grown closer again by the end.

BOOK

Djafari, N., 2020: *Eine Woche, ein Leben*. Bremen, Sujet Verlag (in German only).



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NOVEL

The fate of a girl from Zimbabwe

Like the protagonist of her novel “Nervous Conditions”, Tsitsi Dangarembga broke new ground in Zimbabwe – as an author, freedom activist and feminist. Persecuted by those in power at home, the 64-year-old is honoured and appreciated in Germany.

By Sabine Balk

Tsitsi Dangarembga is a brave woman. She is not intimidated by the increasingly repressive behaviour of the Zimbabwean regime. She even went to prison for her right to freedom of expression – after an action that was actually harmless.



Tsitsi Dangarembga in court in Harare in September 2022.

In July 2020, along with journalist Julie Barnes, she held up a sign in Harare, Zimbabwe’s capital, that read: “We want better. Reform our institutions”. Shortly afterwards she was arrested and charged with public incitement to violence. She and Barnes were given six months’ probation and a fine in late September 2022. There was a large international outcry. The proceedings, which were characterised by numerous errors and delays, were described as a “show trial”. Nevertheless, both women were able to ob-

tain an acquittal in the second instance before the High Court in early May 2023.

The fact that the author has a mind of her own and rejected playing the role of a subordinate woman is also reflected in her work. She is the first female author in Zimbabwe to have written a novel. Particularly notable is her trilogy featuring the adolescent Tambudzai, or Tambu for short, who has some autobiographical traits. The trilogy won Tsitsi Dangarembga the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade in 2021 and introduced her to a wider audience.

The first volume, which appeared under the title “Nervous Conditions” in 1988,

describes the fate of the young Tambu in the Zimbabwe of the late 1960s. Tambu lives in poverty on a farm in what was then Rhodesia. Her father is a lazy good-for-nothing and her mother is an uneducated, hard-working woman. She wants at least one of her children to get a good education so that they can support the family financially later. Tambu’s uncle Babamukuru is her role model and benefactor. He was able to study in England and represents the first generation of the Christian African elite.

The entire family looks up to him. He takes in Tambu’s hated older brother, who is allowed to attend the missionary school where Babamukuru is director. Tambu gets her chance when her brother unexpectedly dies of an illness a few months later. Babamukuru recognises her potential. He wants her to assume her brother’s role and receive a good education. Despite many obstacles – skin colour, class, sex – Tambu is very ambitious and takes advantage of her opportunities.

Dangarembga allows readers to experience Tambu’s thoughts and feelings and vividly depicts the reality of African life. For example, she describes how Tambu has to carry a bowl of water at a big party her family is hosting in Babamukuru’s honour. This is an important task, because people wash their hands according to a particular hierarchy: men before women, and the old before the young.

The scene clearly portrays the hierarchies between men and women, and between children and adults. At the same time, it reveals Tambu’s aversion to tradition and the role she has been assigned. Tambu’s fate is shaped by two forms of oppression: the patriarchal structures of her family, and the colonial dominance of whites.

The jury of the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade described why the book also contains an important message for German readers: “In her acclaimed trilogy of novels, Tsitsi Dangarembga draws on the story of a young woman’s life from adolescence to middle age to depict the struggle for the right to live in dignity and the fight for female self-determination in Zimbabwe. In doing so, she reveals social and moral conflicts that go far beyond regional references, thereby creating the stage for the discussion of globally relevant questions of justice.”

BOOKS: TAMBUDZAI TRILOGY

Volume 1: Dangarembga, T., 2021: Nervous Conditions. London, Faber & Faber.

Volume 2: Dangarembga, T., 2021: The Book of Not. London, Faber & Faber.

Volume 3: Dangarembga, T., 2020: This Mournable Body. London, Faber & Faber.



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HBO MINISERIES

The cost of lies

The miniseries “Chernobyl” revolves around the worst nuclear accident in the world. Over five episodes, the American television network HBO shows how the core meltdown came about.

By Mustafa Shrestha

On 26 April 1986, the number four reactor of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant went out of control. Thirty-seven years after the accident, the area around the city of the same name in the north of present-day Ukraine is still uninhabitable. It will remain so for the foreseeable future because, according to Greenpeace, the exclusion zone surrounding the former nuclear power plant will remain radioactively contaminated for thousands of years.

In the historical drama “Chernobyl”, the chemist Valery Legasov, played by Jared Harris, and the nuclear physicist Ulana Khomyuk (Emily Watson) look for a cause in the immediate aftermath of the accident. The scientists find that Soviet functionaries are hard nuts to crack. They downplay the accident and show no interest in investigating it. Boris Scherbina, played by Stellan Skarsgård, is their only ally. As a politician, he knows his way around the state apparatus and helps the duo manoeuvre through the Soviet system.

The series eschews spectacular special effects for the reactor explosion. Instead, audiences experience the disaster from the perspective of the people on site. That means that initially all that is heard of the catastrophe is a loud bang. The audience doesn’t see or hear any more than the characters – the scope of what actually happened is only revealed in the last episode, when the incident is reviewed in a trial.

The fact that viewers know how the story ends has no impact on the series’ suspense. The first episode recalls a dystopian thriller: families gather in front of their houses in Chernobyl and gaze at the colourful lights that a fire at the nuclear power plant is shining into the night sky. Children play in radioactive ash, which they think is

snow. They have no idea that they are being exposed to deadly radiation. Such moments are hard to watch, knowing what we know today.

CHERNOBYL DOESN'T POINT ANY FINGERS

The series doesn’t make any one responsible for the disaster, though there is a potential culprit. In the first episode, the irascible Anatoly Dyatlov, played by Paul Ritter, bullies his colleagues in the tense control room of the nuclear power plant. As chief engineer, he is in denial about the accident, even though he sees graphite on the floor – a clear signal that an explosion has taken place. The real Dyatlov served time in prison for disregarding established safety protocols. The series, however, characterises him as a scapegoat. It claims that the state’s attempts to hide a design flaw in the reactor were the real cause of the accident.

Chernobyl had a lasting influence on the debate about nuclear energy. While the anti-nuclear movement predates it, the accident awakened critical awareness of the dangers of such technology among the general public of many industrialised states.

Yet according to an interview with screenplay author Craig Mazin in Slate Magazine, “Chernobyl” is not meant to be explicitly anti-Communist or an anti-nuclear appeal. Instead, Mazin wanted “Chernobyl” to warn against the dangers of disinformation. Protagonist Valery Legasov therefore begins and ends the story with the question: “What is the cost of lies?”

Mazin is famous for the “Hangover” comedies. Not many would have trusted him with a story like “Chernobyl”.

But HBO was rewarded for its trust in the author. “Chernobyl” earned top ratings on the internet film database IMDB shortly after the series began. It also won numerous television prizes for the network.

In light of the ongoing debate about nuclear energy in many countries and the increasing number of disinformation campaigns online, the themes in “Chernobyl” remain highly relevant even decades after the reactor accident.

SERIES

Chernobyl, 2019, USA and UK. Director: Johan Renck.



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Contaminated for millennia: the exclusion zone surrounding the Chernobyl nuclear power plant.



Feminist ideas are often passed on through face-to-face conversations.

UGANDA

The experience of feminism is multifaceted

In her book “The First Woman”, Ugandan author Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi contrasts western-style feminism with indigenous forms of Ugandan feminism.

By Dagmar Wolf

Kirabo, the protagonist of the 2020 novel „The First Woman“, is growing up in a Ugandan village in the 1970s under the loving care of her grandparents. Kirabo has never met her mother, and her father lives with his new wife and two children in Kampala.

As an adolescent, Kirabo moves to her father’s home in Uganda’s capital. It is an abrupt change from her previous middle-class village life. She is confronted with an almost western urban lifestyle. Later, thanks to a scholarship, she attends a boarding school for girls, where the staff make every effort to prepare the girls for a meaningful life for themselves and their country.

This coming-of-age novel is exciting to read, but it captivates readers less through

its plot and more through the depth and complexity with which it portrays various characters, times and places.

A central theme of the novel is the role of women in Uganda’s patriarchal society. Kirabo is always accompanied by strong, yet very distinct women who influence her development. Makumbi relies on these women to tell the story of Ugandan feminism, or “mwenkanonkano” in Luganda. It is a story of Ugandan women’s daily fight against oppression of every kind.

Kirabo also struggles with her social role. Despite the love that she receives from her grandparents and the entire village community, she is searching for her mother. When she is 12 years old, she describes feeling like two souls live within her. She wonders whether she is a witch, and if that’s the reason her mother left her. Hoping to find an answer, she seeks out the solitary Nsuuta, who is a witch according to her grandmother. Kirabo tells her that she sometimes feels like she is leaving her body, especially when someone forbids her to do

something because she is a girl. That makes her want to do it even more.

Sometimes she hates being a woman and feels squeezed inside her body. That’s when one of her souls flies away, she says. Nsuuta explains that she leaves her body because “the original state” is within her. She calls this “the first woman”. “We were huge, strong, bold, loud, proud, brave, independent,” Nsuuta says. But women in their original state were rejected by society and suppressed for centuries. Nsuuta explains that the original state was bred out of women.

The women around Kirabo handle their situations very differently. Each develops her own strategy to subvert the patriarchy and live in, and survive, the prevailing system. Makumbi shows that they are all feminists in their own way. But the author makes it equally clear that men also have difficulties breaking out of the system and the roles assigned to them, even if they want to.

Makumbi’s novel is largely set in Uganda in the 1970s and 1980s, when attention to the World Conference on Women in Mexico brought rich countries’ ideas of feminism to Africa. Yet these concepts were only received by the English-speaking urban middle class, not by people in rural areas or poorer segments of the population.

The dominant ideas of this type of feminism do not correspond with the experiences of most Ugandan women. Nevertheless, feminist notions are already rooted in their own indigenous traditions and stories. They do not find expression in rallies and demonstrations, but are rather transmitted through oral traditions, stories and legends within communities, from generation to generation.

In her novel, Makumbi emphasises that women are not oppressed in the same ways around the world. Instead, oppression is culturally specific. For that reason, feminism cannot mean the same thing in all countries and cultures and has to be expressed differently in different contexts.

BOOK

Makumbi, J. N., 2020: *The first woman*. London, Oneworld Publications.



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Protests in Nairobi.

GOVERNANCE

Empty pots

In Kenya, demonstrators have taken to the streets to protest against the sharp rise in living costs and tax increases. Thirty people have already died, and the economy is taking further damage.

By Isaac Sagala

Global inflation, driven by Russia's war in Ukraine, and an economy that is only slowly recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic are driving prices in Kenya. To make matters worse, the government has cut subsidies for essential goods such as fuel or maize meal, the basis for the country's staple food, ugali.

At the same time, it is hiking taxes on income, petrol or housing to raise money domestically and to deal with the external debt crisis, which is mainly fuelled by the debt to China and other international obligations, for example to the IMF.

Kenya is actually East Africa's economic flagship, but still many people there live close to the poverty line. They now wonder how to put food on the table the next day – and they are angry.

The protests started back in March this year in the capital Nairobi and other cities like Kisumu and Mombasa. They were organised by the opposition under the leadership of Raila Odinga, who challenged the

election of President William Ruto in court last year. The court ruled that Ruto had won legitimately.

Odinga still accuses Ruto of lying. During the election campaign, he had promised to reduce the cost of living within a hundred days of taking office last September. The accusations are falling on fertile ground across the country.

Initially, the protests took place once a week, then the organisers extended them to three times a week, Wednesdays to Fridays. The opposition called on their supporters to carry empty pans and pots on their heads and beat them with cooking sticks – the obvious gesture became symbolic. A march to State House, where the president sits, was thwarted by police.

The protests were also marked by dramatic car chases with the police pursuing the organisers. Higher-ranking opposition figures were arrested. Most protesters were on foot and engaged in street battles with the police, resulting in injuries on both sides.

The police are accused by civil society and the opposition of using brutal force against the demonstrators. According to the human-rights organisation Amnesty International, thirty people have been killed. Dozens bear bullet wounds and injuries

from tear gas and police batons. In total, hundreds of people have been arrested.

At the same time, the economy is suffering as traders and shop owners had closed their shops for fear of violence, looting and destruction of business premises. The Kenya Private Sector Alliance estimates daily losses at almost 19 million euros on protest days.

DIALOGUE URGENTLY NEEDED

Religious leaders and western diplomats have called on the government to engage in dialogue with the opposition. The ambassadors and high commissioners of Australia, Denmark, Germany, the United States, the Netherlands, Sweden, Ukraine, Canada, Ireland, Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom expressed concern about the loss of life, violence and destruction of property.

The government and the opposition have since started bipartisan talks. President Ruto and opposition leader Odinga agreed to form separate dialogue teams under the mediation of former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo. So far, however, the negotiators – five from each side – have not been able to reach an agreement. Both sides were nevertheless optimistic about finding a solution.

At the end of July, the opposition stopped the protests. Instead, "solidarity parades and vigils for the victims of police violence" were organised in all parts of the country.

Kenyans expressed mixed feelings about the ongoing dialogue. Paul Wekesa, a Nairobi resident, says: "Once dialogue happens, you know it is no longer about the citizens. We have seen it before: politicians want to discuss what serves their own interests best."

Public pessimism was compounded at the end of August when Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua dismissed the ongoing bipartisan talks, saying that the dialogue would achieve nothing. Opposition leader Odinga also hinted at a change of tactics should the talks fail, saying he would again call on his supporters to protest and strike.



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Meeting between Vladimir Putin and Mali's interim president Assimi Goïta during the summit.

PRESS REVIEW

African media on the Russia-Africa Summit

On 27 and 28 July 2023, the second Russia-Africa Summit was held in Saint Petersburg. The Russian war on Ukraine, which has pushed up inflation worldwide and led to higher food and oil prices, loomed over the meeting. In African countries in particular, the situation was exacerbated by Russia's abandonment of the Black Sea Grain Initiative, a UN-brokered deal that allowed Ukrainian food exports to reach international markets, just a week before the summit. At the first summit in 2019, 43 heads of state attended. Now they were only 17. Here are the headlines of – and excerpts from – selected pieces of African media coverage and BBC News Swahili on the summit. We are quoting the websites.

By D+C/E+Z

WHY WE DO POLITICS OF POVERTY

(...) The few African leaders who attended were in fine form, with rousing speeches, on

why Africa is still largely a poor continent. They touched on many of the reasons; dark global forces that exploit Africa, the damage of nearly 400 years of the enslavement of Africans; the disruption and plunder of nearly 100 years of colonialism; and the rigged international system that followed after independence.

Only the recently-arrived-on-the-scene Burkina Faso military leader Captain Ibrahim Traoré touched on the internal reasons for Africa's miserable state. Noting the immense wealth of the continent, he blamed past African leaders for mistakes and denounced their "beggary" mentality.

However, Capt Traoré seems to be the kind of ruler who preaches water and drinks wine. While he correctly noted the shameful spectacle of going to Russia to beg it to return to its grain deal with Ukraine (which it invaded over a year ago) and get their food and fertiliser exports to Africa back on track, his actions suggested his heart was elsewhere.

He didn't visit a fertiliser or tractor factory in Russia. Instead, he and his delegation

were particularly excited by a weapons exhibition the Russians had put on. That is part of the problem. People don't eat guns. Africa has too many guns but too few tractors, irrigation rigs, seed plants, fertiliser factories and food silos. (...)

Charles Onyango-Obbo, Nation, Kenya

<https://nation.africa/kenya/blogs-opinion/opinion/why-we-do-politics-of-poverty-4324268>

CAN AFRICA BE ACCUSED OF MOBILISING BEHIND ITS INTERESTS?

(...) In Western discourse, Africans are seen as big kids who only obey their food instincts, when it's not to equip themselves with Russian weapons to shoot each other. Even if Africans are not above criticism (...) can they really be reproached for rallying behind their interests? The answer to this question is certainly no. And with good reason. Didn't General Charles De Gaulle say that "States have no friends; they only have interests"? It is this well-known maxim that guides international relations. (...)

So Africa has nothing to be ashamed of in the face of Western accusations. On the contrary, it should take responsibility for its choices, which are dictated by the needs of the moment. (...) Indeed, the competition between the great powers in Africa, based on their economic and geostrategic interests, should offer the continent a wide range of choices in the partnerships offered to it, while freeing it from the Western conditionalities that often accompany international aid. (...)

Beyond the choices to be made between partners on the basis of interests, this is an opportunity for Africa to raise the very issue of its place in international relations. Often reduced to aligning itself with the positions of the world's major powers, Africa has no real say in decisions on major global issues, including those that primarily affect Africans themselves. (...)

But the continent must be able to speak with one voice if it is to succeed. And that, unfortunately, is precisely what we can deplore. In fact, before going to the major world events, Africa fails to prepare properly. African leaders are scattered in their ranks, each preaching to his or her own chapel. (...)

The consequence of this unpreparedness is that one summit follows another with no real impact on the continent's development. (...)

Le Pays, Burkina Faso (translated from French)

<https://lepays.bf/sommet-afrique-russie-peut-on-reprocher-a-lafrique-de-se-mobiliser-derriere-ses-interets-2/>

MEETING OF RUSSIA AND AFRICA: PUTIN WANTS TO INCREASE INFLUENCE

(...) In any case, Russia is only one of several major players who are now stepping up their efforts to exert political and economic influence in Africa – including not only China, but also India, Turkey, the Gulf states, South Korea and, of course, the nations of the West and Japan. (...)

Moscow's decision to abandon the agreement on the safe transport of Ukrainian grain via the Black Sea ports will make it difficult for Russia to convince of having goodwill and better intentions, even if Putin has promised to make up for the deficit that has arisen. (...)

The political context has changed dramatically since African leaders went to

Sochi in 2019 for the first Russia-Africa summit.

For the past three years, the Kremlin has seemed driven by a desire to destabilise France and other Western nations, showing at least partial sympathy for the military that has taken power in Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea and is seen by neighbouring governments as a threat to the region. (...)

BBC News Swahili (translated from Kiswahili)

<https://www.bbc.com/swahili/articles/c72kzj6d4reo>

RUSSIA-AFRICA SUMMIT – IN THE PRESENCE OF SOME TWENTY HEADS OF STATE: VLADIMIR PUTIN PROMISES TO FEED AFRICA

(...) The grain trade, which is becoming a diplomatic tool, was at the heart of the second Russia-Africa Summit. While African countries were worried about Moscow's withdrawal from the cereals agreement, Vladimir Putin reassured his African partners by promising free wheat to six African countries

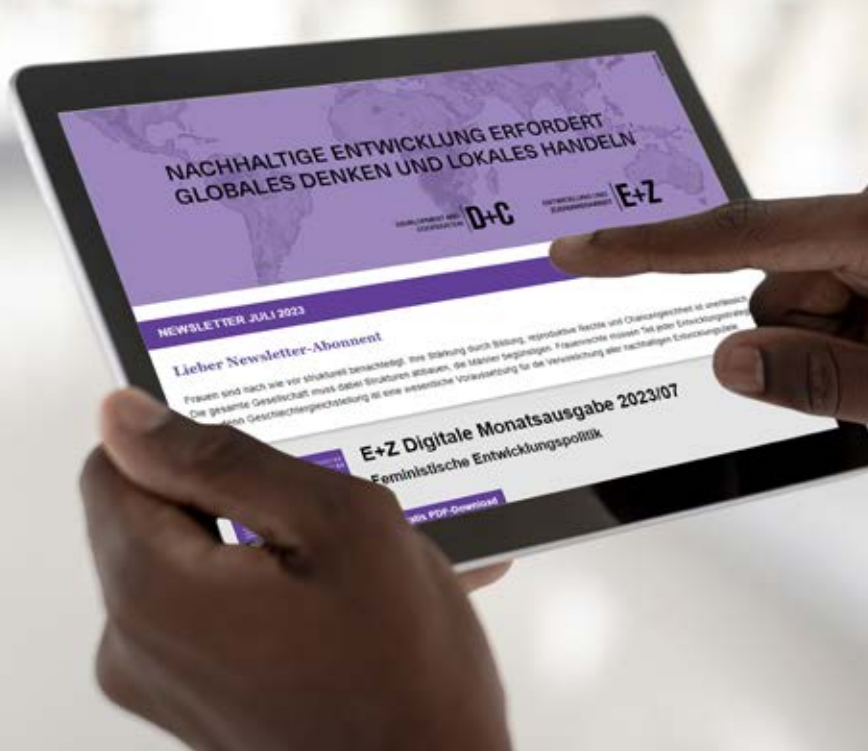
most at risk of food insecurity. Against this geopolitical backdrop, which is once again polarising the world as a result of the war in Ukraine, the Russian president is sparing no effort to include Africa in his ever-expanding zone of influence on the continent. (...)

In the presence of some twenty African heads of state and government, including President Macky Sall, Vladimir Putin could not miss the opportunity to charm the continent. Especially at a time of crisis with Europe, marked by the war in Ukraine. This crisis has been exacerbated by the Russian government's refusal to extend the agreement that has guaranteed Ukrainian cereal exports for the past year, and which risks plunging the African continent into food insecurity. Naturally, in his speech, the Russian President sought to reassure his distinguished guests. (...)

Woury Diallo, Le Quotidien, Senegal (translated from French)

<https://lequotidien.sn/sommet-russie-afrique-en-presence-dune-vingtaine-de-chefs-detat-vladimir-poutine-promet-de-nourrir-lafrique/>

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FOCUS

Water infrastructure

Small advances in Ghana's water supply

By Elaine T. Lawson (p. 19)

Ongoing drought in the crisis-ridden Horn of Africa

By Christoph Schneider-Yattara (p. 21)

Water and sewage system challenges in Kampala

By Ronald Ssegujja Ssekandi (p. 23)

Bangladesh's second largest city is being flooded every day

By Rafiqul Islam Montu (p. 24)

Preventing springs from drying out in the Himalayas

By Nand Kishor Agrawal and Sanjeev Bhuchar (p. 27)

Urban water suppliers must be better supported

By Daniel Nordmann, Dieter Rothenberger and Jörg Dux (p. 29)

FAO's "Global Dialogue on Water Tenure" aims to develop principles of sustainable water governance

By Benjamin Kiersch (p. 32)

UN report: SDG6 unlikely to be achieved

By Prince Thompson (p. 34)



A farmer drinks from a stream at a cocoa farm in Kusa, Ghana.

ACCESS TO DRINKING WATER

Closing the gap

Access to water is a human right. Ghana has made considerable progress in this regard, but there are still significant gaps in coverage.

By Elaine T. Lawson

While Ghana has made meaningful improvements to the provision of safe drinking water, the efforts put in place at the policy level have not resulted in the progress anticipated. In Ghana, water-supply systems are complex. They are made up, on the one hand, of formal state institutions such as GWCL and CWSA (see box), and, on the other, of informal vendors and private institutions seeking to fill in the gaps.

Socio-economic inequalities make it difficult for many people to afford safe drinking water. Poverty is widespread. Ghana's labour market is dominated by low-wage earners working in the informal sector. According to the Ghana Living Standards Survey Round Seven (GLSS 7), two-thirds of currently employed people are engaged in what

is described as “vulnerable employment”. The proportion is higher in rural areas.

The vulnerably employed have difficulty paying more for basic water, sanitation and hygiene services. What's more, there are no social safety nets to ensure adequate supply of clean water to the poor and vulnerable. The prevailing focus on market-driven approaches and cost-recovery mechanisms is also standing in the way of providing access to all.

There are marked regional differences in access to safe drinking water as well. According to the 2021 Population and Housing Census, there is a glaring rural-urban divide in the quality of water distribution and infrastructure, with urban households more likely to have access to safe drinking water.

However, GWCL is also unable to meet the demand for water in urban areas, resulting in a chronically irregular water supply and a high reliance on informal water sources. The two main sources of drinking water in urban areas are sachet water (51.5%) and pipe-borne water (33.6%). Rural areas rely

on borehole/tube wells (33.6%) as well as pipe-borne water (28.8%).

The average time households without water on their premises need to access any source of drinking water is 19 minutes. People in rural areas generally need longer (22 minutes) than in urban areas (13 minutes). In rural areas, there are also comparatively more households more than 30 minutes away from a drinking-water source.

Girls and women are primarily responsible for fetching water, which affects girls' school attendance and women's ability to engage in meaningful employment. It is important to note that these statistics do not adequately cover the growing number of peri-urban and informal settlements with highly irregular and insecure access to drinking water.

For many rural communities, surface water abstraction (such as from rivers, streams and ponds) remains a substantial source of water for drinking and domestic use. This water is most likely polluted. The increase in illegal mining activities (also called “galamsey”, derived from the phrase “gather them and sell”) continues to pollute streams and rivers, disrupting water availability and leading to high treatment costs. Other factors affecting surface water volumes and quality include deforestation, improper agricultural practices, poor sani-

tation and solid waste-management practices, environmental pollution and climate change.

GETTING ON TRACK FOR THE FUTURE

Obstacles to achieving safe drinking water for Ghanaians are:

- poor enforcement of existing laws;
- a lack of affordability and access, especially among the poor and vulnerable;
- inadequate infrastructure;
- and a low capacity to manage water systems, especially at the local level.

Water provisioning and governance institutions, as well as the legal framework, need to be updated to address the complex issues challenging water security in Ghana today. These include climate change, illegal mining, biodiversity loss, increasing poverty and the rising number of self-supply points and vendors. The climate crisis especially threatens the water infrastructure system's ability to supply services. It causes extreme events such as floods and droughts, which reduce the efficiency of dams and reservoirs.

Access to clean and affordable drinking water is a national policy issue. Not only

the climate crisis highlights the importance of greater investment in infrastructure, particularly in water supply storage and flood mitigation systems. Most rural water infrastructure, where it exists at all, is non-functional or outdated, and efforts to retrofit it are slow and insufficient.

Increasing investment in accessible and targeted climate-smart infrastructure could create win-win scenarios for the government and its institutions, as well as water-sector stakeholders. Investing in renewable technology could also help expand water service to areas that do not have connections to the formal water infrastructure. Water-supply systems should be expanded to include wastewater collection and treatment, as well as storm-water systems with storm-water pipes and other infrastructure.

The majority of the water resources that feed drinking-water systems are in rural communities. However, the top-down approach of most policies often ignores local expertise. Including local stakeholders would mean reaching out to local and traditional authorities, as well as incorporating indigenous values and knowledge in measures to safeguard water bodies.

At the same time, water affordability needs to be prioritised. The current focus on cost recovery and tariffs excludes the poor from accessing safe drinking water. Targeted social-protection initiatives that address affordability concerns are long overdue. Such initiatives could include flexible payment systems, developing affordability thresholds and providing subsidies, for example on water-storage systems. The lessons the government learned from providing free drinking water during the Covid-19 pandemic could be valuable in developing such programmes.

Ghanaian civil society should also be strengthened to play its role. There is a high dependence on foreign aid and NGO support. Community-based groups such as WSMTs and water and sanitation (WAT-SAN) committees need to be adequately resourced and trained to care for rural water infrastructure and advocate for safe water access.

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Ghana's water supply

The institutional framework for ensuring access to safe drinking water for all Ghanaians goes back almost a century. Among the big improvements made to drinking-water provision was the establishment of the Ghana Water and Sewerage Corporation (GWSC) in 1965. GWSC was responsible for managing water production and distribution in both rural and urban areas. This dual focus shifted in the 1980s and 1990s, when Ghana underwent significant institutional and legal reforms as part of the structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) set out by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund

(IMF). The modifications in the water sector included a formal separation of rural and urban drinking-water management.

In 1999, GWSC was transformed into a limited liability company called the Ghana Water Company Ltd (GWCL). Since then, GWCL is only responsible for managing the urban water



supply. Urban drinking water is regulated by the Public Utilities Regulatory Commission (PURC), which was set up in 1997 as part of the utility-sector reforms. PURC reviews and approves tariffs and monitors GWCL and other secondary and tertiary water suppliers.

In 1993, the legislature made Ghana's metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies (MMDAs) responsible for improving access to water and sanitation in rural communities and towns with fewer than 10,000 people. The MMDAs receive support from the Community Water and Sanitation Agency (CWSA), which promotes the development and sustainability of safe water.

The CWSA also coordinates efforts by civil-society

organisations (NGOs) and private-sector actors to provide safe drinking water in rural areas. Local user communities manage rural water infrastructure through water and sanitation management teams (WSMTs), who also handle the supervision of drinking-water infrastructure and address consumer concerns.

At the policy level, the Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources (MSWR) is the main government institution responsible for water policy formulation and coordination. Other stakeholders include the Water Resources Commission (WRC) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). At the same time, Ghana still faces multiple challenges in water supply (see main text). EL



Women displaced by drought queue for water at Kaam Jiroon camp in Somalia.

HORN OF AFRICA

The multiple layers of drought

Communities in the Horn of Africa are affected by complex and interrelated crises. Resource conflicts, such as those over water, are becoming an increasing threat, as they affect not only countries but entire regions.

By Christoph Schneider-Yattara

The Horn of Africa is highly vulnerable to the effects of the climate crisis, leading to regular and severe droughts as well as floods. In recent years, these events have become more frequent and intense. Consequently, the region has experienced water scarcity, reduced agricultural productivity and the depletion of livestock and natural resources.

In the past, droughts occurred in the region about every five to ten years. Then they began to happen every three to five years. Now they seem to have become permanent. For the third consecutive year, the Horn of Africa is experiencing significantly reduced rainfall during the rainy season.

Restricted water access has caused reduced crop yields, livestock deaths and a decline in food production. More than

13 million animals have perished since 2020 across Kenya, Somalia and Ethiopia alone, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Rural communities that depend on farming and herding are particularly affected. As a result, these communities experience prolonged food insecurity, leading to hunger, poverty and disease. Vulnerable groups, especially women and children, suffer the most.

Low water quality and lack of water contribute to the transmission of water-borne diseases like cholera, dysentery and typhoid. People often resort to using contaminated water, which poses additional health risks and burdens health-care systems that are already under stress.

At the same time, the Horn of Africa has one of the highest population-growth rates in the world, averaging three percent per year. This exacerbates the struggle for available resources and increases pressure on limited arable land. As a result, deforestation, soil degradation, groundwater depletion and biodiversity loss are widespread in the region.

Moreover, when water becomes scarce, disputes over access, control and distribution can escalate, leading to conflict and violence. These conflicts have the potential to further destabilise already fragile social and political systems (see box).

Migration is a coping mechanism for communities in need. According to OCHA,

“In the past, droughts occurred in the region about every five to ten years. Then they began to happen every three to five years. Now they seem to have become permanent.”

more than 2.7 million people have been displaced since 2020 by the ongoing drought across Kenya, Somalia and Ethiopia. People are leaving their homes in search of better access to water and other basic needs. Sometimes entire communities are displaced by drought or water-related conflicts. Thus, refugee camps are emerging, and the influx of migrants into urban areas is growing, putting additional strain on limited resources and services.

Internal and cross-border migration due to water increases tension in a region plagued by wars and conflicts. In a vicious circle, people move from one crisis to the next, as most stay within the region.

Ethnic conflicts, civil wars, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) are part of everyday life, alongside disputes over access to water and land. According to the Fund For Peace's Fragile State Index 2023, the Horn of Africa is one of the most volatile regions in the world. Somalia is considered the most unstable country globally according to the index. South Sudan follows in third place and Sudan was in seventh at the time of publication. Ethiopia and Eritrea are on "High Alert" and "Alert" respectively. All of these countries have been at war in the recent past or are currently in conflict.

According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), these conflicts have led to more than 13 million internally displaced people in the region by last year and 5 million refugees by March 2023. People are fleeing destruction, persecution and death.

SGBV is a common form of violence in this context. Various armed groups often target women and girls for rape, forced marriage and sexual slavery. SGBV was used in the recent war in Ethiopia and is also being reported from the ongoing war in Sudan.

Although the African Union (AU) has a peace and security architecture, its capac-

ity to mediate conflicts is limited. The presence of the UN in every country in the Horn of Africa shows that national governments are overwhelmed by the task of dealing with all the challenges that affect their people.

To make matters worse, relics of the colonial era not only recall historical grievances, but can also lead to new conflicts, as in the case of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). In the past, Egypt had successfully prevented the construction of dams on the upstream Nile, invoking colonial-era agreements with Britain and Sudan from 1929 and 1959. Ethiopia's decision to build the dam almost triggered a water war between the riparian states, especially between Ethiopia and Egypt.

It is high time for a mechanism to help these nations manage common resources such as water. This requires a multi-faceted approach that includes sustainable water management, investment in water infrastructure, improved agricultural practices and effective economic and governance systems.

In addition, regional, national and international cooperation is crucial to help communities build resilience to water scar-

city, mitigate conflict and find sustainable solutions around resource management and equitable access. This also includes peacebuilding and conflict resolution, supporting humanitarian aid and development initiatives as well as addressing sexual and gender-based violence. A framework for legal and secure migration is urgently needed too.

All this requires a comprehensive approach. Regional bodies such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the AU and the UN can offer technical expertise and policy tools to facilitate processes that advance durable solutions.

Such procedures depend on the active participation and support of all stakeholders from governments, institutions, civil society and local communities. After all, the people in the Horn of Africa deserve to live a dignified, peaceful, just and prosperous life.



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Fragile democracy

Even in democracies, vital resources like water can be contested or difficult to access. However, the more stable the political conditions, the more secured the legally guaranteed access to water tends to be.

Many state systems in the Horn of Africa carry the terms "federal" or "democratic" in their name. Democracy is defined, among other things, by free and fair elections. Yet they are held infrequently, if ever, in the region. They also seem to be aimed at satisfying Western donors rather than at serving as an instrument to balance power. When they are held, they are prone to manipulation, often include post-elec-

tion violence, and rarely lead to a change of government.

Civil society is vibrant, but its room for action is shrinking. In most countries in the region, state actors do not trust citizen participation to form part of a dynamic, society-building process. This manifests itself in draconian laws that restrict civil society. Even where laws are more moderate, they tend to restrict rather than empower citizens when they are interpreted and enacted.

Governance in a democracy should aim to promote transparency, accountability and citizen participation in decision-making. However, in most countries in the region,

governments are dominated by a particular group, clan or party. Typically, they use their power to influence the executive, legislative and judicial branches, as well as independent institutions such as electoral boards, the media and other regulatory bodies. This leads to a lack of checks and balances.

The interplay of corruption, inflation and kleptocracy can pose major challenges to

societies and contribute to conflict too (see main text for the current conflicts in the Horn of Africa). Widespread corruption undermines economic stability and adds to inflationary pressures. High inflation is often the result of conflicts and wars, as well as financial mismanagement and economic sanctions.

Kleptocracy is rarely mentioned as the price of seizing power, but in reality, most ruling elites use their power to control and exploit national resources and extract economic assets for personal gain. In his recent article on the war in Sudan, Omar Shahabudin McDoom, a professor at the London School of Economics, points out that "the impunity of kleptocracy must end if the transition to stable, rule-based government is to succeed." CSY





Kampala's streets after heavy rainfall.

WATER IN URBAN AREAS

Kampala's challenges

In Kampala, Uganda's capital, many places lack access to clean water. The dilapidated sewer system is repeatedly hit by floods, posing serious hazards. Efforts to ease access to water and improve infrastructure have so far been inadequate.

By Ronald Ssegujja Ssekandi

Water scarcity and a deficient sewer system are two of the major challenges Uganda's capital is facing. Like many African metropolises, Kampala's infrastructure is still based on the building standards of the former colonial government. Particularly in slums like Katanga, there is very little access to clean water.

The situation has deteriorated because infrastructure development has not been able to keep pace with the rapid population growth of recent decades: whereas about 130,000 people lived in Kampala in 1960, the last official census of 2014 showed that 1.5 million were residing in the city centre alone.

The Ugandan government recognises that Kampala has special needs as one of

the most important urban centres in the country. Back in 2010, it passed a law called the Kampala Capital City Authority Act that created a semi-autonomous administrative unit with special departments to address the city's most pressing concerns. The departments for land use planning and technical services are overhauling the city's infrastructure, including the water and sewer systems.

The frequent water shortages in Kampala are particularly problematic. The National Water and Sewerage Corporation (NWSC) primarily extracts water from Lake Victoria and treats it in water treatment plants. However, demand is often so high that the NWSC cannot supply all the households that are connected to the mains. Many people therefore rely on alternatives like water vendors, shallow wells or other sources of water, which are potentially contaminated.

In order to improve service, the NWSC is also working on increasing water production, installing an efficient wastewater-management system and preventing water and sewage leaks. The projects are being fi-

nanced by a variety of organisations, such as the African Development Bank.

The Ugandan government is receiving additional support from European partners like the EU-Africa Infrastructure Trust Fund (EU-AITF), the European Investment Bank (EIB), the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) and the KfW Development Bank. As a result, in March 2021, the Katosi water-treatment plant was opened, which can produce 160,000 cubic meters of water per day.

POORLY MAINTAINED PIT LATRINES

Nevertheless, the existing infrastructure cannot meet the needs of the growing population. A significant portion of wastewater flows untreated into Lake Victoria because it exceeds the capacities of the treatment plants. Inadequate hygiene practices and a lack of access to sanitary facilities are making matters worse: many residents rely on poorly maintained pit latrines. The faeces contaminate both surface-water sources and groundwater.

For that reason, the Ugandan government not only aims to expand and modernise its wastewater infrastructure, but also encourages communities to use sanitary facilities and not dispose of waste in the environment.

Because of the country's poor drainage systems, heavy rainfall has led to in-

creasingly frequent flooding in recent years. Large volumes of rainwater flood the streets and threaten people and their property.

At the same time, some people use heavy rains to empty their septic tanks. The faeces mix with the flowing water and create a strong stench. Combined with poor waste disposal and inadequate sewer systems, this practice is contributing to the spread of diseases like cholera.

In light of these challenges, Kampala has joined and now leads the Africa Smart Towns Network (ASToN), which has grown to include 12 African cities. The initiative was launched by France’s development agency in order to support African cities in the creation of sustainable urban systems. Following the model of Europe’s URBACT programme, the network should improve cities’ cooperation with regard to specific challenges.

At first, Kampala’s city administration concentrated primarily on solving mobility problems. Now, the lessons learned from that project are being applied to other areas, like addressing drainage and water problems. The authorities envision a “Smart City”: a sustainable urban area with clear organisational structures and infrastructure based on the latest technology.

In Kampala, modernisation is especially difficult because of the large number of residents. Many are active in the informal economy, and poor people in particular tend to resist efforts to modernise. They often see such measures as an existential threat because the change directly endangers their livelihood.

For example, the city administration is targeting street vendors because they are notorious for their poor waste disposal. Many leave their packaging and plastic

waste on the streets, and it ultimately ends up in the municipal sewer system.

Over the past ten years, Kampala has worked with a variety of development partners in order to solve complex problems and position the city more sustainably step by step. Some success has been made: the city is addressing water and wastewater challenges better than it did a decade ago.

However, not nearly enough has been done. Some problems persist. Solving them will require cooperation between Kampala’s residents, the city administration, development partners and the country’s central government.



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FLOODING

Navigating the climate crisis

Chittagong in Bangladesh is one of the ten fastest-sinking coastal cities in the world. Many people have moved to this city fleeing climate disasters in other places across the country. With large parts of Chittagong under water for several hours a day, they are likely to be displaced again.

By Rafiqul Islam Montu

Nurjahan Begum is sitting on a plastic chair in front of her house in a densely populated settlement on the banks of Karnaphuli river in Chittagong. More than half of the chair is submerged under water. Today, hundreds of families in Begum’s neighbourhood were once more trapped in flood water for nearly five hours.

The daily life of many people in Bangladesh’s second largest city is centering around the tides and the rise and fall of the flooding. The sea is 16 kilometres away. Flood water enters the canals of the city through the Karnaphuli river. During high

tide, everyone has to stay indoors for five to six hours. All work, errands and other activities have to be finished before the water comes.

More than half of Chittagong is being flooded regularly. According to a survey by the Public Works Directorate, a government agency in Bangladesh, about 69% of the city is now more or less covered by flood tides.

Another study published in the scientific journal *Geophysical Research Letters* states that Chittagong lost 2.39 centimetres of land each year between 2015 and 2020. Simultaneously, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), sea levels have been rising at a rate of about three millimetres per year since 1993.

Many of the nearly six million inhabitants of Chittagong came to the city in the last few decades because they were fleeing from the results of other climate disasters happening in the country. Most of them have lost all their properties due to cyclones, river erosion or floods.

So did Nurjahan Begum. Her house on the banks of Meghna River in Daulatkhan, a division in the island district of Bhola, was swept away by a cyclone in 1991. The 60-year-old woman’s life was dominated by climate disasters. They forced her to move a total of 22 times. After the death of her husband and the renewed loss of virtually



The floods are now part of everyday life for the citizens of Chittagong.



The main street of a formerly upmarket residential area is under water almost every day.

all her possessions, she came to Chittagong ten years ago with her three children.

Now, her family and many others are facing the impacts of the climate crisis again. Over the past few years, many people have been forced to shift repeatedly, because they live in high-rise areas with more expensive rent during monsoons and move back to low-rent houses in low-lying areas of the city at the end of the monsoon.

Roksana Begum's family has ten members. They have moved three times in the last two years because of the floods. The 55-year-old migrated to the city to escape the economic hardship in her village. Mohammad Shahjahan also came to Chittagong in search of work when he was 20 years old. Until then, he lived in a village called Dakshin Syedpur on the coast. His family had to shift their house seven times due to river erosion. The place where Shahjahan's father once constructed their house now lies in the middle of the river Meghna. Shahjahan considered the centre of Chittagong as a safer place but is worried about whether he can continue to live in the city at all.

DAILY FLOODINGS

The water does not spare the more well-off neighbourhoods either. The World Trade

Center, the most important building in the Agrabad commercial area, is now surrounded by floodwater. The city's most elite residential area, the Chittagong Development Authority (CDA) housing estate, has come up near Agrabad.

The popularity of the area has decreased massively today due to the floods. Abu Kalam is one of the CDA residents. The 70-year-old has invested a lot in his house, the value of which has now dropped significantly. The ground floor is constantly under water. This is the case for the whole area for five to six hours a day. Most people can no longer use their ground floors and have been forced to build new houses elsewhere. The house owners have no chance to rent out their houses in the formerly prosperous area.

Some infrastructure projects are underway to improve the situation. The roads in the most affected areas have been raised by almost one metre – but at high tide the water is still half a metre above the road. Locks are additionally being built at the canal outlets. Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, the acting mayor of Chittagong City, however, pointed out another problem: "Chittagong once had 76 canals. Now it is down to 57. Many canals have been taken over by land grabbers." He requested the help of the Min-

istry of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives to bring these canals back under the city's control.

Chittagong is not the only city facing these problems. In another study published in the journal *Geophysical Research Letters*, researchers measured the rate of land degradation in 99 coastal cities around the world between 2015 and 2020. In most cities, the land mass is sinking faster than the sea level is rising. If this decline continues, cities will be at risk of flooding much sooner than predicted in most models that focus on sea-level rise. Human activities, especially groundwater extraction, are likely to be the main cause of this decline. Increased monitoring and policies are needed to reduce the rate of deterioration and minimise its impact.

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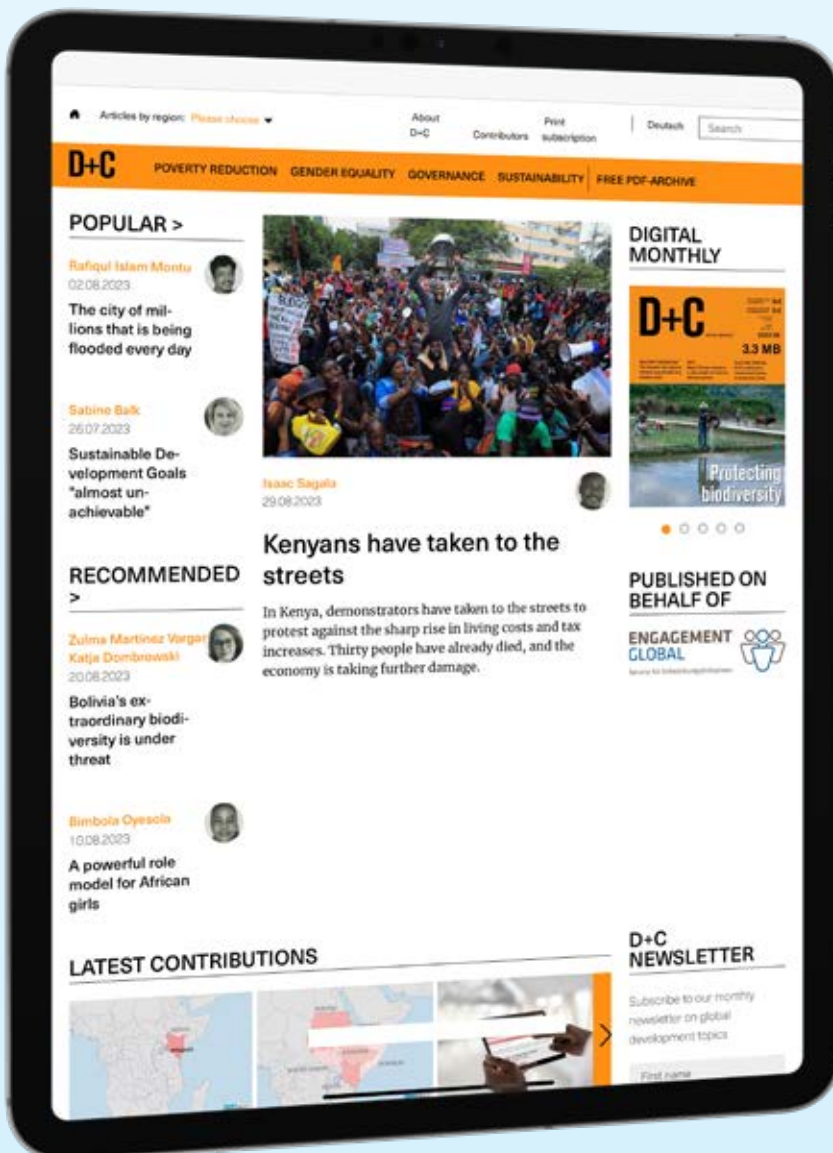
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Spring in the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh.

SPRINGSHED MANAGEMENT

Save the Himalayan springs

Many springs in the Hindu Kush Himalayan region are yielding less water, leading to potential water stress. Preventing further degradation is crucial, and local communities need to be involved.

By Nand Kishor Agrawal and Sanjeev Bhuchar

Phulmaya Devi lives in the village of Phulbari in central southern Nepal. The elderly woman is known to the villagers as “Spring Aama” (“Spring Mother”). She realised that if her community did not learn how to properly manage their springs, they would soon dry up. After attending a training programme on spring revival, Phulmaya Devi not only rejuvenated springs in her village, but also inspired people in other villages to do the same.

Across the Himalaya, people unite to revive springs relying on basic training, technical assistance and locally mobilised funding. In the village of Khetikhan in northern India, for example, a group of women, supported by a local non-governmental organisation (NGO), saved a spring from drying by conserving its catchment area. The availability of additional water inspired the village headman to plan for piped water supply and household water connections.

People in the Himalayas depend on springs – for domestic water use, small-scale irrigation and cultural reasons too. They know there are no easy alternatives in the mountainous terrain. It is usually women who fetch water for domestic use. If they lack nearby sources, they must travel long distances, often carrying water uphill. Some communities have resorted to pumping water from nearby rivers. However, this is costly and energy-intensive and often not feasible for remote settlements.

There is no complete inventory of springs for the Hindu Kush Himalayan region, encompassing Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan. According to rough estimates there are about 9 million springs sustaining over 100 million people. Inventories indicate that each spring in inhabited areas serves at least 10 households.

During the dry season, which can last six to eight months, most springs typically discharge about one litre or more per minute. Conservative estimates suggest that about half of all springs in the Hindu Kush Himalayan region are close to human settlements. This would mean that 4.5 million springs provide about 6,500 million litres of water per day.

In 2018, about half of the estimated 3 million springs in the Indian Himalayan

region had either dried up or reduced flows, according to NITI (National Institution for Transforming India) Aayog, the Indian government’s public policy think tank. In Bhutan, a 2022 assessment of more than 6,500 water sources found that about 35% were drying up. Nepal faces a similar situation, impacting around 10 million people relying on springs.

One reason why springs are drying up is that ponds, which once stored water or served as wallows for livestock, have fallen into disrepair. Moreover, in the Hindu Kush Himalayan region, many water planners are only trained to design water supply infrastructure, not to recognise and safeguard water resources or recharge areas.

Other main reasons for the degradation of springs are:

- climate change and variability in weather patterns, particularly erratic rainfall and snowfall,
- deforestation,
- road infrastructure development,
- groundwater withdrawal and
- natural causes like earthquakes.

Moreover, compared to a watershed that may easily cover about 400 hectares, springs are small units of typically one to five hectares. Planners tend to neglect them as an important source of water in the larger context of rivers, watersheds and aquifers.

PREVENTION IS CRUCIAL

Preventing further degradation should be top priority for governments and communities. Speed and scale are of utmost importance. However, limited funding and

technical capacities often hinder prevention. Bureaucracy, hierarchies and political priorities also play a role. Governments tend to prioritise quick technical fixes over preventive measures, despite the urgency of averting a future crisis.

Proper springshed management is urgently needed. It is an emerging field, covering both the management of the sources (springs) and the underground area, where water is stored and supplied to the springs. Springshed management differs from watershed management, since underground hydrogeology is very different from what appears on the surface. For example, watershed efforts can result in additional groundwater storage and flow, but not necessarily to the targeted spring. It is praiseworthy that the Indian government has included springsheds in its recent watershed guidelines, albeit mostly from a watershed management perspective.

Governments of the countries of the Hindu Kush Himalayan region demonstrate commitment through budgets, plans and success stories, but tend to focus on degraded springs. However, unless prevention receives equal attention, numerous springs could dry out. Springs are currently being revived slower than they are drying up.

Preventing spring depletion requires sustainable land management. It is not enough to simply protect areas close to springs with fences and trees. We also need to identify areas where groundwater enters the soil and is contained between layers of rocks. Such areas can be located in other villages or catchments. Therefore, close collaboration between spring communities and stakeholders in recharge areas is essential. This can be difficult, however, and may require incentives.

PRIORITY STEPS

Taking action on springs starts with mapping. This can be an empowering process for communities as they gain a better understanding of springs and their hydrogeology. With the help of mobile apps and field test kits, they can report information about the location of the spring or the water quality, for example. This will result in a more complete inventory and a clearer picture of the condition of the springs.

Secondly, raising awareness is crucial. Springshed management should be taught



in schools. Local governments must invest in training workers instead of expensive treatments. They must educate community members about hydrology and geology, so that they can help local governments make investment decisions. This could be supported by simple decision tools and standard protocols for springshed management.

Thirdly, strong governance, gender equality and social inclusion as well as fair benefit sharing are vital for sustainable community-level projects. Where systematic community mobilisation is lacking, springshed interventions often remain limited to technical aspects, risking their long-term success – quite like a short-term fix that is unlikely to prevent relapse.

There has been some progress in the coverage of drinking-water supply systems and connections, particularly in India. However, state agencies of the Himalayan states should be more involved in conserving and managing water sources. Better coordination is needed between these agencies to unite conservation and supply efforts. Communities must play an active role in both, taking ownership rather than just being supplied with water.

Furthermore, climate change impacts on springs have not been adequately studied yet. The climate discourse often focuses on melting glaciers, floods and other extreme events. Springs should not be forgotten, however. After all, they provide water for millions of households and support Himalayan rivers, on which some 2 billion people downstream depend. Scaling up springshed conservation can benefit nature and people by restoring biodiversity, reducing the impacts of climate change and sustaining livelihoods.

Water security in the Himalaya is at a tipping point. We must act together with speed and scale to revive drying springs and avert an impending crisis of water stress in the not-so-distant future, which could lead to widespread dislocation, loss of livelihoods and conflict. In the language of economics, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. We cannot afford to wait.

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WATER SUPPLY

Supporting water utilities more effectively

Billions of people still lack adequate access to drinking water and sanitary facilities. A holistic approach is needed for sustainable water management and equitable, universal access. Urban water utilities in particular will only be able to achieve SDG6 if a turnaround in performance is achieved.

By Daniel Nordmann, Dieter Rothenberger and Jörg Dux

Access to adequate drinking water, sanitation and hygiene is enshrined in the UN's 6th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG6), and it is a human right too. However, water is not universally available. In many low-income countries, people face fundamental questions every day: where can I find safe water for drinking, cooking and hygiene? How

much is available? How long is the walk to get it? And how polluted will it be?

Water resources are becoming more and more scarce. The climate crisis and urbanisation are exacerbating the situation. According to WHO and UNICEF, over 2 billion people lack access to clean drinking water. 3.6 billion have no safe access to sanitary facilities. Women and girls are most affected. They suffer significant social and economic disadvantages because they have to walk long distances every day carrying heavy buckets in order to survive, or because they regularly stay away from work or school, especially during menstruation, due to lack of sanitation facilities.

The first UN Water Conference in 50 years took place in March this year. It was celebrated as a "turning point" for the

global water crisis. The media rightly lauded the diplomatic successes and 689 voluntary commitments made by the international community. However, according to WHO and UNICEF, access to piped drinking water in cities has declined by ten percent over the past 20 years in central and southern Asia, for example.

The numbers are regressive in sub-Saharan Africa as well. Nowadays just over half (about 57%) of the urban population has access to drinking water from the tap. Twenty years ago, however, that number was close to two-thirds. Around the world, achieving SDG6 remains a remote prospect. A trend reversal is nowhere in sight.

The financing gap is growing along with the global supply crisis. Official development assistance (ODA) relating to water declined by 12% between 2015 and 2021 according to the UN. The latest UN report warns that financing will have to increase sixfold in order to ensure universal access to safe drinking water and sanitation by 2030.

Urban water utilities play a key role in this context. They are not only responsible for closing urban coverage gaps but are also on the front lines of the battle for global health and against pandemics, as the Covid-19 pandemic showed.

At the same time, water utilities are indispensable to making urban settlements liveable, productive and adaptive. That is true especially in light of uninterrupted urbanisation and the consequences of climate change, such as increasing water scarcity, heat waves and flooding. For that reason, the UN, World Bank, OECD and other multilateral organisations are calling for the mobilisation of additional financing for the global water sector. Capital should flow not only from public budgets, but also from commercial and private sources.

Yet more money is not enough on its own, as German development cooperation actors have learned with regard to advising and financing public water utilities. Experience also shows that it is not easy to mobilise funds from local banks or from impact-oriented investors.

If water utilities are not professionally managed, additional funding can even have negative consequences: it can encourage corruption, lead to the deterioration of equipment and networks after initial improvements and cause customers to become increasingly frustrated. According



Water connection in Nyeri.

to a World Bank study, nine out of ten utilities are not creditworthy. Access to banks and capital markets therefore remains closed.

Most utilities must first better maintain existing infrastructure and manage it

more professionally. This means, for example, connecting additional customers to the existing networks, installing water meters, fully utilising the capacities of the existing wastewater-treatment plants and reducing electricity consumption and the sometimes

serious water losses by 50% or more. More money will only have an impact if the utilities are able to do these things.

These steps are also necessary to raise utilities' own revenue to a sustainable level. Only then will policy makers and regulatory

A catalyst for water transformation

One of the voluntary commitments that Germany's federal government, with support from KfW Development Bank and the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), made together with the Dutch government at this year's UN Water Conference was the Urban Water Catalyst Initiative (UWCI). The partnership, initiated by Germany, is open to additional donors. In fact, according to Global Water Intelligence, the leading publisher of the international water industry, the initiative may be the most important contribution to the UN's Water Action Agenda.

The UWCI marks the first time a global instrument has been created that purposefully strengthens urban water utilities that possess the two most important conditions for reform: autonomy and a motivated, stable management that enjoys local political support (see main text).

Five elements increase the effectiveness of support for utilities, accompanying and complementing the bilateral programmes that will still be necessary for developing the general conditions:

- Local willingness to reform: utilities supported by UWCI must demonstrate that their leadership and governing bodies back the company's

reforms. They must also plan the strategic implementation of the reforms autonomously. Instead of adhering to constraints imposed by donors, the utility management itself should determine the path to the goal.

- Competition and flexible assistance for results: funding will be provided in places where utilities can actively apply for it and be persuasive. This ensures that funding and technical support go to companies that actually want change. Flexibility provided by expert pools and small-scale financing should be tailored to meet utilities' needs.

- Support for utilities instead of project-related resource allocation: the UWCI supports utilities independent of investment projects in places where it can provide the most leverage for increases in efficiency. The focus is not only on new infrastructure projects, but also on optimising the operation of existing facilities and connecting customers to existing networks, particularly in the early funding phases. Utilities must achieve cost coverage in order to gain independence from subsidies for operation. Doing so eases the burden on public budgets, which can then use the funds for other purposes. It also protects utilities from

political interference and paves the way to creditworthiness.

- Financial autonomy and local financing: experiences from Colombia, Tanzania and Kenya show that if water utilities manage to improve their cost coverage, they can also refinance with local development and commercial banks and on their own countries' capital markets. This is a sustainable approach because it eliminates currency risks and reduces countries' debts. Thereby, utilities can tap into long-term financing sources outside of official development assistance (ODA). When utilities stop receiving subsidies for operation, they can take their development into their own hands. Nevertheless, commercial financing is only one component. Investments in water infrastructure will rely on the public sector for the foreseeable future. Water is and will

remain a social and political good.

- Improved integration of technical and financial support: technical advice (like from utility partnerships or aid workers) and investment plans supported by development banks often do not sufficiently intersect. Different interests, processes and project cycles hamper effective coordination. In this context, the UWCI relies on tailored advice that is based on the independent expertise of experienced technicians and managers in the water industry. What's more, short- and long-term financing – ranging from grants, to loans, to guarantees to local banks – is provided from a single source and in a systematic way.

In close cooperation with German and Dutch partners, the UWCI will soon begin supporting the first utilities.

DN, DR, JD



Water supply in the Baljeet Nagar slum, New Delhi.

authorities be willing to approve water tariffs that are both sustainable and socially acceptable. That's because tariffs that do not cover costs make it impossible for utilities to serve everyone on a permanent basis and become creditworthy.

MORE THAN "PROJECTS"

The example of the water utility in Nyeri, a city of approximately 140,000 people in central Kenya, is instructive in this regard. The company's motivated management won the support of political decision-makers and was thereby able to significantly improve both service and its own economic situation.

The Nyeri Water and Sanitation Company (NYEWASCO) managed to more than double the number of connections in the city since the end of the 1990s, reduce water losses to below 20% and, at the same time, generate the cost of operating and maintaining facilities and networks, thereby creating more leeway for new investments. In doing so NYEWASCO also steadily expanded service for the poor. To date Kenya's water regulation authority has designated the

company the best water utility in the nation 14 times in a row. That achievement proves that such success can be maintained over the long term.

Evaluations by the KfW Development Bank, World Bank and other important investors show that project financing for new infrastructure pays too little attention to corporate governance and local political support, both of which are important ingredients of success. As a result, many projects cannot contribute to improving utilities' leadership and creditworthiness.

What's more, financing is often not adequately tied to improving service provision and in-house efforts. It also doesn't help utilities bring about the necessary cultural transformations, reforms and efficiency increases within their companies and introduce new technologies. Technical consulting and training of operating staff also fall by the wayside if funds are lacking for critical procurements like water meters or repairs.

Development cooperation must step in here to ensure that technical and financial support make reforms possible, and that local managers receive targeted assistance

at the right moment as they mobilise support and funds for utility reforms (see box). What is needed is not always new infrastructure projects, but a holistic strengthening of water utilities as economic enterprises oriented towards the common good, in order to provide a socially just, high-quality, affordable and sustainable public service and to contribute to a just transition.



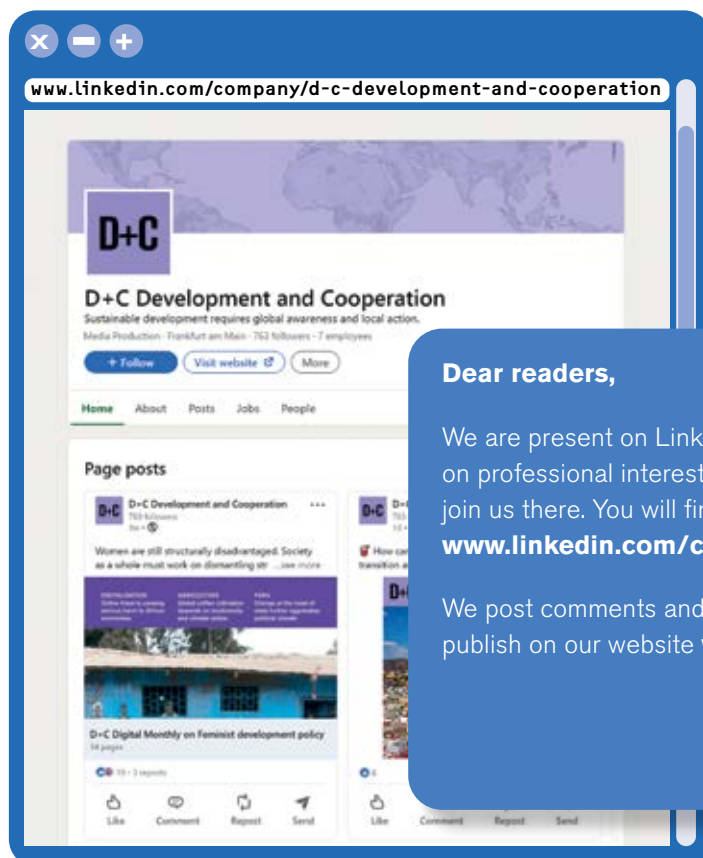
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DEVELOPMENT AND COOPERATION **D+C**



In the Senegal River delta, traditional rules coexist with formal laws.

WATER TENURE

Fair access to water for all

Many people worldwide, particularly marginalised groups, do not have legally regulated access to water. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has initiated a global dialogue on water tenure to establish principles for responsible and sustainable water governance.

By Benjamin Kiersch

According to UN estimates, over 733 million people live in areas with at least high water stress. In these areas, freshwater withdrawals account for at least three quarters of the total renewable freshwater resources available.

Agriculture plays a central role. According to the UN, it is responsible for 72% of water withdrawals worldwide. In many African and Asian countries, the percentage is significantly higher. In order to meet the demands of a growing world population, FAO estimates that agricultural production will have to increase by 50% by 2050 compared to 2012. Better irrigation will be essential: to date, only about 20% of cropland around the world is irrigated, yet it grows 40% of food. If current trends continue, the global water demand from irrigated agricul-

ture will increase by more than 30% from 2012 to 2050, according to FAO calculations.

In many places, smallholder farmers secure food supply. However, they often do not have access to irrigation or a vested right to water use. Their access is frequently based on customary law, which is not always recognised by the state. Customary laws govern access to natural resources on over half of the world’s land. In sub-Saharan Africa, it’s up to 60%, the NGO Rights and Resources estimates.

Even within the state regulatory framework, there is potential for conflict. In addition to water legislation, other regulations often intervene in the use of water resources, like those from the energy and environmental sectors. In many places, however, these laws are poorly coordinated, which can cause friction. The same is true of the state and non-state institutions involved.

There are also deficits in water accounting, which is necessary to make sound decisions about sustainable allocation. Agricultural demand in particular is often difficult to accurately represent in water balances.

Legally protected access to water is indispensable to the food security and livelihood of indigenous peoples, marginalised groups and smallholder farmers. For that reason, the FAO has taken up the issue of water tenure in a series of conferences, publications and case studies, particularly in the project “Knowing water better” (KnoWat, see box).

However, water tenure was excluded from one of the most important international declarations on land tenure: in 2012,

“Legally protected access to water is indispensable to the food security and livelihood of indigenous peoples, marginalised groups and smallholder farmers.”

the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS) adopted the “Voluntary Guidelines for the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Forests and Fisheries (VGGT)”. The guidelines strive to protect the tenure rights of all land users, whether based on formal laws and regulations or on customary laws or traditions. Water tenure was left out of the negotiations because there were concerns about addressing water and land tenure at the same time.

Based on the results of the KnoWat project and the work of civil-society or-

organisations and researchers worldwide, the FAO has launched a multi-year project to continue its commitment. The “Global Dialogue on Water Tenure” will take place from 2022 to 2026. Its aim is to discuss principles of responsible governance of water tenure as well as guidelines to implement these principles at the national and local level. Participants include international and national government agencies as well as representatives of indigenous groups, civil society, academia and the private sector. Among them are Germany’s Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) and the German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS).

The results of the dialogue should be adopted on a global level by a political body

like the CFS. Similar to the guidelines on land tenure mentioned above, this could mark a significant step in international water law. Achieving this would be particularly important for areas where freshwater is becoming scarce or highly variable due to the climate crisis or population growth.

A successful implementation of the results would be an important step towards ensuring a more equitable distribution of natural resources. It would be a tangible contribution to implementing the human rights to food and water, as well as the 6th UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG6), pertaining to “clean water and sanitation”. It would especially benefit communities that so far lack a vested right to the vital resource of water.

REFERENCES

FAO Committee on Agriculture, 2022: 28th session: Governance of tenure of water resources for food and agriculture: <https://www.fao.org/3/nj011en/nj011en.pdf>
 UN Global Dialogue on Water Tenure: <https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/global-dialogue-water-tenure-0>



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Distributing water equitably

Around the world, water is often inequitably allocated and inefficiently managed. Improving this situation was the goal of the FAO project “Knowing water better” (KnoWat) funded by Germany’s Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL). The project worked from 2019 to 2022 in Rwanda, Senegal and Sri Lanka, as well as on the global level. It evaluated water resources using an integrated approach and provided valuable information for decision-makers as well as farmers.

At the global level, KnoWat and its international partners launched a webinar series on water tenure, the “Water Tenure Mondays”. They also organised various events on the topic. At the country level, KnoWat cooperated with authorities in the water and agriculture sector as well as civil society, academia and farmers’ organisations. The primary goal was to equitably and sustainably manage scarce water

resources and ensure food security for the local people.

In order to achieve this goal, it is important to be aware of available water resources and their use, as well as the formal and customary rules that determine how water is allocated. The project also analysed water productivity – the amount of water used per unit of yield – in agriculture.

Local partners observed water tenure systems in Rwanda, Senegal and Sri Lanka. They discovered, for example, that wells that were built with state

funding in Rwanda do not necessarily have a use permit from the water authorities. However, users often mistakenly assume that they do, given the funding source. Closer collaboration between authorities could prevent such issues.

In the Senegal River delta, traditional laws regulate farmers’ and fishers’ access to water. However, they are in conflict with the authorities’ water allocation, which prioritises large areas for rice cultivation. Traditional agriculture on seasonally flooded land is being severely restricted by the construction of dams, threatening the livelihood of smallholder farms. Very few users have

permits from the water authority. Permits cannot be obtained locally, but only in Dakar, the capital. They are also expensive to retain.

In the Malwathu River basin in Sri Lanka, multiple institutions regulate access rights to surface water, groundwater and irrigation infrastructure. Their jurisdictions overlap, however. This problem has led to confusion, reduced supply security and a heightened risk of conflict for users. In all three countries, formal and informal water tenure systems coexist.

KnoWat shows that an analysis of such systems must take into account all users as well as formal and customary legal systems. It can then identify vulnerable groups, highlight conflicts and serve as a basis for more inclusive water policies. BK



Along Sri Lanka’s Malwathu River, water rights lack clear regulation.

LINKS

Knowing water better (KnoWat): <https://www.fao.org/in-action/knowat/en/>
 Water Tenure Mondays Webinar: <https://www.fao.org/in-action/knowat/resources/water-tenure-mondays/en/>

BASIC NEEDS

SDG achievement at risk

An important message of the UN World Water Development Report 2023 is that SDG6 – clean water and sanitation – will not be achieved at current trends. That has serious implications for all SDGs.

By Prince Thompson

Water is vital for life and therefore crucial to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN, including for example:

- SDG1 (no poverty): Access to safe water and sanitation is crucial for reducing poverty and improving livelihoods, particularly for the most vulnerable populations.
- SDG2 (zero hunger): Agriculture is the largest user of water globally, and sustainable water management is essential for achieving food security and reducing hunger.
- SDG3 (good health and wellbeing): Safe water and sanitation are necessary for preventing water-borne diseases and improving health.
- SDG13 (climate action): Sustainable water management is crucial for adapting to and mitigating the impacts of climate change.
- SDG14 (life below water) and SDG15 (life on land): Water is essential for maintaining healthy ecosystems and biodiversity, both on land and in water.

Where water-infrastructure is inadequate, other water-related problems are compounded. It is therefore cause for concern that SDG6 looks unlikely to be achieved, as the UN World Water Development Report 2023 warns. The authors state that efforts must at least quadruple, stating that

quantified information on progress is lacking for five of 11 SDG6 targets. The document was published by UNESCO earlier this year.

According to the report, 26% of the world population did not have access to safe drinking water, and even 46% lacked access to proper sanitation. While 60% of the world's water bodies were assessed to have "good" water ambient quality, the poorest 20 countries were underrepresented in this regard. On the other hand, the extent of natural wetland areas has decreased by 80% since pre-industrial times.

To improve matters, the report proposes innovative solutions. They include, among others, water-management approaches to reduce wastewater, use water-efficient technologies and promote water saving. It also makes sense to treat and re-use wastewater, including for non-potable

purposes, such as irrigation, industrial processes and toilet flushing. The authors are in favour of collecting and storing rainwater in order to reduce the dependence on groundwater and surface water. They want ecosystems such as wetlands, forests and river environments to be used more systematically because they all have an impact on water quality and quantity. Finally, they propose the application of information technology, including for machine learning which has the potential to improve water management and governance. International development agencies, of course, have been promoting things like this for a long time.

The authors point out that better water management serves related ecological purposes such as the protection of biodiversity and mitigating global heating. For innovations to materialise, however, collaborative approaches are said to be needed. They should involve governments, the private sector and civil society.

The UNESCO document acknowledges that cooperation is easiest to achieve when partners share interests. However, competing interests must be reconciled too – and that may prove particularly difficult when one party only sees the water aspect as a side issue. The report makes proposals on how to take a "whole of society approach" to governance in one of its chapters. Other chapters deal with topics such as food and agriculture, environment, human settlements, industry and health.

The overarching goal is to practice integrated water resource management. Prudent regulation and sufficient infrastructure investments are needed. Local communities must be involved in decision-making, the UN authors insist. Development cooperation can make a difference too.



UN World Water Development Report 2023.

LINK

UN World Water Development Report 2023.
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000384655>



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Digital Technology can be used to empower women, but also to suppress them.

Page 6



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