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The world needs to learn from Indigenous wisdom

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Photo: picture alliance/ASSOCIATED PRESS/Mariam Dagga

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Photo: picture alliance/ASSOCIATED PRESS/Moses Sawasawa

"Ideally, climate risk insurance payouts should flow seamlessly into existing social protection systems to fund cash transfers, food assistance and other recovery measures."

James Bennett and Nazaruddin Puteh, p. 16

25 Focus

The world needs to learn from Indigenous wisdom

Cover: "Corpo-canoa" by Yacunã Tuxá (see p. 4).

Indigenous communities are the descendants of a country's first peoples. Their stories are often marked by colonisation, oppression and the loss of culture and land. Today, they are fighting worldwide to preserve their identities and ways of life, which continue to be threatened by land grabbing, exploitation and marketisation. Yet their knowledge and resilience are valuable to all of humanity. We must listen to them, protect them and learn from them.

Yacunã Tuxá

is an Indigenous visual artist and activist from Tuxá de Rodelas in Bahia, Brazil. As a multidisciplinary artist, she moves between different languages and media to address the struggles, resistance and political organisation of Indigenous women in Brazil. In her art, words and images intertwine to create connections between memory, identity, territory, justice and dreams, turning art into a powerful political tool.

The work on the cover of this issue, "Corpo-canoa" (body-canoe), is a visual metaphor depicting the displacement of the Tuxá people in 1987, when they were forced to leave their land due to the construction of a hydroelectric dam. In the image, the canoe, an ancient symbol of transport and crossing, also represents body and memory. The work expresses the burden of forced relocation, but also the resilience of an identity that resists extinction, affirming that the true heritage of the Tuxá people is intangible: their living memory and the dignity of being themselves.

The good news

It is a historic statement by the International Court of Justice (ICJ): states must take action against climate change in accordance with applicable international law. If countries fail to do so, for example by continuing to rely on fossil fuels, they are in breach of international law. It was students from a region that is already one of the worst affected by the climate crisis worldwide who initiated the advisory opinion: the Pacific Islands Students Fighting Climate Change (PISFCC).

The opinion itself is not legally binding. However, it interprets existing obligations under international law that are indeed binding, such as those arising from customary international law. The report is therefore also relevant to countries that are not party to the Paris Climate Agreement, such as the US.

Another important point is the finding that a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is a human right. The report thus becomes a starting point for concrete climate lawsuits worldwide.

50 %

income losses

have hit public workers in Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi and Nigeria over the past five years due to austerity measures. This trend is evident from a survey on *"The Human Cost of Public Sector Cuts"* , conducted by the international NGO ActionAid.

GAZA

Only very limited food supplies reach the people in need

Urgently needed food aid, medical supplies and hygiene items are not reaching the people in Gaza because Israel is restricting access. An end to the blockade and an immediate and permanent ceasefire are necessary to provide comprehensive humanitarian aid to Gaza.

BY JOLIEN VELDWIJK

The current operational environment in Gaza remains extremely challenging. The UN has enough food in the region or en route to feed the entire Gaza population for at least three months. However, access constraints have meant that at least 14,000 tons of food aid were offloaded by hungry crowds before they reached the warehouses. The supplies had been procured through the UN-coordinated aid mechanism and collected from border crossings in July.

Scenes like these are now a daily reality in Gaza, as urgently needed aid supplies are stuck.

Photo: picture alliance /Anadolu/Khames Alrefi

The UN estimates that more than 62,000 tonnes of food are required each month to cover basic humanitarian needs. However, the food assistance that has entered Gaza in the months of June and July was less than a quarter of that minimum amount.

The UN has repeatedly spoken out about and documented the myriad access constraints they face, including the closure of all but one border crossing, long delays in obtaining Israeli clearances and the limited number of designated safe routes for humanitarian convoys. These are not just statements. They are backed by video footage and first-hand reporting that show the conditions UN convoys face when trying to transport supplies. Even where routes exist, they are often overcrowded due to repeated displacement orders and delays at Israeli checkpoints. This exposes convoys to large crowds of people who, pushed to the brink of starvation, wait desperately for aid trucks in the hope of securing any food they can find.

URGENTLY NEEDED RELIEF SUPPLIES ARE STUCK

CARE continues to provide lifesaving assistance through its primary healthcare centre in Deir Al-Balah and by trucking water to communities with little to no access. However, since 2 March, when Israel imposed an 11-week total siege before reopening a single border crossing with strict controls over what goods can enter and when, we have been unable to bring in any supplies. This includes desperately needed medicines, baby kits, hygiene kits and food packages, which remain stuck in warehouses in the West Bank, Jordan and Egypt.

In July, we were forced to close our clinic for a period of one week due to displacement orders in surrounding areas, impacting most of our staff as well as our office and guest house. We were forced to stop distributions until August due to extremely limited supplies. Recently, UNICEF has provided us with limited supplies of nutritional supplements such as high energy biscuits and ready-to-use complementary foods. This has allowed us to resume distributions to women with a lower middle-upper arm circumference who are at risk of adverse birth outcomes. Those nutritional supplements are what many women and children are surviving on at this time when people cannot even access cash to buy food from the market, which, when found, is being sold at unaffordable prices.

STOCKS ARE EXHAUSTED

The UN highlights supply shortages as one of the challenges to sustaining nutrition support. As of 2 August, supplies for the blanket supplementary feeding programme have been completely depleted inside Gaza. Current insecurity makes it impossible to collect prevention supplies from crossings and distribute them across Gaza at the scale that would be needed to cover all children under five and pregnant and breastfeeding women.

> “Convoys are exposed to large crowds of people who, pushed to the brink of starvation, wait desperately for aid trucks in the hope of securing any food they can find.”

CARE condemns Hamas’ brutal attack on Israel and calls for the release of all hostages. We also continue to call for the opening of all land crossings, the full and sustained flow of food, clean water, medical supplies, shelter items and fuel through a principled and coordinated UN-led aid mechanism. We also call for an end to the siege, and an immediate and lasting ceasefire. Without this, humanitarian access will remain a challenge in this highly volatile and unsafe environment, where starvation, desperation and almost two years of daily killing and destruction are leading to a breakdown of any semblance of public order and safety.

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Photo: picture alliance / picture alliance/ASSOCIATED PRESS/Mark Schiefelbein

President Donald Trump announced new tariff rates for more than a hundred countries on 2 April 2025 in Washington.

WORLD TRADE

Trump's tariff tantrums

The US president's approach to changing tariff regulations is neither coherent nor consistent. This does not change the fact that many countries in the Global South will be hit hard, particularly those that depend on cheap exports.

BY PRAVEEN JHA

For the last few months, starting in March 2025, the US president's "tariff wars" have been among the most discussed issues in the global media. The essential claim made by Donald Trump is that the rest of world has reaped huge advantages from the US for decades due to the prevailing global tariff regime, which has been ostensibly "very unfair" to the country and has weakened the US economy in serious ways.

Until 2024, the US had been the world's largest import market for almost two decades; on average, it imposed tariffs of two to three percent on imports from other countries. This has changed dramatically in recent months.

WHY IS DONALD TRUMP INTRODUCING TARIFFS LIKE THIS?

Recall that the US president declared 2 April "Liberation Day" when he announced new tariff rates for more than a hundred countries exporting to the US, including those in the European Union. Subsequently, there have been significant adjustments in tariff rates for several countries, which has caused chaos and uncertainty.

It is eminently clear that Donald Trump and his administration are effectively weaponising tariffs for a variety of reasons, which include:

- reclaiming at least some of the space the US has lost in the real economy, partly due to the weakening of its manufacturing sector,
- undermining the BRICS bloc, which is viewed as a threat,
- enforcing the unilateral economic sanctions imposed on Russia and preventing other countries from continuing to trade with Russia,
- "teaching" several countries "lessons" for their "lack of loyalty" to the US in particular and the Global North in general.

However, it is worth noting that none of these motives have led the US to treat different countries consistently. For example, since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, China and the EU have imported more from Russia than India has. But India has been targeted with a "penalty" of 25 % tariffs – allegedly for its oil trade with Russia – on top of the 25 % that had been announced in April. After the US had first imposed an astonishingly high tariff rate of 145 % on China on 9 April, it brought the rate down to 30 % on 11 August – less than one-fifth of the original figure.

EVEN TRUMP CANNOT IGNORE CHINA'S MARKET POWER

It is well known that in recent decades, China's economy has been growing stronger and stronger. It has been called the "factory of the world" thanks to its impressive infrastructure, huge economy of scale and cutting-edge technological capabilities. According to data from the World Bank's World Integrated Trade Solution (WITS), China accounted for almost a quarter (24.9 %) of the total global exports in machine and electrical equipment in 2022, way ahead of the US share of seven percent. It had a 36.3 % share of global textiles and clothing exports. India, the other much-talked-about emerging economic power, had barely a 0.9 % share in machine and electrical equipment, and a 4.4 % share in textiles and clothing.

> "Increases in the US tariffs at the current juncture, ostensibly to improve its own economic situation, may well accentuate the crisis for the rest of the world."

The simple message is that China has a massive, almost unassailable advantage in several industries. Even more importantly, it has a very powerful grip on the contemporary global production system in several sectors and control over several critical resources. All of this may have led the Trump administration to rethink its strategy, which resulted in the aforementioned huge decrease in the tariff rate between April and August 2025.

US TARIFFS WILL AGGRAVATE ECONOMIC CRISES IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

For a few other countries, too, the initial threats of high tariffs have been toned down by the Trump administration during the same period. These include Vietnam, Thailand, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. So far, the high tariff rates have either already been lowered or postponed to allow for negotiations. However, for a majority of the countries in the

Global South, any increase in tariffs is going to hurt, especially in the poorest countries.

Finally, the global economic system has been hit by the 2008 financial crisis, and it has not yet truly recovered. There has been uneven global growth, increased government debt, and even advanced economies are experiencing a growth slowdown.

> "Many countries in the Global South depend on the US market. Some of these countries can only compete because of their low production costs."

Increases in the US tariffs at the current juncture, ostensibly to improve its own economic situation, may well accentuate the crisis for the rest of the world, especially in the absence of substantial increases in spending by the respective governments to boost demand and cushion the impact.

Many countries in the Global South depend on the US market. Some of these countries can only compete because of their low production costs. Each of them may be forced to squeeze wages further and pursue what is known among economists as a "beggar-thy-neighbour" policy, which involves trying to maximise their trade surplus. This could be done by devaluing their national currency, limiting imports and promoting exports.

In the process, due to increased US tariffs, American output and employment may witness some increase, but it would be accompanied by reduced imports from the rest of the world. This will further aggravate the economic difficulties many countries in the Global South face. In short, there is a lot at stake.

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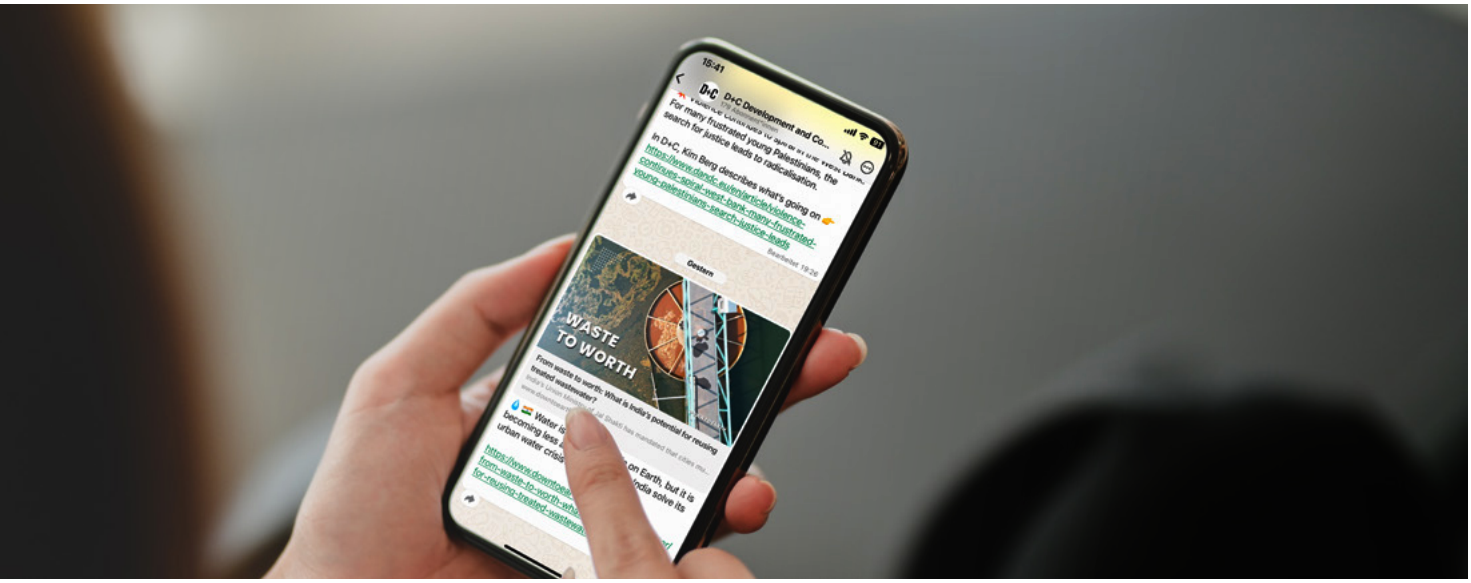

Photo: picture alliance/ASSOCIATED PRESS / Brian Inganga

Mourning at the funeral of a street vendor who was shot dead by police during the recent protests in Nairobi.

PROTESTS

Too much violence and grief

Recent events in Kenya show that civic space is shrinking in East Africa – police violence, suppression of political opposition and serious human-rights violations, including torture by state representatives, are increasing at an alarming rate. What options remain for civil society in the region?

BY GRACE ATUHAIRE

Since 2019, Human Rights Watch's annual World Reports have documented patterns of increasing state repression in East Africa. Tanzania and Uganda remain highly restrictive, with governments regularly suppressing freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and dissent. In May, for example, two prominent activists made headlines when they were detained and tortured by Tanzanian authorities for days after they entered the country to express solidarity with imprisoned opposition politician Tundu Lissu. Both Boniface Mwangi, who is from Kenya, and Ugandan activist Agather Atuhaire reported that they had been sexually assaulted, which the Tanzanian police denies.

In Kenya in particular, state repression and violence are once again being carried out in response to the protests that have engulfed the country over the past 12 months. In 2024, the so-called "Gen Z protests" in Kenya attracted international attention. Young people organised against the government's controversial finance bill, which would have imposed drastic new taxes on an already struggling economy. Their movement achieved a partial victory when the government agreed to withdraw the bill. However, this success came at a high price: dozens of people were killed across the country and hundreds were injured, though the exact numbers are difficult to verify. Even the Kenya Defence Forces were deployed to support the National Police Service. Many people have been reported missing.

This tragic death toll in protests is nothing new in Kenya's political history. Protests have always been a central part of the country's civil society, from its anti-colonial struggles to the movement for multi-party democracy in the 1990s. But repression has also been a constant. After the disputed presidential elections of 2007–2008, the police cracked down brutally, killing over 1200 people and displacing hundreds of thousands. After the 2017 elections, violent riots broke out again, leaving at least 97 people dead, many of them in opposition strongholds. Dozens of women and girls reported sexual assaults. Journalists and human-rights activists who exposed such violations were arrested, threatened and attacked.

More recently, in 2023, opposition leader Raila Odinga called for demonstrations against the government of President William Ruto. The protests resulted in at least 30 deaths, many injuries and property damage. In June and July of this year, as Kenyans marked the anniversary of the Gen Z protests with new nationwide demonstrations to honour the dead and renew their demands, at least 42 people were killed and hundreds injured. Several cases drew national outrage, including the filmed fatal shooting of an unarmed street vendor.

"Investigations into deaths during protests rarely lead to convictions."

The pattern is familiar: every new wave of protests is announced as peaceful. But when the tear gas clears, people have been killed, families are mourning and property has been destroyed. Young people are at the centre of this reality. They are driven to activism by disappointment in politics, the rising cost of living and unfulfilled promises of democracy.

WHY DO THESE PROTESTS SO OFTEN ESCALATE INTO VIOLENCE?

Several factors contribute to the outbreak of chaos. One is infiltration by criminal elements and opportunistic looters, especially in urban centres such as Nairobi and Mombasa, where criminal groups use the protests as a cover to rob and destroy property. Citing these threats, the police respond with force, but are often unable to distinguish between criminals and legitimate protesters.

At the same time, an alarming suspicion has been raised: activists and observers point to "unknown groups" that incite violence but are never clearly identified or prosecuted, fuelling speculation that elements within the security services themselves may be stirring up chaos to discredit the protests.

Moreover, police accountability remains notoriously weak. Investigations into deaths during protests rarely lead to convictions. This impunity further erodes public trust.

As political scientists have emphasised, violent resistance is generally not as effective as nonviolent action in achieving long-term goals. This poses difficult questions for Kenyan activists. If protests are likely to be met with deadly force, do organisers bear moral responsibility for the suffering inflicted on their supporters? Should they reconsider their tactics in light of the predictable cycle of state violence and social unrest?

East Africa needs new approaches. Civil-society leaders should think creatively about safer, less confrontational ways to exert pressure: legal activism, digital mobilisation, community organising and building transnational alliances.

These forms of resistance are an effective way to mobilise public support and can be more difficult for authoritarian states to suppress.

State actors must also take action. Harsh rhetoric such as that used by President Ruto, who called on the police to aim at the legs of demonstrators during the recent protests, must be toned down. Kenya was one of the first African countries to develop a national action plan for youth, peace and security, but its implementation has focused mainly on tough security measures and has neglected important aspects like prevention and protection. State actors should maintain open channels for genuine dialogue with young people, raise public awareness of existing complaint mechanisms and invest in psychological care and social support for communities already traumatised by repeated raids.

The citizens of East Africa are demanding better leadership and an end to the bloodshed. Responding to them with violence is not only immoral, but also unsustainable. The future of the region depends on breaking this deadly cycle.

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CONFLICT

A region in constant crossfire

Uvira is situated on the shores of Lake Tanganyika in South Kivu province in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). This makes the city and its surroundings an important hub, not only for its immediate neighbours Rwanda and Burundi, but also for Tanzania and Zambia. Given its favourable geographical location, the area should be thriving. The fact that it has instead been the scene of tensions and armed conflicts for several decades is symptomatic of the problems facing the resource-rich region around the African Great Lakes.

BY JEAN MASEMO

It's virtually impossible to keep track of all the militia groups, government troops and other military actors operating in the eastern DRC.

Photo: picture alliance/ASSOCIATED PRESS/Moses Sawasawa

The so-called Uvira offensive, which saw the Rwanda-backed M23 rebel group attack the region, began in February. A number of villages and towns were captured, with Médecins Sans Frontières reporting that more than a quarter of a million people had been displaced to Uvira by late May. In 2024, the city and its metropolitan area had a population of around 725,000.

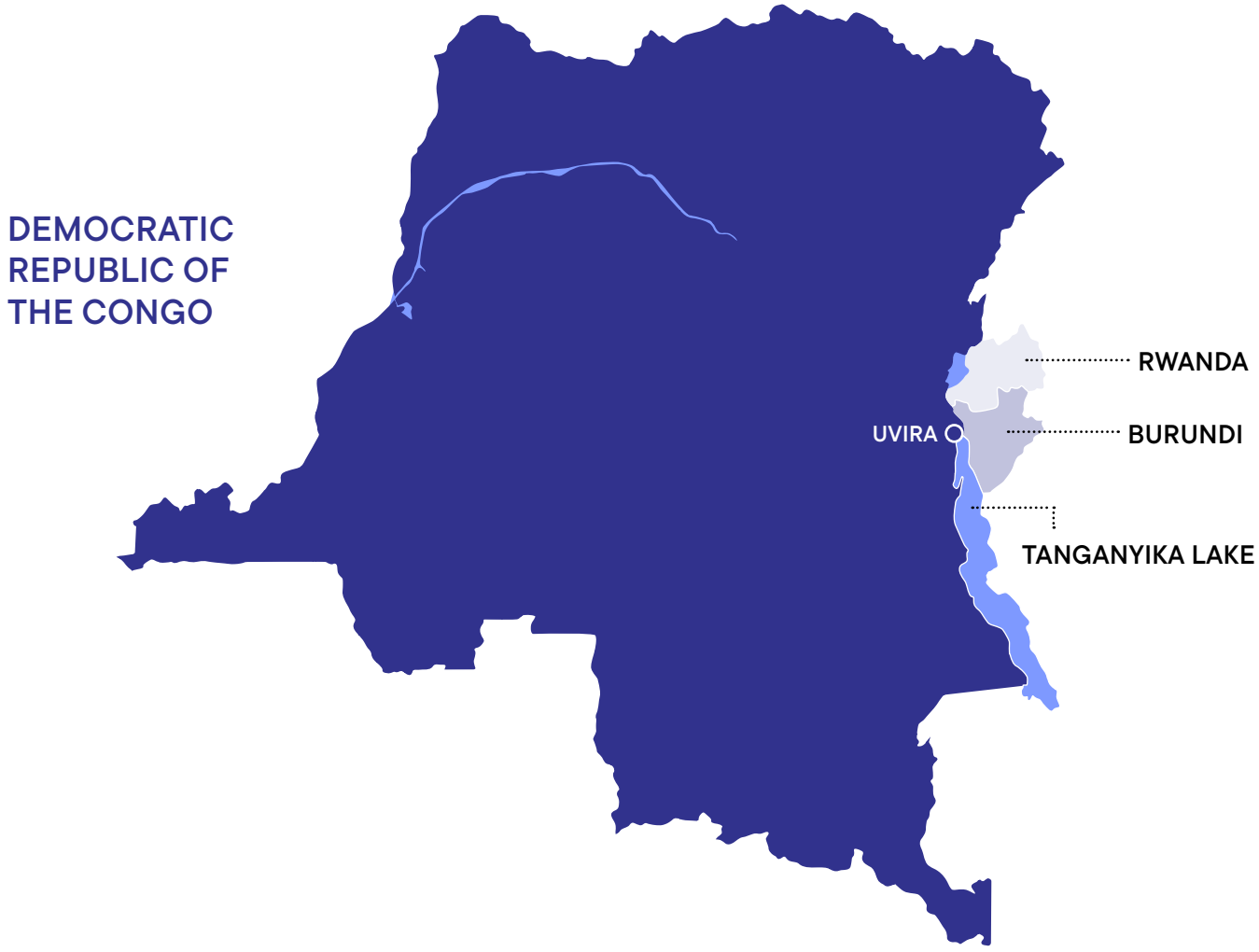
Burundian Tutsi militants – allies of the M23 – are also active in and around Uviru, with the Congolese rebel group Wazalendo and the official armed forces of Burundi (FDNB) and the DRC (FARDC) on the opposing side. At times the Wazalendo have also attacked Congolese soldiers that the group accused of abandoning the cities of Bukavu and Goma to the enemy.

What all this means for the population is that the local equilibrium has been destroyed and the region is gripped by fear. Many people have also fled to Burundi or inland up the Ruzizi River. Armed groups have taken control of various towns and villages and are helping themselves to the crops left behind on the fields. Virtually no humanitarian aid is reaching remote villages. The population, which for years has been suffering from constant conflicts, hunger and an ailing government, is now living in a state of general psychosis without any tangible sense of hope.

THREATS TO THE ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITIES

People often forget that the endless fighting not only makes it all but impossible for social and economic life to resume – nature is unable to recover either. In the forested area of Kyamate, our civil-society organisation Initiative des Jacobins Éleveurs pour le Développement (IJED) has been working with local communities since 2020 to secure nearly 300 hectares of reforested land. The trees had grown in some cases to a height of six metres and the fauna was beginning to regenerate.

Today, however, these achievements are threatened by the intrusion of armed groups from Burundi such as the government-affiliated militia group "Imbonerakure". For four years now, actors such as these have been advancing into the Uvira region from neighbouring Burundi across the Ruzizi Plain. Their presence poses a risk both to the environment and to local communities. Many people are now taking more of the resources they need from the forests,



which is jeopardising the ecosystems there: bush fires are spreading uncontrollably, and trees are increasingly being cut down to sell as charcoal.

BETWEEN DIPLOMATIC HOPE AND REALITY

The signing of the peace treaty between the DRC and Rwanda in Washington on 27 June 2025 sparked widespread optimism. The situation on the ground remains fraught, however: both sides have recently stepped up their military activities. The ink had hardly dried on the deal when the M23 began pushing towards Uvira city again. Meanwhile, Qatar-mediated talks between the Congolese government and the M23 are continuing in Doha.

> "The population, which has been suffering from conflicts, hunger and an ailing government, is living in a state of general psychosis without any tangible sense of hope."

President Félix Tshisekedi's government is being harshly criticised for its inability to resolve the ongoing crises in the east of the country. This is prompting local leaders to reposition themselves, sometimes more for their own political gain than from any genuine desire to improve the situation.

CALL TO ACTION FOR UVIRA

In view of the ongoing crisis, the Congolese authorities as well as donors, humanitarian groups and international institutions should act without delay to:

- strengthen the protection of the civilian population and restore the state's authority in the occupied territories,
- ensure safe and permanent humanitarian access to the areas affected by violence,
- promote local sustainability initiatives and acknowledge their crucial role in making communities more resilient,
- take steps to ensure that the peace treaty is effectively implemented, while at the same time promoting an inclusive solution for the ongoing conflicts.

The people in Uvira must no longer be ignored as if they were simply displaced person statistics or the invisible victims of an endless conflict. Now, more than ever before, they deserve security, dignity and hope. Acting now means rejecting indifference and reaffirming our commitment to humanitarian principles and fundamental rights.

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Photo: picture alliance/Xinhua News Agency/Shaun Jusa

In 2024, Zimbabwe received a risk insurance payout from the African Risk Capacity Group to help alleviate the effects of severe drought.

SHOCK-SENSITIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION

Bridging funding gaps when disaster strikes

Social protection systems are expected to act quickly and effectively to protect the poor and vulnerable in acute times of crisis. But severe shocks often overwhelm them, pushing millions into poverty. Sovereign climate risk insurance can help bring relief to affected communities, provided governments manage to overcome difficulties of implementation.

BY JAMES G. BENNETT AND NAZARUDDIN PUTEH

Social protection systems face mounting challenges as natural hazards and climate risks increase in intensity and frequency, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. In response, many governments have introduced integrated systems designed to cushion poor and vulnerable groups against shocks, so-called adaptive social protection (ASP) systems. These are only effective if properly funded, however. In times of crisis, governments must scale up social protection budgets, with existing social protection programmes being expected to absorb additional funds and deliver relief rapidly. Yet in practice this is easier said than done.

Governments have several options to address budgetary shortfalls during disasters. For example, they can allocate funding to contingency budget lines and government reserve funds, which function like a government savings account. Historical loss and damage data indicate the amount of savings that will be required to meet emergency needs. However, when rare but severe disasters occur, governments must decide whether to reallocate funds, borrow heavily or seek ad hoc humanitarian aid from international partners. These measures involve risks such as fiscal instability, rising debt and dependence on donors.

Alternatively, pre-arranged financing can help governments scale up funding for shock-sensitive social protection systems in the event of a disaster. One increasingly common tool is climate risk insurance. Governments pay annual premiums to insurance providers and, if disaster strikes, receive payouts based on pre-agreed triggers. In 2024, for example, the government of Zimbabwe received a $ 16.8 million payout from the African Risk Capacity (ARC) Group, a regional insurance provider, after a failed agricultural season and severe food insecurity following drought.

While insurance can provide significant support, it comes with caveats: premiums are costly, and payouts are only as effective as the systems that deliver them. Without functioning distribution systems, a timely insurance payout can struggle to reach those who need it most.

The growing recognition of the importance of integrating risk finance into social protection systems is reflected in a recent report and guidance commissioned by the UN Development Programme (UNDP). The guidance will be implemented across UNDP country projects where risk finance is being applied, ensuring that strengthened delivery systems complement these efforts.

VARIOUS FORMS OF PAYOUTS

The way climate risk insurance payouts are designed not only dictates who receives payments, but also how quickly and reliably funds reach those in need. There are generally two types of climate risk insurance payout: direct payouts, whereby the beneficiary receives the money directly from the insurance provider, and indirect payouts, whereby the insurance provider first transfers the payment to an intermediary agency – e.g. a government body, social protection programme or mobile banking provider – which in turn distributes the benefit directly or indirectly to the final recipients.

Regarding the conditions of insurance, two main distinctions are relevant:

- Indemnity-based insurance covers the actual losses incurred by the insured entity. The insurer must approve the individual claim for compensation before a payout can be made.

- Parametric insurance, on the other hand, triggers payouts automatically when predefined parameters – such as the length of a dry period, the amount of precipitation or the wind speed – are met. This type is also known as "index-based insurance" because the triggers are thought of as indexes.

"The way climate risk insurance payouts are designed not only dictates who receives payments, but also how quickly and reliably funds reach those in need."

The climate risk insurance type and conditions influence the speed and reliability of payouts. Direct and index-based payouts tend to be made more quickly than indirect and indemnity-based ones – if assuming that delivery channels

> “Governments pay annual premiums to insurance providers and, if disaster strikes, receive payouts based on pre-agreed triggers.”

are short and the triggers are clearly defined. The efficiency of those responsible for delivering the benefits also plays a role. Payouts tend to be unreliable if these actors are poorly coordinated, lack sufficient data or are prone to other risks in financial governance systems.

WHY RISK INSURANCE PAYOUTS SOMETIMES FAIL

Ideally, climate risk insurance payouts should flow seamlessly into existing social protection systems to fund cash transfers, food assistance and other recovery measures. This approach, often called “piggybacking,” leverages established government-run programmes to deliver assistance quickly. In practice, however, their implementation rarely goes smoothly.

Numerous factors can hinder efficiency and effectiveness, including weak targeting mechanisms, lack of political will and poor coordination between government agencies. ARC has identified obstacles that hinder the effective transmission of risk insurance payouts to affected communities. Here are two examples:

- In September 2019, in the wake of a severe drought, an ARC payout of nearly $ 740,000 to Côte d’Ivoire was earmarked mainly for cash transfers to affected people. However, the payments did not reach the beneficiaries until a full year later, mainly due to poor coordination between ministries and the telecom operator in charge of cash transfers. The Covid-19 pandemic, the sudden death of the Prime Minister who supervised coordination between ministries and limited access to cash transfer distribution points also played a role.

- When Mauritania experienced a severe rainfall deficit in September 2021, data issues caused a delay of several months before the policy was triggered. ARC only disbursed the payout of about $ 1.7 million in March 2022. Poor transport infrastructure resulted in further delays. By the end of August, only 87 % of targeted households had actually received assistance.

Despite such shortcomings, ARC is often regarded as an example of best practice in climate risk insurance, particularly for its transparency and accountability. ARC and its member states develop contingency plans to ensure payouts are used effectively, while similar set-ups in other parts of the world sometimes lack such requirements. Moreover, ARC commissions independent audits of its payouts. While client governments are free to conduct their own evaluations, they may lack the capacities to do so adequately.

ALTERNATIVE TOOLS

Climate risk insurance is one of several tools for pre-arranged disaster financing. Governments can also arrange emergency response funds, sovereign contingency loans and catastrophe bonds (cat bonds). Like climate risk insurance, these instruments help governments to bridge fiscal gaps when disaster strikes. They can channel funds or payouts from these instruments into adaptive social protection systems, ensuring that relief reaches the most vulnerable. But a crucial question remains: Do these mechanisms simply fill short-term funding gaps, or do they also drive sustainable poverty reduction and resilience?

To date, little research has been conducted to explore this issue. Analyses by Schaefer and Waters (2016) suggest that climate risk insurance schemes can enhance resilience if they are embedded within broader risk management strategies. However, empirical evidence on their

long-term, pro-poor impacts is lacking. Further research and global exchange of best practices are therefore needed to help governments and insurers to develop schemes that not only provide immediate relief but also strengthen communities' long-term resilience.

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Photo: picture alliance / Kay Nietfeld

In mid-July, the "Compact with Africa Summit" took place as a side event to the meeting of G20 finance ministers and central bank presidents.

AFRICA STRATEGIES

Taking a chance on the private sector

The cuts that Western countries are currently making to their development budgets are hitting Africa particularly hard. More people are looking towards the private sector to fill the gaps. A comparison of the Africa strategies of four European countries shows that Germany in particular does not yet attach enough importance to private industry.

BY SIMON ZÜFLE AND PHILIPP VON CARLOWITZ

Over the past 20 years, numerous countries – including China, the USA and Russia – as well as the EU, have repeatedly held summits with African countries and the African Union (AU), which illustrates the growing geostrategic competition for influence in Africa. Relations with all African countries are becoming increasingly important in many countries' foreign trade policies.

In addition to strengthening their political influence in Africa, many countries are interested in deepening their eco-

nomic relationships with African countries and creating a favourable business environment. For example, the EU Commission announced in February 2022 that it would invest up to € 150 billion in African countries as part of the Global Gateway Initiative. The initiative aims to promote ecological and digital transformation as well as sustainable economic growth and expand healthcare systems.

At the same time, some EU member states are positioning their private sectors as actors that can help achieve economic and political development goals. The following comparison of the Africa strategies of Germany, France, Italy and the Netherlands highlights different approaches as well as the different importance that these countries attach to the private sector.

All four countries have become more diplomatically active in the recent past. Germany, for example, is a driving force behind the G20 initiative "Compact with Africa", which came into being in 2017 under Germany's G20 presidency. Its goal is to improve the business environment in African partner countries in order to promote private sector investment. The French government has held 28 Africa-France Summits starting in the 1970s. At the most recent, in 2021, the French government took a new approach: instead of representatives of African governments, it invited civil-society actors, companies, intellectuals and representatives of the diaspora to discuss cultural topics as well as entrepreneurship and innovation by African and French start-ups. The Italian government organised an Africa Summit in January 2024, which 21 African heads of state attended. It was the highest-level summit that Italy has held in recent years – and a sign of its increased focus on the continent. So far, the Netherlands has not held an Africa summit.

> "The private sector should move to the centre of Africa policy."

FRANCE

In 2023, President Emmanuel Macron introduced a new Africa strategy. In addition to realigning its security policy, the government also wants to take a new approach to economic cooperation by moving away from classic development cooperation towards a stronger role for the private sector. Economic cooperation is to be intensified particularly in the areas of agriculture, digital technologies and the cultural and creative industries.

French companies' investments in Africa would also receive better protection against risks. Companies that expand internationally are ultimately supported by Team France Export actors. This initiative brings together the market entry offerings of the export credit and foreign trade agency, national and foreign chambers of commerce and individual French regions to provide companies with a quick overview of all the available funding opportunities for activities in Africa.

ITALY

In 2024, the Italian government introduced the Mattei Plan, which has six pillars: education, agriculture, health, energy, water and infrastructure. The goal is to promote Africa's sustainable socio-economic development and fight the causes of irregular migration. Italian companies are involved above all in the implementation of this plan, especially with regard to energy projects and supporting African start-ups. The Mattei Plan builds on the Africa strategy that was adopted in 2020, which placed particular emphasis on Italian private-sector investment in the agriculture and food industry, renewable energies and infrastructure. The plan should help Italian companies expand in Africa and engage in successful partnerships.

THE NETHERLANDS

In 2023, the Dutch government announced its first continent-wide Africa strategy, which is designed to last 10 years. It focuses on four areas: mutual economic development, security, migration, poverty reduction and climate protection. The private sector is pivotal to achieving success in all of these areas.

Promoting Africa's private sector is central. The goal is to make value chains more sustainable and strengthen local production in order to ease African companies' access to European markets. Private sector involvement is most relevant in the agriculture, health and infrastructure sectors. Eight African priority countries (Egypt, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal and South Africa) are defined for projects relating to sustainable and digital transformation, which aim to create local jobs.

Additionally, innovative financing models should also facilitate Dutch private sector investment in Africa. The strategy particularly emphasises the role played by the African diaspora in the Netherlands as a bridge between the two regions.

GERMANY

In Germany, individual federal ministries and the federal government have adopted various Africa strategies in the past. These include the Ministry of Defence (2015), the Ministry of Education (2018), the Ministry of Economic Cooperation and

Development (2023) and the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (2025). The Africa policy guidelines of Germany's federal government, which are coordinated by the Foreign Office, were last updated at the beginning of 2025.

The guidelines are divided into four pillars:

1. Joining forces to overcome global challenges,

2. Security, peace and lasting stability,

3. Strengthening democratic resilience, as well as education, science and innovation and

4. Sustainable growth, greater economic exchange and cooperation between companies, local added value and diversification of supply chains.

The fourth pillar is concerned with strengthening private sector actors, such as firms in African countries, whose cooperation with German companies should increase. The private sector, however, is not seen as a core component of the guidelines; it is only considered a priority in this last pillar.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GERMANY'S AFRICA POLICY

This comparison of Africa strategies shows that all four countries would like to enhance their economic cooperation with African countries and especially their private sector investment. There are differences, however, when it comes to the private sector's role in steering African development. Whereas in France, Italy and the Netherlands, the private sector is seen as making an essential contribution to reaching development and economic goals, in Germany, it is addressed as a separate topic in just one of the pillars of the government's Africa policy guidelines.

Germany needs a comprehensive, inter-ministerial Africa strategy that goes beyond topic-specific Africa papers by individual ministries. An integrated approach is urgently needed. Such an approach should set clear goals, bring together the most important actors concerned with Africa policy issues and establish a central role for the private sector.

The private sector should move to the centre of Germany's Africa policy because German and African companies play a pivotal, enabling role in achieving development and economic goals. Private sector engagement has many positive effects on African countries: by investing in Africa, they contribute to job creation, technology transfer and economic growth, which leads to political and social stability and lower levels of migration.

> "Germany needs a comprehensive, inter-ministerial Africa strategy."

A stronger focus on the private sector in Africa policy would include greater support for companies when entering the market or continuing to do business in African countries. That would be beneficial for all: African companies and the German private sector would both profit without creating new dependencies.

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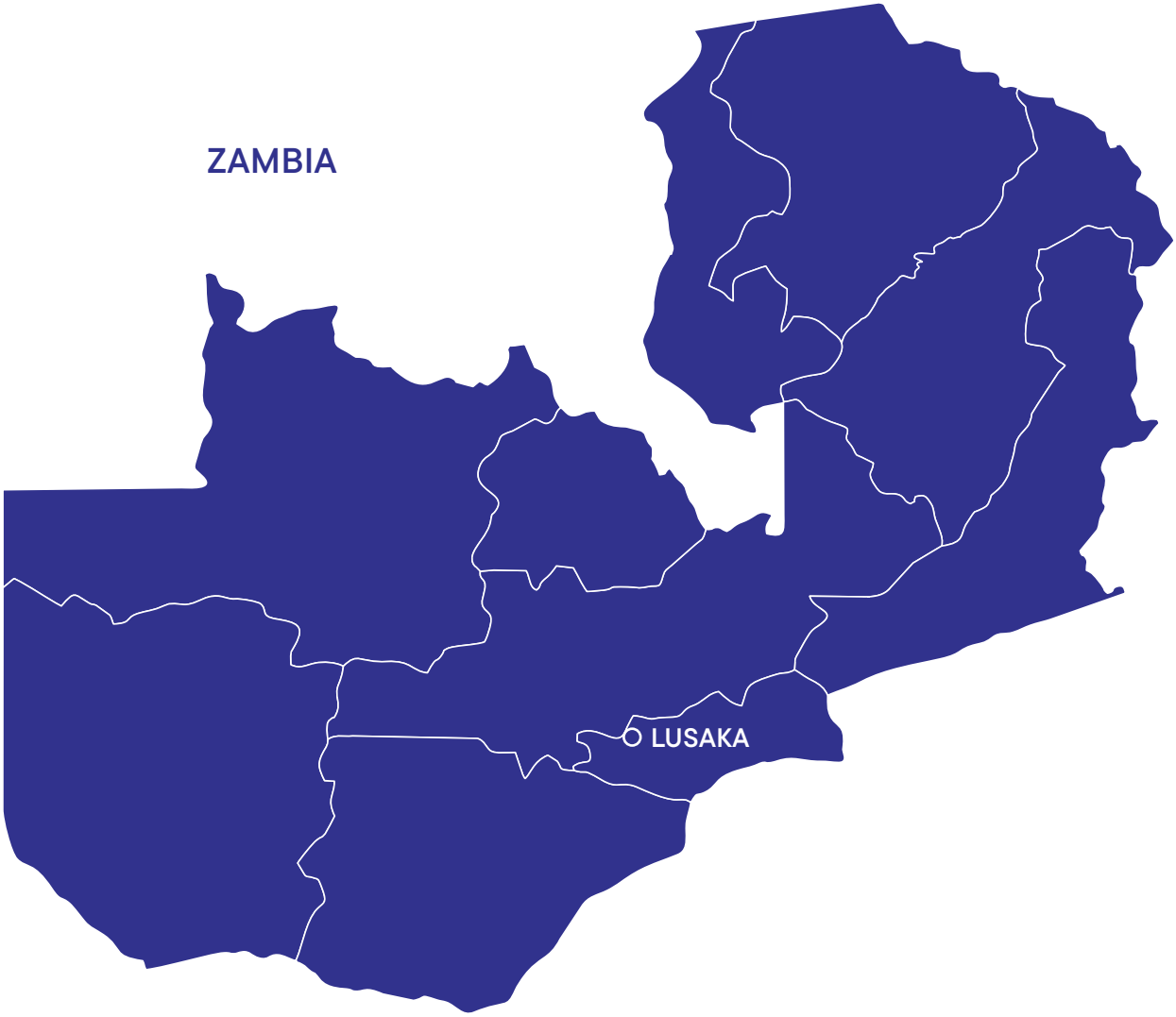

AGRICULTURE

How smart farming helps Zambian communities adapt to drought

In southern Zambia, farmers are using simple yet effective climate-smart methods to survive worsening droughts. A local training programme is helping young people and women secure food and income despite failed rains.

BY DERRICK SILIMINA

In Zambia's southern Magoye area, located in Mazabuka District, farmers are waiting for rain that won't come. Once-fertile fields are now dry and cracked, scorched by an unrelenting sun. "It's been over a month since the rains stopped," says smallholder farmer Daniel Chola. "We're just praying for rain so we can have something to eat."

Like many others in southern Zambia, Chola has seen his harvests decline due to prolonged dry spells linked to El Niño. The region's vulnerability is compounded by the uncertain outlook for a wetter La Niña event in 2024–2025. In the 2023–24 season, Chola managed to harvest only 13 bags of maize. This year, he expects even less.

The consequences of drought have spread far beyond the fields. In early 2024, the Zambian government declared a national disaster. Water levels at major hydroelectric dams dropped, disrupting electricity generation and revealing how closely energy, food and water systems are linked.

KNOWLEDGE AND COMMUNITY ARE TOOLS FOR RESILIENCE

One response to these challenges is the Emerging Farmers Initiative (EFI) , a grassroots programme operating in the nearby Monze District. EFI focuses on training women and young people in climate-smart agriculture and integrated farming systems. "This region has suffered repeated droughts. Climate change is no longer abstract – it's our lived reality," says project leader Sr. Juunza Mwangani .

Participants learn how to conserve water using drip irrigation, how to raise fish alongside crops and how to diversify their income through livestock and vegetable farming. The initiative also promotes conservation agriculture and reduced pesticide use, aiming to improve soil health over time. Since 2022, over 100 young people have been trained at the New James Corboy S.J. Secondary School's model farm, which includes a drip-irrigated garden, fishponds and a feed production unit. "I now see farming as a business," says Jane Muleya, 19, who plans to pursue agribusiness after school.

FROM MAIZE TO GOATS: HOW WOMEN SHAPE CHANGE

The EFI specifically targets women, who are vital to rural food security but often lack access to land and financial resources. What started with just four participants has grown to include 75 women – each encouraged to mentor two others in turn.

Mercy Miyanda, 60, received five goats through the programme in early 2024. "They've since multiplied to 15," she says. "The sisters gave us knowledge and livestock – and that changed everything."

Another participant, Christabel Cheelo, supports a household of 10 through poultry, horticulture and fish farming. "I no longer depend on rainfall alone. With this mix, I can pay school fees and feed my children," she says.

With its low-cost technologies, hands-on training and a focus on community, the EFI is now seen as a promising model for rural climate adaptation. As Zambia continues to face the escalating effects of global warming, initiatives like this show that resilience can start small – one garden, one goat, one community at a time.

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The world needs to learn from Indigenous wisdom

Illustration: Yacunã Tuxá

"Activist Mayalú Kokometi Waurá Txucarramãe" for the project "Indigenous visions for rights, engagement and a sustainable world".

OUR VIEW

Indigenous role models

Indigenous ways of life have withstood difficult conditions and outside pressure for centuries. The global community must do more to protect them – and learn from them in light of looming social and ecological crises.

BY KATHARINA WILHELM OTIENO

In every country on Earth, there are people who were there first. Who knew and used forests, deserts, seas and mountains long before the first visit came from elsewhere. Many, though not all, of these "first peoples" have survived to this day. Their descendants are now referred to as Indigenous.

It was contact with others that first defined Indigenous Peoples as such – and has always carried the risk of their destruction. This was made clear in the first attempt at a definition by the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations in 1982, which remains a benchmark. It defines Indigenous Peoples as the "descendants of the peoples who inhabited the present territory of a country (...) at the time when persons of a different culture or ethnic origin arrived there from other parts of the world, overcame them and, by conquest, settlement or other means, reduced them to a non-dominant or colonial condition (...)."

The awareness of Indigenous identity as something unique and worth protecting therefore emerged in contrast to outside forces, who in most cases were trying to erase it. That is true today, especially for peoples who choose to live in isolation, such as in the Amazon, and prioritise protecting their way of life over the conveniences of the modern world.

Another part of the UN definition refers to the fact that Indigenous Peoples "today live more in conformity with their (...) traditions than with the institutions of the country of which they now form part, under a state structure which incorporates mainly the (...) characteristics of other segments of the population which are predominant." Indigenous Peoples are still fighting to preserve their identity and way of life amidst a majority culture that sometimes differs greatly from their own.

Yet Indigenous groups are threatened not only by the loss of their culture, language and way of life to modern societies, but also by the exploitation of Indigenous land and life, for instance by tourism or for economic purposes. From Bali to Brazil to Benin, visitors are now offered "authentic Indigenous experiences". That can mean participating in staged rituals or taking expeditions to territories that are actually protected. This kind of watering-down makes it more difficult to identify and appropriately protect vulnerable Indigenous groups.

Capitalism likely represents the biggest threat to Indigenous life: countless Indigenous communities all over the world have experienced land grabbing, displacement or the dangerous pollution of vital resources in their territories when gold is mined, forests are cleared or dams are built.

The loss of Indigenous ways of life is also a problem for so-called modern society. The reason is obvious: we can and must learn from every way of life that has survived for so long under so much external pressure and under such difficult conditions. This can be seen, for example, in the stories and voices of representatives of the Turkana, Santal, Maasai and Mapuche that appear alongside many others in the "Focus" section of this issue .

We must listen to them – in order to be able to redress what has been done to them for centuries, to protect them from future suffering, but also for our own sake. In light of the many global crises we are facing, we need, more than ever, models of resilience – which so many Indigenous Peoples can provide.

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“If all that is lost, then I am lost”

Sonami Baski, a student from West Bengal, says that her Indigenous community and its culture define her entire being – and despite challenges, she takes pride in belonging to it. She spoke with Ipil Baski.

SONAMI BASKI
is a student and belongs to the Santal community.
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Photo: Bimal Baski

Who are you, where do you live, and what Indigenous community do you belong to?
My name is Sonami Baski, and I come from a village called Bishnubati in Bolpur, West Bengal. I am a student and belong to the Santal community.

What does your Indigenous identity mean to you?
My identity as an Adivasi – the word means "original inhabitants" and is the name we and other Indigenous groups in India and Bangladesh have chosen for ourselves – means everything to me. It tells me who I am, what I am and where my roots are.

My identity is carried by my language, culture, clothing, and food. If all that is lost, then I am lost. I love everything about my community. The songs and dances, clothing and style, religions and festivities, even the rules and regulations. I also like the way both men and women are treated equally in our community.

"Our society is marked by poverty."

What would improve the situation of your Indigenous community?
Our society is marked by poverty, which is why young people drop out of school early and are forced to work in the fields or move to large cities to find work. In our society, young men in particular start drinking alcohol at a very early age. There are also cases of early marriage, and people are not sufficiently educated and do not take good enough care of their health.

What can the world learn from your Indigenous community?
I think the world can learn a lot from us. For example, we have different dances for different seasons and occasions. We also have unique methods of building, cleaning and decorating our houses, weaving mats and brooms and hunting animals. In addition, we have extensive knowledge of herbal medicine.

Apart from that, our community may be more in line with some of the development goals than some non-Indigenous societies: our society is not strictly patriarchal; women are free. And we Adivasis are nature worshippers. We take only what we need from nature and do not destroy nature or kill animals unnecessarily.

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Photo: Michaela Kuhn, Aid by Trade Foundation

"The world is ours together, we must also talk together"

The Maasai have lived in harmony with nature for centuries, but now they see their way of life under threat. Alais Ole-Morindat explains that his Indigenous identity teaches him to preserve the gift of nature and pass it on to future generations – a lesson the industrial world should learn as well. He spoke with Eva-Maria Verfürth.

You come from a Maasai village near Tarangire and Manyara National Parks in Northern Tanzania. What does your Maasai identity mean to you?

As a Maasai person and a pastoralist, my philosophy of life is built on three pillars from which I see my God, the people on Earth, the future and my reality. The first of these pillars is natural resources: water, pasture, highlands and lowlands, forests, grasslands, salt pans and wildlife. These resources are gifts from God Almighty, and with this gift comes the responsibility to protect

them for the millions of people who are yet to come. I have to pass the stick to the younger generation and tell them to protect this gift as well. The second is my livestock herd: the cattle, sheep and donkeys. They enable me to live from one day to the other. I drink milk, eat meat, sell cows and use the money to pay bills and taxes. My livestock also uses the first pillar, as they need the land, pastures and water. The third pillar is my community: together we must flourish. Our approach is co-existence, and our key strategy is mobility. As we live in drylands, if there is no grass or it doesn't rain, we move to the next place. We negotiate how we move with other people, so that we don't have to fight. All of this is our system.

However, this system is now at risk.

It is being interfered with by businesses of all kinds such as agribusiness, the extraction of gemstones like tanzanite, rubies and diamonds and the construction of luxury camps and hotels. This is happening at a time when the rains are poor, the climate is changing and the world is not at ease. As Indigenous Peoples we are afraid that more natural resources will be required and that we will lose ground.

> "We Indigenous Peoples have protected the environment and fauna that these people are now going to exploit."

What would you like to tell those people who are disrupting your way of life?

We think that the industrial world has been too selfish in extracting resources. For a long time, we Indigenous Peoples have protected the environment and fauna that these people are now going to exploit. We have been the custodians of biodiversity, as this is part of our philosophy. The economic and political value of the resources is important, but the socio-cultural and spiritual meanings are even more important to us. Maintaining the natural balance gives us an element of peace and a reason to look into the future in a positive way. We should not be selfish. As a generation, we should play our role and pass the stick to those who are yet to be born.

What could improve the situation of your community?

We need to be put at the centre of any development dialogue and conservation process – as subjects, not as objects – and we have to be able to argue our case to policy and decision makers. It is important that these processes are informed by science, but also by our traditions and values. If we are to secure the future of the world, there's no time for monologue, we need true dialogue. But the current structures allow only a few people to discuss and make decisions. At present, we Indigenous Peoples are not at the forefront of the debate, even though we are the ones who stand to lose the most due to climate change. I want the poor, marginalised and voiceless to be part of the discourse so their perspective also influences politics and the way we, as human beings, should live. The world is ours together, we must also talk together.

We talked to Alais Ole-Morindat at a press conference organised by Aid by Trade Foundation at Hamburg Sustainability Conference 2025.

JAN OLLI
is a Sámi from northern Norway who worked on behalf of local and Sámi communities as Director of Finnmarkseiendommen (FeFo), the land management body responsible for about 95 % of Finnmark County's territory, Norway's most northern region. Now retired, he advocates for a broader understanding of Sámi identity.

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Photo: Jan Olli

"We want to be part of progress, without giving up who we are"

What does it mean to be Sámi today? Sámi advocate Jan Olli challenges common stereotypes and explains why Indigenous identity must not be reduced to reindeer herding or traditional lifestyles, but instead rooted in language, history and belonging. He spoke with Leon Kirschgens.

You come from a Sámi family in northern Norway. What does your Sámi identity mean to you?

I grew up in a coastal community where Sámi was our language at home. My two grandmothers didn't speak Norwegian at all – Sámi was the mother tongue that united the generations. My father was a fisherman until the 1960s, then worked in road construction. So yes, we were Sámi, but our daily lives didn't differ much from those of our Norwegian neighbours.

That's crucial for me: Sámi identity is not primarily about how you live – it's about who you are. It's rooted in ancestry, in culture, in language. And yet, this often goes unnoticed as so many people – even within Norway – still expect an "authentic" Sámi to look or live a certain way. That's deeply problematic.

You're referring to the focus on reindeer herding?
Exactly. Reindeer herding has become a symbol of Sámi culture, but only approximately 10 % of Sámi actually practice it. And yet public discourse often considers reindeer herders the only "real" Sámi. This narrow image is reinforced not only by outsiders but also by some Sámi themselves – especially those who have moved to urban areas and feel a strong need to protect tradition. So, it's a paradox: the people who are most vocal about defending a traditional way of life are often the most removed from it. That's not a criticism, but it shows how strong the pressure is to conform to a certain image – even if it excludes the vast majority of us.

What needs to change to address it and support the broader Sámi community?
First of all, we need to shift the perspective in general. Indigenous identity must not be measured by lifestyle. Not living "traditionally" doesn't make you less Sámi – or less entitled to rights, recognition and cultural belonging. But that's often the implicit message in policy and public perception.

We also need to move beyond the idea that there's always a conflict between modern development and Indigenous rights. Sámis, like anyone else, need jobs, infrastructure, good schools and healthcare. We're not against progress – we want to be part of it, without giving up who we are. At the same time, we need to strengthen the foundations of Sámi identity: language, history and collective memory. That's where the state has a responsibility. It can't be left to individuals or to a small cultural elite.

"We also need to move beyond the idea that there's always a conflict between modern development and Indigenous rights."

What would that look like in practice in terms of education and inclusion?
Look, when I was growing up, I didn't learn anything about our history in school until the secondary level. That creates a disconnect. If we want young people to understand and value their identity, they need to see it reflected in their everyday environment and not just at festivals or in museums. That's why Sámi language should be compulsory in schools in core Sámi areas – otherwise, it will fade away. It's not enough to offer it as an optional subject. We also need a comprehensive integration of Sámi history, literature, music and perspectives into the curriculum, starting in nursery school. This is the only way we can convey Sámi identity not as a costume or postcard, but as a living and evolving identity.

“Our ability to preserve our cultural identity while embracing change is remarkable”

What does it mean to be Turkana today? Rael Nkoi Lomoti is the founder of Turkana’s first girls’ football team and an advocate for education, gender equality and climate justice in her community. She spoke with Katharina Wilhelm Otieno.

What does your Indigenous identity mean to you?
My identity as a Turkana is deeply rooted in our historical and cultural heritage, which has been shaped by centuries of adaptation to the arid environment of northwestern Kenya, particularly around Lake Turkana. The Turkana are a Nilotic ethnic group and part of the Ateker Confederation, as we call a group of closely related Indigenous groups: the Jie, Karamojong, Turkana, Toposa, Nyangatom, Teso and Lango. Our origins date back to South Sudan, and we migrated to our current territory in the 17th century.

This identity is not just a label, but a lived experience centred around our nomadic pastoral lifestyle, in which livestock – cattle, goats, camels and sheep – are central to our economy, social structure and spiritual beliefs. Livestock is not only an economic asset, but also symbolises wealth and status and is used, for example, in negotiations over bride prices and dowries.

Where else does this identity come into play?
Our cultural practices are dynamic expressions of this identity. Examples of such practices include our basket weaving, traditional dances such as Edong’a, Naleyo and Ekimuomuor and the annual Tobong’u Lore Cultural Festival (which means “welcome home”).

Our social structure is still based on families and clans, with subdivisions such as Ngirsai (leopard) and Ngimor (stone), which reflect our communal organisation.

Women continue to be particularly skilled in making beadwork and building semi-permanent houses from leaf branches or palm fronds. Men still practise stick fighting and make weapons such as spears and hand knives.

Spiritually, our identity is based on our belief in Akuj, the supreme god, and the veneration of our ancestors, who shape our moral and social fabric. Our language, Ng'aturkana, an Eastern Nilotic language, is an important link to our heritage and preserves oral traditions in proverbs, songs and stories. As a young woman, I am proud of this identity to this day.

What can the world learn from the Turkana?

The Turkana community offers several lessons that can influence global practices, particularly in the areas of sustainability and social cohesion. Our sustainable resource management and traditional knowledge systems are outstanding and have been perfected over centuries in an arid environment.

Research shows that our seasonal migration and water-conservation techniques, such as digging shallow wells in dry riverbeds, are effective adaptations to harsh environmental conditions. Another example is our ability to predict weather conditions by observing the stars, animal behaviour and plants, which can enrich modern sciences such as meteorology. This knowledge is crucial in the face of climate change, as our practices offer models for sustainable living in arid regions.

Our resilience in difficult times is another important lesson. Living in one of the harshest climates in East Africa, we have developed strategies to survive and thrive, such as diversifying our livelihoods through fishing, small-

Photo: Moses Mbotela for Desert Roses

RAEL NKOI LOMOTI

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scale trading and crafts, particularly around Lake Turkana. This adaptability can inspire other communities facing similar challenges to integrate modern techniques into traditional knowledge.

What about the social and cultural sphere?
Our strong sense of community and mutual support are exemplary. In Turkana culture, it is customary to share resources such as livestock and food in times of need, which promotes social cohesion and collective well-being and contrasts with the individualistic tendencies of modern societies. The Turkana's methods of conflict resolution, such as dialogue mediated by elders, can complement modern forms of government.

Our ability to preserve our cultural identity while embracing change is equally remarkable. We remain resilient in the face of challenges such as drought, conflict and marginalisation, and we have integrated Western education, Christianity and new economic opportunities without losing our core values, thereby ensuring cultural continuity in a globalised world.

For many young people, myself included, identifying with Turkana culture means a strong sense of belonging and a support system that extends beyond the nuclear family. In a globalised world where young people often feel uprooted, our culture provides a foundation for a shared identity and purpose. This connection to our heritage gives us a unique perspective on resilience and community, empowering us to navigate modern challenges while staying true to our values.

"Our practices offer models for sustainable living in arid regions."

What would improve the situation of the Turkana?
Our situation needs to improve in all areas. Access to good education is crucial, as many children in Turkana, especially in remote areas, do not receive any schooling. Building more schools, awarding scholarships and offering vocational training in areas such as agriculture, renewable energy and tourism would empower young people and diversify livelihoods.

Given the poor state of roads, health facilities and the water supply in our region, infrastructure improvements are also essential. Investment in boreholes, irrigation systems and mobile clinics would improve access to water and health services, while better roads would connect remote communities to markets, thereby reducing economic isolation.

Sustainable economic opportunities such as fishing cooperatives, ecotourism and pearl embroidery, supported by training in climate-friendly agriculture and access to microfinance, can open up additional sources of income, which would empower women in particular.

Given the vulnerability of our arid environment, it is also crucial to combat climate change and environmental degradation. Initiatives such as reforestation, water harvesting and renewable energy projects can mitigate the effects of drought. Partnerships with non-governmental organisations and the government to restore degraded land could support our way of life as livestock farmers and ensure food security.

The Turkana region repeatedly makes headlines due to conflicts between a variety of actors. What can be improved here?
Inter-communal conflicts over resources persist. Strengthening traditional peace mechanisms such as elder councils and supporting disarmament programmes can reduce violence, while cooperative resource management with neighbouring communities would promote stability.

Finally, given our historical marginalisation, securing land rights and ensuring political representation are important. Meaningful consultations and a fair distribution of profits from development projects such as oil production, as well as greater political participation at the national and regional level, would protect our interests, especially in large-scale projects affecting our ancestral lands.

What is the biggest success your community has achieved?
Empowering women in Turkana through economic initiatives such as beadwork cooperatives and small-scale retail has improved household income, challenged traditional gender norms and contributed to greater equality in our society. This is something I would like to further promote through my community-based organisation Desert Roses with initiatives such as the "Let the Girl Play Initiative", which empowers young women by promoting education and leadership skills in sport, thereby improving their self-confidence and opportunities.

Our collaboration with researchers and the global recognition of the Koobi Fora archaeological site, which has yielded significant archaeological discoveries, have put Turkana on the map as a cradle of humanity, created tourism opportunities and strengthened our pride in our identity and connection to the origins of humankind.

However, the greatest achievement of the Turkana community is our enduring resilience and cultural continuity despite numerous challenges. Our ability to preserve our traditions and way of life across generations and to give today's youth a sense of identity while continuing to adapt to change, is a testament to our strength.

Photo: Moses Mbotela for Desert Roses

Rael is the pioneer of women's football in Turkana County.

LAND RIGHTS AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Where is Julia Chuñil?

The Mapuche environmental activist disappeared under mysterious circumstances in November 2024; since then, the investigation has hardly progressed. The case shows how dangerous Indigenous activism is in Chile. Resistance to the forestry industry has repeatedly led to conflicts with the government.

BY JAVIER A. CISTERNA FIGUEROA

"For us, my mother is no longer alive. That may sound harsh, but at this point we just want to find her remains." These words were uttered by Pablo San Martín Chuñil, one of Julia Chuñil Catricura's five children. The Mapuche environmental activist was last seen on 8 November 2024 on disputed land near the town of Máfil, about 800 kilometres south of the Chilean capital of Santiago.

The activist, who was 72 at the time, was fighting for a forested plot of land called Reserva Cora Número Uno-A on behalf of the Mapuche community that she was the leader of. Julia Chuñil wanted to maintain the land according to Mapuche tradition, which is characterised by smallholder agriculture and livestock farming – and prevent a forestry company from encroaching into the area.

As a social and ecological pioneer in the region, Julia Chuñil made enemies. According to her family, she received threats and bribery attempts, which she resisted. The family suspects a regional businessman of having her disappeared because he wanted to clear the forest. The public prosecutor's office ordered a police investigation, but so far it has raised more questions instead of making real progress.

A HISTORY FULL OF CONFLICT

Julia Chuñil's case has interested many people in Chile and has also been picked up by international media. It has become part of the long history of conflict between the Chilean government and the Mapuche community, the largest Indigenous group in the country. Since democracy was introduced in 1990, many Indigenous leaders in Chile have fought to defend their territory – like Julia Chuñil, who lived in the city and returned to the country to protect ancestral Mapuche regions from logging. At the same time, the forestry business, especially the harvest of pine and eucalyptus trees, has become more and more lucrative.

Forestry is now the third-largest export industry in the country – after copper mining and fishing and aquaculture, which has led to a decline in agricultural land. In 2022, over two million hectares were designated for timber production in Chile. This issue has long led to direct confrontations with Mapuche groups who are defending their rural way of life.

For example, in 1997, Mapuche groups in southern Chile carried out violent attacks against forestry companies. Police operations by both left- and right-wing governments have allowed the situation to escalate. Dozens of civilians and police officers have lost their lives. At the same time, criminal groups involved in drug trafficking and timber theft have exploited the so-called "Mapuche conflict" to expand their illegal activities in rural Chile. The combination of violence, repression and criminality has resulted in a state of emergency being declared in two of the most affected regions, meaning that the military has been given responsibility for security.

MUTUAL MISTRUST

Gloria Callupe Rain is a member of the Commission for Peace and Understanding, which the government of left-wing president Gabriel Boric created to promote dialogue with the Mapuche. The Mapuche expert describes the conflict between the Chilean state and its Indigenous Peoples as far-reaching, historically determined and characterised by mutual mistrust.

Protest against the disappearance of Mapuche leader Julia Chuñil in Santiago de Chile in April 2025.

Photo: picture alliance/Anadolu/Lucas Aguayo Araos

> "Only when you understand the depth of the conflict and the enormous damage it has caused will you see that the Mapuche are asking for reparations, not preferential treatment."

"Violence takes many forms and is linked to the government's relationship to the Mapuche people and countless broken promises. We have institutions that do not fulfil their duties and legal proceedings that drag on for years even though they concern legitimate claims like land restitution and recognition. That leads to frustration, pain and hopelessness, which in turn lead to violence," she explains.

For Gloria Callupe, the story of Julia Chuñil is also the story of the historical disenfranchisement of the Mapuche people. "Only when you understand the depth of the conflict and the enormous damage it has caused will you see that the Mapuche are asking for reparations, not preferential treatment."

NO ONE IS LOOKING FOR JULIA ANYMORE

Karina Riquelme Viveros, an attorney who for many years has defended Mapuche cases and now represents Pablo San Martín Chuñil, says that the only certainty that the family of the vanished environmental activist has is that "the search efforts of the past eight months have been inadequate". The human-rights attorney accuses the investigative authorities of trying to hold Julia's own children responsible for her disappearance. Yet she claims they have ignored much more promising investigative leads, such as the constant harassment that Julia Chuñil was subjected to.

"The biggest barriers are the classism and racism of the institutions that initially only investigated the family and disregarded all other aspects," Karina Riquelme Viveros says. "That has lowered the chances of finding Julia." Moreover, administrative and financial reasons are now being produced to explain why certain investigative measures were not taken, which she considers unusual.

She adds that her client, Pablo San Martín Chuñil, worries that he is becoming the victim of a fabricated charge. Pablo San Martín Chuñil confirms the statements by his attorney. "The past few months have been very difficult for us as a family," he says. "There have been repeated attempts to hold us responsible for my mother's disappearance. They tried to accuse my sister. She was locked in a delivery van and asked to incriminate herself. It was terrible. So, it is very

hard to have trust." He reports that the search for his mother has already been called off and the family's hopes are fading – while the justice system continues to provide no answers.

SOLIDARITY IN CHILE AND WORLDWIDE

As the world follows the Chuñil case, people who fight for land rights and the environment continue to be persecuted on a massive scale. According to a report by the civil-society organisation Global Witness, in 2023 at least 196 activists were killed, 85 % of whom lived in Latin America, especially in Colombia and Brazil.

Although the problem is not nearly as severe in Chile as in those countries, violent attacks on activists have recently increased. In 2024, the civil-society organisation Escazú documented 47 cases of human-rights violations against environmental activists, approximately half of which were physical attacks.

Escazú is also supporting the family of Julia Chuñil. Its legal strategy has been to take the case to international courts in light of the lack of progress. In July, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights called on the Chilean government to intensify its efforts to find Chuñil.

"People who fight for land rights and the environment continue to be persecuted on a massive scale. According to a report by the civil-society organisation Global Witness, in 2023 at least 196 activists were killed, 85 % of whom lived in Latin America."

Solidarity with the family is growing on the local level, too. Javier del Río Richter is the spokesperson of the "Coordination group for Julia Chuñil", one of many groups that have sprung up to support her and her family. He reports that the group holds a demonstration every Thursday in the city of Concepción to raise awareness about the case. "We're showing the family that they're not alone, that there are more people who are fighting for their mother, for their grandmother, for Julia," says Javier del Río Richter. On social media, they are in contact with other support groups, including outside Chile in places like Mexico, Spain, Argentina and Brazil, where the case has also generated interest.

These expressions of sympathy are helping Julia Chuñil's family bear the pain. But they can't answer the questions that this case has raised. "All we want is for the torture to end, the justice system to do its job, no more innocent people to be accused and for the person who is actually responsible for my mother's disappearance to be found," says Pablo San Martín Chuñil.

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INDIGENOUS MEDICINE

Precious knowledge that must be preserved

The Maasai know how to treat malaria with bark. Like many other Indigenous groups, they have immense medical knowledge. However, like the entire Maasai way of life, this knowledge is gradually being lost due to forced resettlement for the sake of profit.

BY LAWRENCE KILIMWIKO

Photo: picture alliance/Anadolu/Mehmet Aslan

For the Maasai, the Earth and its wilderness are the ultimate source of life.

Traditional medicine has been practiced by Indigenous communities in Africa since the dawn of humanity. Long before the advent of modern medicine, people relieved pain and illness using plants, herbs, animal organs, roots, leaves and soil.

Ethnobotanical research in Tanzania and Kenya shows that the Maasai, who live in both countries, and many other Indigenous communities possess profound knowledge of the medicinal plants in their environment. As traditional pastoralists with an expert understanding of their native lands, the Maasai use a wide variety of plants and herbs to treat their own illnesses and those of their livestock. They include, among many others:

- Greenheart tree (Warburgia ugandensis): a decoction of the bark is used to treat febrile illnesses, especially malaria, and as a general antimicrobial agent.

- Worm-cure Albizia (Albizia anthelmintica): traditionally used for removing intestinal parasites. The roots are boiled and eaten. Sometimes the bark is used to alleviate malaria symptoms or as a salt substitute.

- Jacket plum (Pappea capensis): Maasai warriors traditionally used a bark infusion as a cleansing tonic for the blood and to aid recovery from blood loss.

Other medicinal plants popular among Indigenous people in Tanzania include tamarind (Tamarindus indica) and baobab fruit (Adansonia digitata). Tamarind is used to treat a wide variety of diseases, such as gastrointestinal problems, sore throat, constipation, allergic dermatitis and cholera. The dried pulp of the baobab fruit is rich in ascorbic acid, while its leaves contain vitamin C, sugars, potassium, tartaric acid and calcium. The pulp is eaten, soaked to make refreshing drinks or preserved as jam, while the bark is turned into rope, mats and baskets.

HOLISTIC HEALING

The Maasai's medicinal knowledge forms part of their holistic, spiritually charged worldview in which the Earth is the ultimate source of life. It provides not only food, water and medicinal plants for themselves and their livestock, but also sacred plants for rituals as well as burial grounds and places where ancestral spirits dwell. Rain and natural cycles are integral to this worldview.

This relationship is not unique to the Maasai. Almost all of Tanzania's roughly 120 Indigenous communities interact with forests in efforts to conserve nature and for medicinal practices. Scholars have pointed out that traditional medicine in African Indigenous communities, unlike modern medicine, treats the whole person and takes into account the physical, cultural, psychological and other aspects of human wellbeing.

For the Maasai, life, health, sickness and healing are thus intertwined and inseparable from their environment. "Protective medicines work within their life environment," writes Aidan Msafiri of the Kilimanjaro Consortium for Development and Environment Ecoplus (KCDE).

WAY OF LIFE UNDER THREAT

However, the Maasai's traditional way of life, including their nature-based medicine, is at risk. The Tanzanian government has come up with a plan to relocate tens of thousands of Maasai from their ancestral lands in northern Tanzania's Ngorongoro conservation area by 2027 under the guise of conservation. Many see this as an attempt to boost tourism in a region that is widely known for its breathtaking landscapes and wildlife.

According to the civil-society organisation Human Rights Watch (HRW), the government has already resettled thousands of Maasai to a village about 600 kilometres away, where they are provided with houses, farming land and modern infrastructure. HRW criticises the fact that the affected Maasai communities were not involved in designing the plan and that their free, prior and informed consent was not obtained.

Christopher Ole Sendeka is an experienced Maasai parliamentarian. In his opinion, these measures violate the community's way of life, which is so closely intertwined with wilderness that the two cannot be separated.

"For the Maasai, life, health, sickness and healing are thus intertwined and inseparable from their environment."

Soksi Ole Ngitika is an elder from the village of Kayapus in Oldugai, Ngorongoro. He claims that the Maasai have the highest life expectancy in Africa. In his view, the government, rather than uprooting the Maasai, should have tried to learn lessons from their social organisation to benefit the country as a whole in economic and cultural terms. "We have always lived among wild animals in our natural habitat, we still live there, and we want to continue living there." According to Ngitika, development also requires a solid cultural foundation – and it is a mistake to write off Indigenous groups as being incapable of contributing to it.

The displacement of the Maasai threatens to extinguish centuries of accumulated traditional medical practices closely tied to their specific environment. Even though a return to traditional nutrition and medicine has become a trend in some parts of the world – Google Arts and Culture has an entire exhibit called "Healing the Maasai Way" – traditional medicine is not receiving enough attention, especially in the home countries of Indigenous communities. Institutions promoting it often engage in unsustainable harvesting practices. Moreover, there are no effective legal frameworks or policies to protect traditional medicine in Tanzania.

With the Maasai's displacement from their ancestral lands, the future of this knowledge of medicinal plants and practices looks bleak. Displacement not only cuts these communities off from their ancestors – many of them perceive it as the end of their world.

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REPARATIONS

Justice after genocide

Only in 2015 did the German government acknowledge that the war against Indigenous communities in the former German colony of South West Africa culminated in genocide. An estimated 75% of the Ovaherero, half of the Nama and an unknown number of the Damara and San were killed. To date, the descendants of the genocide victims have not received adequate compensation from Germany, nor have they been sufficiently involved in reconciliation processes. This is shameful – and not an isolated case when it comes to crimes against Indigenous Peoples around the world.

BY HENNING MELBER AND JEPHTA NGUHERIMO

The admission of guilt was the first of its kind by a colonial power. Negotiations between the German and Namibian governments followed in an effort to come to terms with this past. A joint declaration was signed in 2021. However, in response to massive protests in Namibia denouncing the inadequacy of this declaration, the Namibian government resumed negotiations. By mid-2025, talks were still ongoing.

In a parallel process, Germany responded to pressure from Namibian descendants of the victims and German postcolonial initiatives. The government worked with institutions such as museums, which were aware of the gruesome legacy in their basements, to search for and identify human remains from the colonial era.

Thousands of skulls and other body parts – including some from other colonies such as East Africa – were brought to Germany following the massacres of Indigenous communities that resisted foreign occupation. Some of the skulls belonged to decapitated leaders. In Germany, they became the subject of racist, pseudo-scientific anthropological studies. These were intended to justify a "civilizing mission" by asserting the superiority of the "Aryan master race", that is, the Germans.

RESTITUTION AS A MODEST BEGINNING

In 2011 and 2018, skulls and other human remains were repatriated from Berlin and 2014 from Freiburg. The official ceremonies in Berlin were marred by inadequate recognition on the part of the German government. Although these repatriations were of great significance to Namibians and were attended by high-ranking delegations, they were treated disrespectfully by some lower-ranking German government representatives. For example, Cornelia Pieper, then Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office, left the venue in 2011 without even having the decency to listen to the speeches of the Namibian delegation. This is anything but credible remorse.

The restitution also included the return of stolen cultural property. In 2019, the Linden Museum in Stuttgart returned the family Bible and whip of the legendary Nama chief Hendrik Witbooi, who was killed in 1905 while fighting against

Photo: picture alliance / Gregor Fischer

In 2018, a memorial service was held in Berlin as part of the repatriation of human remains from Germany to Namibia.

the Germans. These items had been stolen in 1893 during the Hornkranz massacre, which the Nama people consider the beginning of the genocide. However, the protocol and details of the return of the items to Witbooi's descendants were complicated. Development sociologist Reinhart Kössler from the Arnold Bergstraesser Institute for Cultural Studies in Freiburg commented on the process: "The claims for ownership and control on the part of the modern independent state countervail the expectations and hopes of the communities whose forbears have been robbed of the objects".

In 2022, the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation returned 23 stolen objects. The project began in 2019 and ended with the opening of a mobile exhibition of the objects in Windhoek in June 2025. German critics claim that some of these objects were not stolen and should not have been returned. This raises the fundamental question of who has the power to define and control such processes.

FRAGMENTARY RESTITUTION

Fragmentary restitution cannot compensate for a lack of genuine remorse and reparation for the crimes committed. Even if the joint German-Namibian declaration is finally signed, the result, once described as a "reconciliation agreement," is not sufficient for reconciliation with the descendants of the Indigenous communities most affected. This is because representatives of their most important organisations were not involved in the negotiations.

Ultimately, this constitutes a continuation of colonial relations. As Nama activist Sima Luipert emphasised in Al Jazeera: "No amount of money can ever wholly repair the damage that has been done. It's about recognition." Reverend Rupert Tjitee Isaac Hambira, a descendant of the Ovaherero in the diaspora, stated at a World Council of Churches conference this year titled "Berlin 1884–1885 and Anti-Black Racism: In Search of a Shared Anti-Racist Ecumenical Vision": "True reconciliation demands more than symbolic gestures. It demands justice rooted in truth, shaped by inclusion and backed by genuine transformation. Until such process is realised, we will not consent. We will continue to contest the legitimacy of these negotiations."

The marginalisation of Indigenous communities in negotiations concerning their interests violates the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which was adopted in 2007 with both Germany and Namibia voting in favour. Article 18 states: "Indigenous Peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures". For Namibian lawyer Ngutjiuaa Hijarunguru-Kuṭako, any agreement between the two governments is therefore null

and void. "They are negotiating about people who are not sitting at the table," she told the German news outlet "taz".

> "Ultimately, this constitutes a continuation of colonial relations."

REPARATIONS AND MEMORY

The treatment of the descendants of the victims of the genocide against the Ovaherero and Nama is not an isolated case. Many Indigenous groups around the world have been systematically displaced, deprived of their rights and murdered by foreign powers. And many have yet to receive adequate apologies, let alone compensation. Yet this is precisely what many Indigenous Peoples need in order to heal from collective trauma and strengthen their identity.

In his essay "The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness," Nigerian Nobel Prize winner Wole Soyinka refers to the healing trilogy of truth, reconciliation and restitution. On the path through the portal of healing, which victims and perpetrators must pass through together to achieve moral symmetry, restitution is the final but central step. Gurminder K. Bhambra, professor of postcolonial and decolonial studies at the School of Global Studies at the University of Sussex, pointed out in her essay on the colonial world economy: "A distributive justice that fails to acknowledge the requirement of reparative justice for colonialism will always be partial. Worse, it becomes a building block for the walls that separate and divide the relatively advantaged from the disadvantaged and excluded."

Questions about persistently asymmetrical power relations and selective memories do not only arise in negotiations between states. They can be a domestic issue, too. Coming to terms with the genocide committed by German colonisers against Indigenous communities in what is now Namibia requires the direct involvement of the relevant authorities of the affected communities to find the best way to make amends. Doing so would be consistent with Namibia's post-independence nation-building motto, "Unity in Diversity," as well as its slogan, "Solidarity, Freedom, Justice." Instead, the exclusive nature of the negotiations between the governments without the respective representatives of the Indigenous Peoples sparked hostility and resentment and fuelled ethnic tensions with communities that have more influence within the government. Claiming the right to speak for others denies the Indigenous communities that are directly affected a voice at the negotiating table. This is another form of colonialism.

Reverend Hambira points to the duty and responsibility "that the suffering of our people is known, never forgotten and never repeated". The work of remembrance, resistance, and dignity must continue "out of a fierce love for our ancestors, our children and the truth".

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COLOMBIA

Defending territory with tradition and technology

For the Inga people, the Andes-Amazon region in Colombia represents far more than just the land on which they live. They defend their territory against climate damage, the exploitation of natural resources and violence – and they are now even drawing on open-source technologies to help them achieve their goals.

BY LEONARDO JIMÉNEZ GARCÍA

Photo: Leonardo Jiménez García

Members of the Wairari Atun Sacha cabildo are mapping their territory.

Colombia was ravaged by armed conflict for over 50 years, with the government, guerilla forces and paramilitary groups fighting over land rights and in pursuit of economic and political power. Throughout this time, large parts of Colombia's Amazon region were viewed as guerilla territory and witnessed fighting, displacement and drug cultivation. For anyone not living there, this was long considered a no-go area – a war zone that nobody would enter voluntarily.

The Indigenous communities who live there were unable to escape the conflict, however. They would often get caught between the sides, with government units or guerilla groups suspecting them of collaborating with their opponents. Many were more or less cut off from the outside world.

A PLACE OF INDIGENOUS ACTIVISM

This was also the case in the villages and communities of the Santa Rosa municipality. Until 2016, when a peace agreement was signed between the government and the FARC (the largest guerrilla group at the time) that did at least bring some semblance of peace, many of the villages were essentially inaccessible for outsiders.

> "This territory means life. It is our home and a sacred place, an infinite space in which people can develop and grow together."

The region is rich in natural resources: Santa Rosa is situated in the Andes-Amazon region in the north-east of the Cauca department, a transition zone between the Andes and the Amazon basin. Mountain ecosystems of the Andes, the remnants of the rainforest and important water-catchment areas boasting huge biodiversity are all to be found here. Yet this natural wealth has been at risk for decades – from state neglect, environmental damage and the conflict.

The entire "Bota Caucana", as the region is known, is not only badly affected by climate change; it has also seen extensive deforestation, soil erosion, river pollution and declining animal populations. The still smouldering conflict, along with legal and illegal gold mining, have also brought violence, mercury pollution and social division to the local communities. The communities and villagers of Santa Rosa have not let this deter them, however – with the result that Santa Rosa has now become a site of Indigenous resistance.

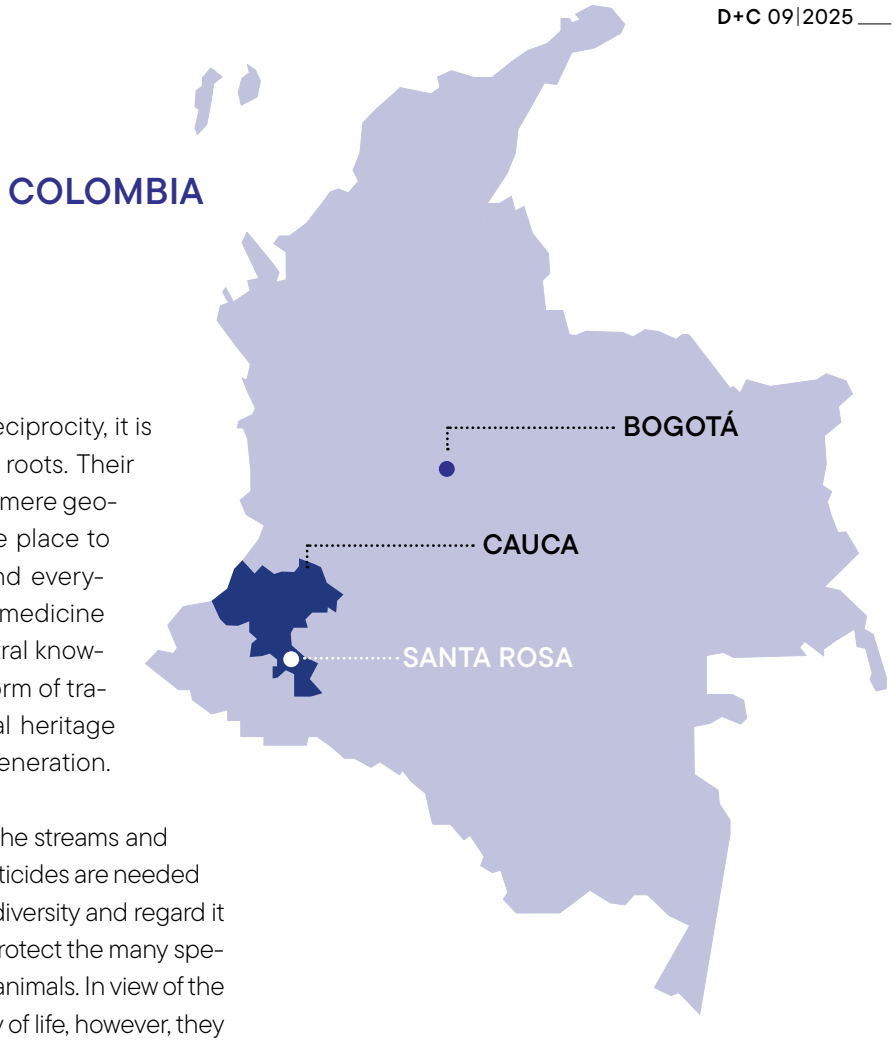
LAND RIGHTS ARE ABOUT MORE THAN GEOGRAPHICAL DISTINCTION

The Indigenous communities in the Santa Rosa area belong to the Inga People. Dotted around the region, families live on plots of land on which they have their houses, fields and forests. Far than being isolated, however, they maintain a collective form of settlement and live according to the principles of solidarity: they do not regard the land as their individual property but as a place for spiritual and political connection with the community.

For the Inga, the "territory" on which they live means much more than just land and soil – it stands for an abundance

A chagra plot where the Inga practise traditional agriculture.

Photo: Leonardo Jiménez García



of natural resources and a sense of reciprocity, it is the core of their identity and of their roots. Their territory is neither a commodity nor a mere geographical distinction; it is an inclusive place to live, where nature, culture, history and everyday spirituality merge. Traditional medicine continues to thrive here, as do ancestral knowledge, arts and crafts, and Minga, a form of traditional community work. This cultural heritage is handed down from generation to generation.

In Santa Rosa, clean water still flows in the streams and rivers, the air is pure and virtually no pesticides are needed for agriculture. The Inga value their biodiversity and regard it as a gift that entails a responsibility to protect the many species of birds, medicinal plants and wild animals. In view of the threats to their ecosystem and their way of life, however, they – in particular the younger generation – have decided that they have no choice but to become politically active.

A few years ago, they founded the Indigenous "Wairari Atun Sacha" cabildo in the village of Tarabita to campaign for their rights. Their aim is to preserve the social, cultural and ecological heritage of the Bota Caucana.

YOUNG PEOPLE CAMPAIGN TO PROTECT THEIR INDIGENOUS HERITAGE

Colombian cabildos represent Indigenous communities vis-à-vis local and national governments and are organised as autonomous entities. The cabildo Wairari Atun Sacha represents its community in the Santa Rosa local government. It is part of the association of Indigenous Councils of Santa Rosa and affiliated to the Indigenous Regional Council of Cauca (Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca, CRIC).

The cabildo's primary political objective is to have their territory recognised as ancestral lands of the Inga people – as official "Indigenous territory". Yurani Quinayas, the cabildo's first representative, explains: "First and foremost, this territory means life. It is our home and a sacred place, an infinite space in which people can develop and grow together."

The Indigenous representatives of the Wairari Atun Sacha cabildo hope that having their territory recognised will secure their autonomy, as self-governance and collective welfare play a central role in their way of life. The idea is for the people here to be able to decide for themselves how the land, water and forests are used and protected, in line with their ideology. They reject the exploitation by outsiders of natural resources when such projects are imposed upon them, claiming that these give rise to "social and economic disharmony".

The cabildo calls for state and international conservation funding to be channelled directly to the Indigenous communities that live in the area in question. Its members see protecting the environment as a collective and intergenerational responsibility and therefore ensure that all youngsters are taught about the importance of preserving their natural heritage.

HOW OPEN-SOURCE MAPPING IS HELPING IN THE FIGHT FOR POLITICAL RIGHTS

In 2024, the cabildo joined the international project "Participatory mapping for a sustainable Amazon" (Mapeos participativos para una Amazonía sostenible). The mapping project enables its participants to explain their holistic understanding of territory both to themselves and to the outside world.

With the aid of open-source mapping tools such as the global OpenStreetMap, cabildo members have since been

drawing on their traditional knowledge to create maps of their lands. They reveal the region's biodiversity and multiculturalism and shine a spotlight not only on the environmental destruction that has already happened, but also on future threats posed by illegal mining, deforestation and climate change. The first map includes spiritual and cultural places, such as sacred sites, ancient chagras (traditional agroforestry plots) and trails, communal infrastructure such as houses, pathways and a village school, as well as natural resources such as water sources, streams, forests and different species of bird. Many of these local specificities did not feature on official or commercial maps.

> "The Indigenous representatives hope that having their territory recognised will secure their autonomy, as self-governance and collective welfare play a central role in their way of life."

The community calls the mapping tools "instruments of power" because they enable it to document the geographical, cultural, ecological and political characteristics that define their lands from their own perspective. Social scientists support them in creating the maps.

One year on, the members of the cabildo are now administering their own georeferenced information systems. These help them identify risks posed by forest fires or landslides and better adapt to such threats – which is vital in view of climate change. Precipitation patterns are changing, temperatures are rising, and ecosystems are becoming increasingly vulnerable.

Perhaps most importantly, however, the maps provide the Inga in Santa Rosa with political arguments. The charting of pollution and degradation zones on the map has enabled them for example to identify the sites where nearby mining projects have caused mercury contamination to reach critical levels in the catchment area of the Caquetá River. They have also been able to document woodland areas that have been damaged by livestock breeding and the timber industry, as well as remote hamlets that are neither connected by road nor have any basic power or water supply.

The maps make it easier for the community to argue their case and provide concrete proof when dealing with the environmental authorities and other public institutions. Its members can now present georeferenced data to underpin their arguments. The cabildo can also raise the profile of its conservation projects among scientific institutions and environmental organisations.

For the community's members, the maps they have drawn up together serve as an instrument with which to defend their territory and continue to follow their Indigenous way of life. According to Fernando Quinayas, the "Líder Gobernador" and thus most senior representative of the cabildo: "A cartography project in the Amazon region cannot be regarded as separate from the historic fight of the Indigenous Peoples for self-determination. It is about far more than just mapping: it has given us the chance to build up local knowledge that is deeply rooted in our culture and has to do with love and dignity."

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Photo: Katja Dombrowski

Transport on the Río Beni: the people of Asunción de Quiquibey sell their goods at the Rurrenabaque market.

INDIGENOUS RIGHTS

Gold, natural gas, land grabs

Bolivia is seen as a pioneer when it comes to Indigenous rights. Though it's the peoples of the Bolivian Andes that are particularly well known, they account for only part of the country's Indigenous population. Others feel neglected – and fear for their existence.

BY KATJA DOMBROWSKI

It takes three hours to travel by boat from Rurrenabaque, a small town on the Beni River in the Bolivian lowlands, to the village of Asunción de Quiquibey. The Beni River is the only transport route here – there are no roads and the villages along its banks can only be reached by river.

Bolivia may be especially famous for the Andes, yet that paints a misleading picture: nearly half of the country is covered by the "Amazonía", as the tropical lowlands are known. The world's largest rainforest region, the Amazon, begins directly behind the Andes, the Bolivian part accounting for 6.6 % of the total area of 6.7 million square kilometres. Asunción de Quiquibey is one of 23 villages in the Pilón Lajas region, which enjoys dual protection status: both as a UNESCO biosphere reserve and as an Indigenous territory recognised by the Bolivian state. Two Indigenous groups live together here: the Mosetén and the Tsimané, whose houses are built on stilts and scattered around the forest. The people live off the forest and river and engage in some subsistence farming. There's no running water, electricity or mobile phone reception in this

remote region. Cooking is done on wood fires in a large open communal kitchen. This is also where the village has its drinking water supply: the water is piped in from a source a few kilometres away.

HARDLY ANY STATE BENEFITS REACH PILÓN LAJAS

Bolivia sees itself as a pioneer when it comes to the rights of Indigenous Peoples. In 2009, a new constitution was adopted under President Evo Morales, the country's first Indigenous head of state. It recognises the culture and language of 36 different Indigenous groups and the rights of nature – Mother Earth. The same year, the country changed its official name to "Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia" – Plurinational State of Bolivia. The idea was for the new name to set the agenda.

Quite a lot has happened in the meantime: during Evo Morales' term in office, extreme poverty was halved, income inequality reduced and public education and healthcare expanded.

If you talk to the residents of Asunción de Quiquibey, however, you quickly realise that the Mosetén and Tsimané feel pretty much abandoned by the Bolivian state. Of the 36 Indigenous Peoples recognised in Bolivia, 32 live in the Amazon region. Theoretically, they all have the right to education in their native tongues. Yet lessons at the school in Asunción de Quiquibey are taught – if at all – in Spanish. It will take a very long time for the state to train enough teachers to give lessons in all of the country's languages, which incidentally are all recognised as official languages.

Another example is electricity. The state has declared its intention to supply all of its citizens with electricity. Where it is difficult or impossible to connect people to the national grid, the government has promised solar-based insular solutions. Yet so far, the people in Asunción de Quiquibey have been waiting in vain for solar panels to be provided for every house. State healthcare provision doesn't reach this far, either: the only option for anyone who falls seriously ill is to take the boat to Rurrenabaque, as no rapid help is available in emergencies. One woman talks about domestic violence, another area where the state's absence is clearly felt: there is no help from outside for such problems.

Thanks to its relative proximity to the city, however, Asunción de Quiquibey is actually quite well connected. Its inhabitants travel to the market in Rurrenabaque on Sundays to sell the products they grow, such as bananas, corn and yucca. Most of the other Indigenous villages in Pilón Lajas are considerably more remote, residents living an isolated existence and rarely leaving their villages. "The people there are much poorer and have far worse access to services," says Alex Oscar Chad Lurizi from SERNAP (Servicio Nacional de Áreas Protegidas), the state authority responsible for the protected areas.

IT'S UNCLEAR HOW LONG THINGS CAN CONTINUE LIKE THIS

"There are 28 of us families in the village," says Lucía Canare, at 57 one of the oldest women in Asunción de Quiquibey. She has 12 children aged between 10 and 40. Four still live with her, but the older ones have left the village. Many young residents move away, to Rurrenabaque or La Paz for example, in search of work.

Lucía Canare explains that life there is peaceful, and what they grow themselves is enough. She says it's unclear how long things can continue like this, however. The Indigenous people feel that their way of life is threatened – above all by things that are beyond their own control and which have to do with power and money. They lament the lack of support from the state.

One issue is gold mining. In the Bolivian Amazon, mercury is used to extract gold. But even though the gold mines are situated outside the protected area, at the Kaka River for example, four hours by boat from Asunción de Quiquibey, the mercury ends up there, nonetheless. People ingest it mainly by eating fish, one of the dietary staples of riverside dwellers. Studies show that people in the region have mercury levels in their organisms that are many times higher than that considered safe by the World Health Organization. As the body cannot break down this heavy metal, it simply accumulates. Among other things, it damages the cen-

tral nervous system and can cause hair loss and blindness, as well as many other problems.

Scientists have also taken hair samples from the people in Asunción. The villagers are aware of their mercury levels and are scared of the long-term effects. And what does the state do? "There's total silence," says Chad Lurizi from SERNAP. The authorities have neither taken steps to combat the use of mercury nor dealt with the health consequences.

"32 of the 36 Indigenous Peoples recognised in Bolivia live in the Amazon region."

The other big fear relates to a gigantic infrastructural project that has long been planned but has yet to be implemented: the Bolivian state wants to build a huge hydroelectric power plant with two components on the Beni River and a total capacity of 3,676 megawatts. The plans for this project, dubbed "El Bala", date back to the 1950s. It is thanks to the united resistance of the region's Indigenous Peoples that it hasn't gone ahead yet. State electricity supplier ENDE (Empresa Nacional de Electricidad) says that the much larger component, named "Chepete" and situated around 70 kilometres upriver from Rurrenabaque, will feature a dam 183 metres high. This would flood an area of 680 square kilometres, creating a reservoir that would be Bolivia's second-largest lake after Lake Titicaca. "Bala", the second component with a river power plant 13.5 kilometres from Rurrenabaque, would flood another 93 square kilometres, according to ENDE.

The hydroelectric plant poses an existential threat to the Indigenous Peoples. Their representatives claim that more than 5,000 people from six Indigenous groups would lose their homes and their livelihoods. This would include the inhabitants of Asunción de Quiquibey, which is situated in the area to be flooded. And where are they supposed to go? The fear is that this would mean the end of their people, who would be gradually stripped of their lands. There is still some hope that "El Bala" will never be built.

THREATS ON ALL SIDES

The natural resources to be found in Pilón Lajas, such as gold and natural gas, are another cause for concern for local inhabitants. "Not only people from Bolivia but also foreign companies from countries such as Venezuela and China have applied for permission to exploit them," says Clever Clemente Caimany from Asunción de Quiquibey. He's a member of the Consejo Regional Tsimane Moseten (CRTM) Pilón Lajas, a regional council that fights to preserve biodiversity and protect the rights of the native inhabitants in the area.

Land grabbing is another threat. People from other regions of Bolivia move to the lowlands and clear the forests there to gain arable land. And they don't leave the protected areas unscathed, either. The government of the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) – which will be in office until the beginning of November 2025 – often turns a blind eye to such activities: though it styles itself as the advocate of the Indigenous Peoples, these also include the inhabitants of the Andes who are migrating to the Amazon region. And they have to make a living for themselves somehow if the mines no longer offer any work, water sources have dried up or been polluted, and farming – which was always difficult there – is hardly able to ensure their survival anymore. So, the Indigenous Peoples from the highlands take land away from the Indigenous Peoples in the lowlands.

The latter believe that it is obvious which group is preferred: whenever politicians talk about the rights of Bolivia's native inhabitants, they say it's the people from the Andes who are always meant – the Quechua and Aymara who constitute the overwhelming majority. It's not the small Indigenous groups in the Amazon region, who see themselves being at risk of dying out.

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