D+C

MONTHLY E-PAPER

DEVELOPMENT AND COOPERATION
D+C
ENTWICKLUNG UND ZUSAMMENARBEIT
E+Z

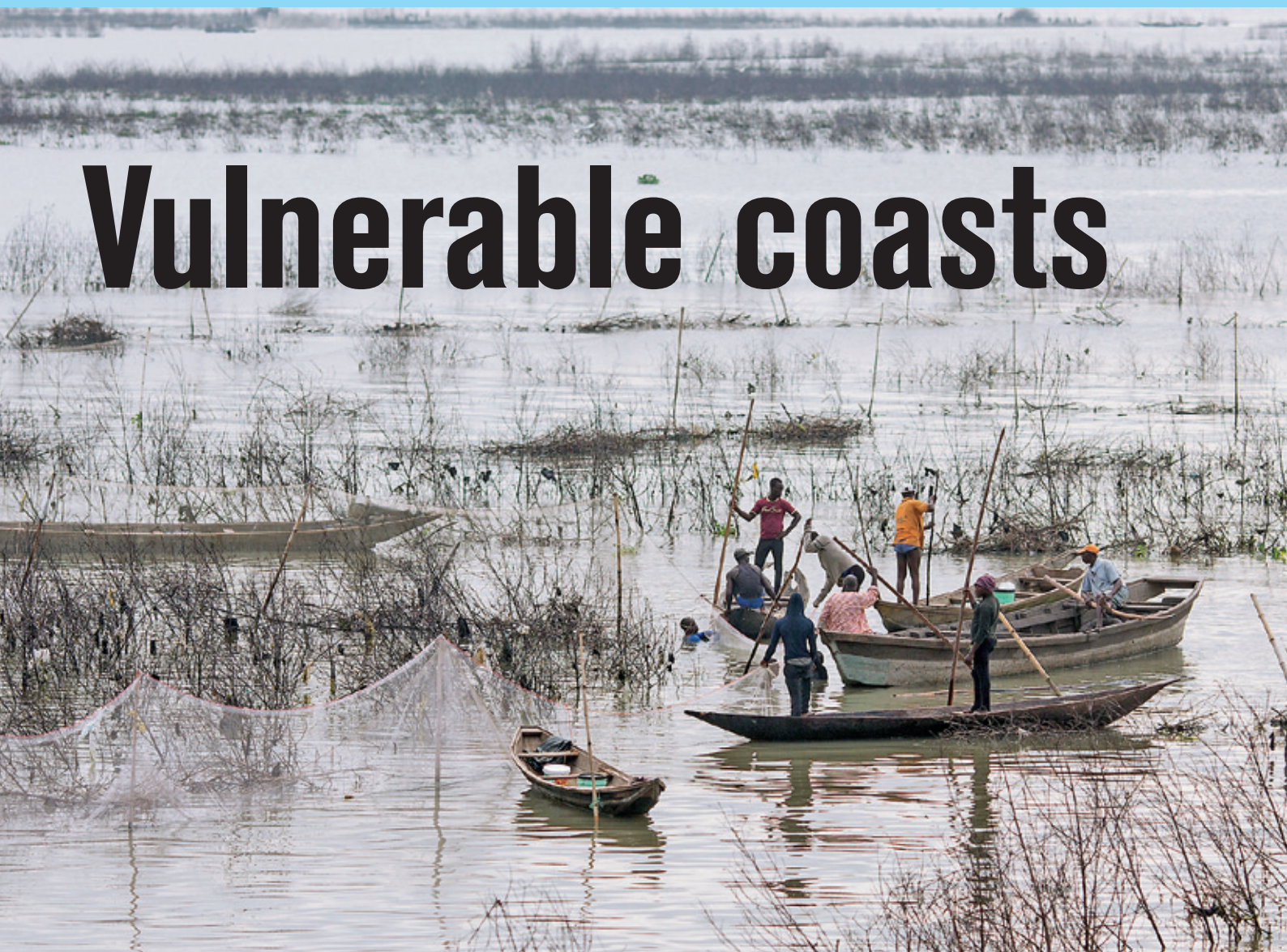
International Journal

ISSN
2366-7257
April 2017

POVERTY REDUCTION
The difference minimum wages might make

LANGUAGE POLITICS
Cameroon's government is suppressing the Anglophone minority

SOFT LAW
The Sustainable Development Goals have important legal implications



Vulnerable coasts

In German in E+Z
Entwicklung und Zusammenarbeit.
Both language versions
at www.DandC.eu

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Front page: Fishermen in Lagos Lagoon.
Photo: Hannibal Hanschke/picture-alliance/dpa

FOCUS

Vulnerable coasts

Urgent action

Bangladesh is exposed to the rising sea level, and climate change is anticipated to make extreme weather events ever more likely. Salinisation is affecting people's livelihoods on delta islands. The country will not give up, however, writes Feisal Rahman of the Independent University, Dhaka. In Vietnam, measures are underway to protect the Mekong Delta, the country's rice bowl, from the impacts of climate change, as Severin Peters and Christian Henckes of GIZ report. Protecting mangrove forests is important, for example.
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Multilateral dimensions

Forced displacement due to disasters is one of the great humanitarian challenges in the 21st century. The Platform on Disaster Displacement is a multilateral initiative designed to tackle the issue, as staff members elaborate. Seas are of geo-strategic relevance, and who controls coastal waters can be an issue of controversy. Philippine journalist Alan C. Robles assesses the case of the South China Sea. Finally, trade depends on ports, and the lack of access to the sea hampers a country's development. Unless the neighbours of landlocked developing countries are cooperative and have good infrastructure, trade suffers in landlocked developing countries, as Kacana Sipangule of Universität Göttingen explains. **PAGES 26, 31, 33**

New islands for the rich

Though the sea level is set to rise, Lagos is growing out into the Atlantic Ocean. Recent years have been marked by a scramble for coastal plots. Poor communities are being evicted. Urban activist Olamide Udoma-Ejorh reports. **PAGE 35**

Marginalised fishing communities

Overfishing is depleting fish stocks before West-African coasts, and the environmental impacts of oil production are compounding problems. Nnimmo Bassey of the Health of Mother Earth Foundation, a Nigerian non-governmental organisation, assesses the matters. Meanwhile in Mexico, coastal communities are still waiting to be compensated by BP for the impacts of the Deepwater Horizon disaster seven years ago. As Virginia Mercado and Luis A. Soto of the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México point out, Mexico's government has other priorities than to support their legal fight. **PAGES 37, 39**

EDITORIAL

Particular urgency

Shanghai, Mumbai, Lagos, Istanbul, Buenos Aires, New York and many other big cities are on the sea. One reason is that trade and industry depend on ports. Another reason is that land tends to be fertile where rivers flow into the sea, so it was feasible early in history to feed urban centres. Many small towns and villages are also close to shorelines. According to UN statistics, about 40 % of humankind live within 100 kilometres from the sea. Historically, they depended on farms, fishing and trade.

Populations are growing, and so is population density, reducing the land available for agriculture. Pollution and resource depletion, moreover, result in the dwindling of fish stocks. Trawlers from many countries are contributing to overfishing. Traditional livelihoods are being eroded.

Coastal communities are exposed to specific risks. Storms and floods have always been dangerous, and global warming is now making extreme weather more frequent and more forceful. Because of flooding, fields become saline, reducing the scope for agriculture. Some farms are becoming unviable. An implication of the rising sea level, moreover, is that the ground water is affected too. Where it becomes too saline, it no longer quenches the thirst of humans and beasts.

Policymaker face major challenges. They must ensure that infrastructure – from roads to water and power supply – is improved and made resilient. Embankments must be fortified, dykes must be raised and protective vegetation must be planted. Storm shelters, early warning systems and disaster plans are needed.

These challenges do not only arise in rural areas. Many urban agglomerations are growing very fast, especially in Africa. Their transport systems, utilities, sanitation and waste management are overburdened. They need more and better health-care and education facilities. Decent jobs must be generated.

Rising to this multitude of challenges will require technical competence, sufficient funding and good governance. The big issues include fighting poverty, protecting the environment, stimulating the economy, building infrastructure and institutions. These are, of course, things that development agencies are familiar with – but the urgency to act is especially striking in coastal areas.

Industrialised countries must not shy away from their responsibility. This is not an issue of charity. The enlightened self-interest of advanced nations is to see other societies prosper in peace. Political stability is of global relevance, and trade with strong economies is much more profitable than trade with poor economies. Moreover, the rich countries have contributed most to causing climate change. They must not abandon the victims to their fate.

In international affairs, the term "climate refugee" is not officially accepted yet. It should be. Migration from coastal areas is happening. Extreme heat, extended droughts, salinisation and other kinds of slow-onset change will make various areas in many world regions inhabitable.

The international community will have to deal with this problem. Preventive action makes sense. We need climate protection – and effective development cooperation. The better livelihoods are safeguarded and even improved in coastal regions, the fewer people will be forced to leave those regions.

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Debate

Discrimination

Cameroon's Anglophone minority has long felt marginalised. Labour action by a teachers union has triggered a mass movement, affecting the entire country and revealing the political system's deficiencies. As Jonathan Bashi, a legal scholar reports, members of the Francophone community demand substantial democracy, freedom of speech and the right to self-determination. **PAGE 13**

Millions of people at risk

Famine is haunting East and Central Africa. Civil war and bad governance are the main reasons. Fast response to the first indicators of famines can prevent disaster, argues Christoph Schneider-Yattara of the faith-based ACT Alliance. So far, however, only half of the required funding has been made available internationally. **PAGE 14**

Tribune

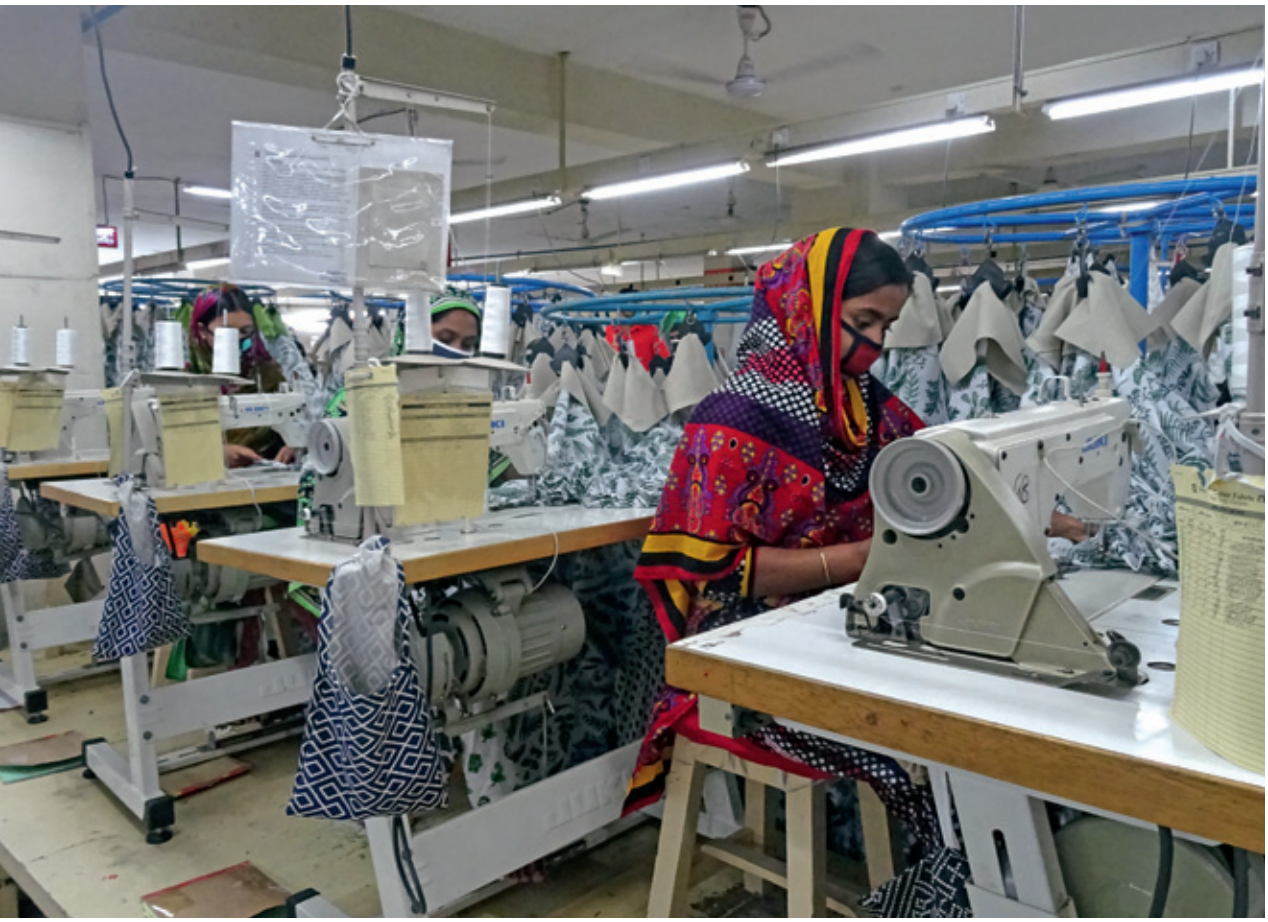
Voluntary acceptance

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has been called "a contract for the future of the world". The document is not a contract in a binding legal sense, of course, and must be understood as non-binding "soft law". Markus Kaltenborn of Ruhr-Universität Bochum and Heike Kuhn of Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development argue that it largely reflects and reinforces existing international law. **PAGE 17**

Photos: Kepseu/picture-alliance/africamediaonline, Lane/picture-alliance/dpa

WORLD ECONOMY

Sustainability requires fair wages



What most seamstresses earn in Bangladesh does not provide a decent living.

Photo: sb

"Green economy" in the sense of environmental sustainability is the slogan that points the way forward for economic development. Friedel Hütz-Adams, a researcher at the non-governmental Südwind Institute in Germany, argues that it requires fair pay for employees. In a recent book, Georgios Zervas and Peter Spiegel go one step further: they call for a global minimum wage of one dollar per hour to eliminate poverty and exploitation worldwide.

By Sabine Balk

According to Hütz-Adams, the global economy can only be made more sustainable if environmental progress is flanked by social progress. A central issue, he states, is how high wages and incomes need to be to provide people with sustainable livelihoods everywhere. The researcher argues that national minimum wage legislation has often proved insufficient to ensure decent standards of living in developing and emerging countries. Therefore, a large number of organisations, trade unions and companies are endeavouring to define and implement living wages in many countries and sectors.

According to Hütz-Adams, recent research indicates that it is possible to define appropriate living wage for a given geographical region. Most organisations campaigning for fair pay use the Anker method for this purpose. It was developed by econo-

mist Richard Anker, a former senior economist at the International Labour Organisation (ILO). His method is based on the following information:

- the cost of an affordable, nutritious diet,
- the cost of acceptable basic housing,
- the cost of clothing and footwear and
- the cost of covering other essential needs.

An appropriate living wage can be calculated on the base of these costs and the size of wage-earners' households. Hütz-Adams warns, however, that calculating cost of living can be very difficult in developing countries, where statistical data tend to be unreliable or even unavailable. Moreover, costs often vary dramatically within countries.

Bangladesh is a country where numerous organisations are currently working on the implementation of a living wage. Eighty percent of the country's garments industry is concentrated in and around Dhaka, the capital. To apply the Anker method, comprehensive data was collected in the spring of 2016. The costs of food and housing were checked, for instance. Hütz-Adams calls the results "sobering". On the outskirts of the agglomeration, a living wage is the equivalent of $177, but $214 are required in its centre. The wages that are actually paid range from $69 to $83 a month, depending on skill level, which implies that wages would have to more than double to ensure a decent livelihood.

Studies on pay levels are similarly being carried out for other sectors and countries – for instance for cut flowers from Kenya, tea from Malawi or electronic goods from China. The findings differ dramatically, but in most cases the wages paid are not sufficient to meet the cost of living. As Hütz-Adams explains, things are even harder to assess in regard to smallholder farmers.

Implementing a living wage is the next challenge, as Hütz-Adams points out. Attempts are being made in various sectors – including the garment industry in Bangladesh. "Everyone involved is aware that these processes take time," the author writes. One problem in the garment sector is that companies in the supply chain want to retain a fixed share of the prises as profit. The result is that if a garment leaves a factory at a moderately higher price to cover better pay for the workforce, the retail price rises exponentially. The retail price of a shirt that would cost three dollars might thus rise to nearly €16.

Stressing that the introduction of living wages is a long process that requires the involvement of many parties, Hütz-Adams offers advice to all of them. Everyone who is relevant in the supply chain – from company managers to trade-union leaders and government officials – should join networks committed to achieving the goal. Relevant data could then be systematically and comprehensively collated and made publicly available.

Hütz-Adams also wants the German government to act. He believes it should:

- make it a legal requirement that German companies have to pay living wages throughout the value chain,
- make the payment of living wages a precondition for public procurement,
- create complaint mechanisms so those who are not paid fairly can claim their rights and
- call for legally binding international standards that companies that operate internationally must observe.

The author also addresses demands to manufacturers and retailers. They should:

- design their supply chains in a way that allows them to understand the provenance of the products they buy and
- set price in a way that facilitates the payment of living wages throughout the supply chain.

Hütz-Adams believes that banks and other financiers should only make money available to companies that provide verifiable information concerning their commitment to social and environmental standards as well as human rights. Moreover, he sees a role for consumers, who should demand to know whether living wages were paid to everyone involved in the manufacture and distribution of a product.

Georgios Zervas, a management consultant, and Peter Spiegel, a futurologist, go a step further than Hütz-Adams. They propose an amazingly simple solution for tackling extreme poverty: a global minimum wage of one dollar an hour after taxes and contributions to national social protection schemes. The net wage of one dollar would have to be observed as an absolute minimum throughout the world. The authors claim that it would allow the worst forms of exploitative slave labour to be eliminated at one blow. It should apply to developing and emerging countries where there is currently no minimum wage or only a very low one, they argue.

Zervas and Spiegel also consider Bangladesh's garments industry an example. The minimum wage there is the equivalent of $ 50 a month, which amounts to 15 to 20 cents an hour. Raising it to one dollar would make a big difference. However, the two authors accept that a minimum wage is not implementable in every sector, especially not in agriculture.

Apart from raising employees' incomes, Zervas and Spiegel claim the one-dollar-an-hour solution would have another positive effect: to put a limit to wage competition in the developing word. Entire industries would not keep migrating from country to country in the hunt for ever lower wages. The authors insist their radical proposal would be economically feasible. If all companies were under the same obligation to pay a minimum wage of one dollar an hour, competition would not be distorted, they point out.

Moreover, Zervas and Spiegel see a minimum wage as the "most effective of all imaginable stimulus programmes for the global economy", because nearly all of the money earned by the poor is spent immediately and thus goes straight back into the economic cycle. Another advantage would be that international migration would decline as livelihoods in poor countries improve.

The problem with the proposal made by Zervas and Spiegel is its implementation. The authors only mention this issue fleetingly, calling for the ILO to approve the minimum wage and monitor its enforcement. In their eyes, the broadest possible coalition of business actors, civil society and policymakers should promote the reform.

BOOK AND LINK

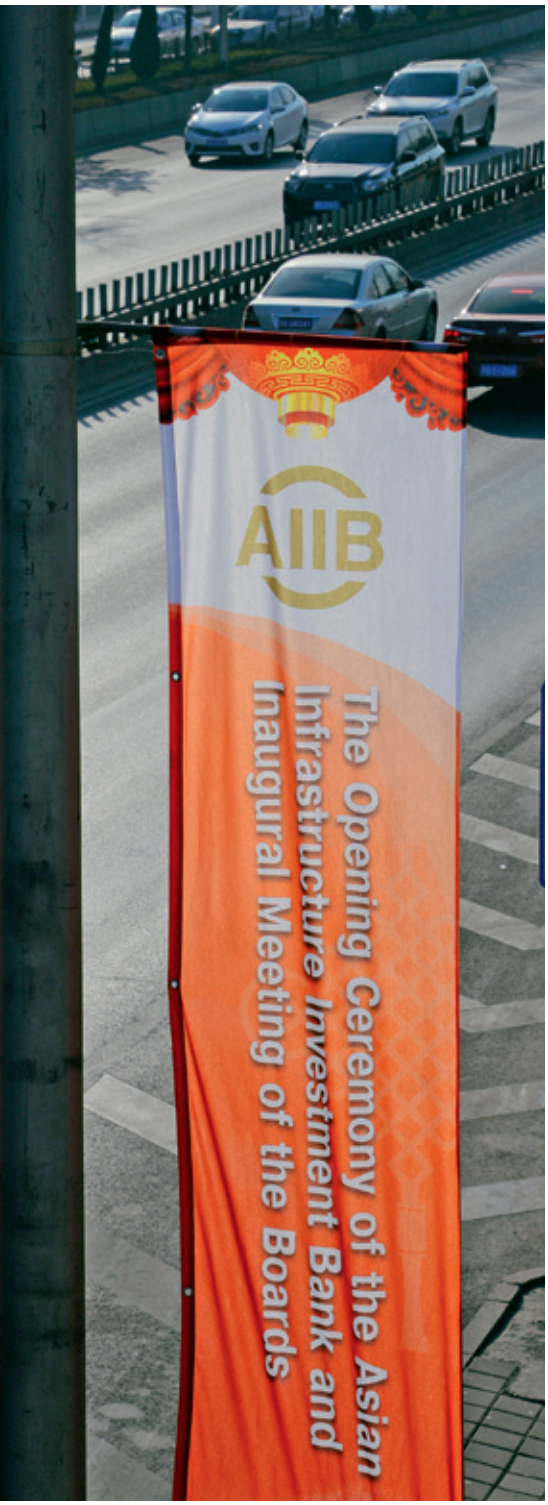
Zervas, G., and Spiegel, P., 2016: Die 1-Dollar Revolution (The one-dollar revolution). Piper, München/Berlin (only in German).

Hütz-Adams, F., 2017: Nachhaltigkeit erfordert Gerechtigkeit (Sustainability requires fairness) (only in German).

http://www.suedwind-institut.de/fileadmin/fuerSuedwind/Publikationen/2017/2017-03_Nachhaltigkeit_erfordert_Gerechtigkeit.pdf

AIIB

Lacking standards



Many questions concerning social standards remain unanswered at the young AIIB.

Established at the initiative of China, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) started operations in 2016. Civil-society organisations criticise the multilateral institution for failing to take account of human rights violations in the context of its funding programmes. German policymakers, however, hope they will have a positive influence on the AIIB.

By Lea Diehl

Considering its economic strength, China is underrepresented in the established international financial institutions (IFIs), where the tone is set by the United States, EU member countries and Japan. The creation of the AIIB was a response to that – as well as an attempt to boost Beijing's international influence.

The AIIB's mission is to promote social and economic development, especially in Asia. It grants and facilitates long-term loans that would not be available without it. The bank seeks to strengthen regional cooperation, supporting public as well as private investments.

The AIIB's founding members include European nations. Germany is the biggest European shareholder and holds 4.1 % of the voting rights. Therefore, environmental and human-rights organisations believe that Germany has a special responsibility.

Urgewald is one such organisation. In its view, the AIIB needs to adopt and observe appropriate social and environmental standards, but it is failing on both fronts. In the critics' eyes, one example is a Indonesian slum upgrading project in the context of which the human rights of women and indigenous people were violated. The project is co-financed by the AIIB and the World Bank.

For a long time, environmental and human-rights organisations have been complaining about established IFIs only applying inadequate environmental and social standards. Now they accuse the AIIB of failing to meet even those standards.

The AIIB cooperates with established IFIs on many projects. Nevertheless, it is their competitor, says Arntraud Hartmann, a member of a standards-monitoring committee at the Asian Development Bank (ADB). She warns that in the long run the desire to attract clients will result in the lowering of standards at all multilateral banks.

In regard to energy projects, for example, the AIIB's guidelines are less strict than those of the World Bank. The AIIB rules out neither coal projects nor nuclear power, but AIIB President Jin Liqun says the bank's work is "lean, clean and green".

According to a Hawaiian critic, the AIIB pays little attention in its day-to-day operations to the grand principles it claims to be committed to. Her point is that the bank lacks transparency and reliable control mechanisms.

This view was shared by experts attending an urgewald meeting to discuss the AIIB in Berlin last month. Many demanded that AIIB involve both its shareholders and civil society in project planning and evaluation processes. A first step – it was suggested – would be to provide earlier and fuller information on projects and complaint mechanisms.

QUESTIONABLE COOPERATION PARTNER

Members of the German Bundestag, however, hope to have a positive influence on the AIIB.

Social Democrat Manfred Zöllmer sees German participation as an opportunity to exert pressure on Beijing to adopt appropriate standards in the future. However, he admits that it will take time. "The AIIB needs to observe standards that are not the norm in China and that the Chinese are not familiar with," says Zöllmer, who is a member of the Bundestag's finance committee.

How much influence Germany will really have on the environmental and human-rights situation in the target regions is debatable, says Thomas Gambke, who belongs to the Green party. He argues that the AIIB's European shareholders must cooperate to gain more influence.

Philip Murman of the Christian Democrats says the AIIB might facilitate investments beyond what the Asian Development Bank is doing. In his eyes, for example, there is a great need to invest in rural health care and education.

"The AIIB will try to improve matters," promises AIIB press spokesman Yuanjiang Sun, pointing out that the AIIB is still in its infancy and plans to work on standards and strategies.

Photo: picture-alliance/Hu Qingming/Imaginechina/dpa

INEQUALITY

Redistributing money and power

Despite progress in many areas such as fighting hunger and poverty, social inequality keeps growing. It undermines social cohesion and trust in democracy, hampering economic growth and preventing social advancement. The whole of society is affected. That is true in poor and rich countries.

By Katja Dombrowski

Oxfam, the international non-governmental organisation (NGO), estimates that 70 % of the world population live in countries where the gap between rich and poor has grown over the past 30 years. Developing countries, emerging markets and industrial countries are equally affected. According to Oxfam, rising disparities of income and wealth are among the biggest global challenges in economic, social and political terms. Even the business-dominated World Economic Forum sees income disparity as a key risk in the next decade.

Economic inequality affects many areas of life, including life expectancy, education opportunities and health. According to Oxfam, it reinforces other inequalities such as those owed to gender, ethnicity or religion. In countries with growing income gaps, crime and violent conflicts are to increase too. Contrary to former beliefs, inequality hampers economic growth and its effects on reducing poverty, the NGO states.

The global community has acknowledged the problem. Reducing inequality is one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that the UN adopted in 2015. Accordingly, money and power must radically be redistributed, Oxfam argues. "Governments can close the gap between poor and rich if they break away from pure belief in the market and confront the interests of powerful elites," the NGO states in a recent update of the summary of its 2014 report „Even it up – time to end extreme inequality". Redistribution is the only way to create equal chances for all, it argues.

Oxfam is calling for concerted action to build a fairer economic and political system that will value every citizen's rights. Policies must be implemented concerning regulation and taxation, minimum wages, social transfers and free access to the education and health-care systems, for instance.

The report identifies international tax loopholes as a major problem. Developing countries lose at least $ 100 billion per year due to multinational corporations' tax avoidance and evasion (see D+C/E+Z 2017/3, p. 12). The practice costs Bangladesh alone $ 310 million every year – enough to finance a fifth of the country's overall expenditure on primary education.

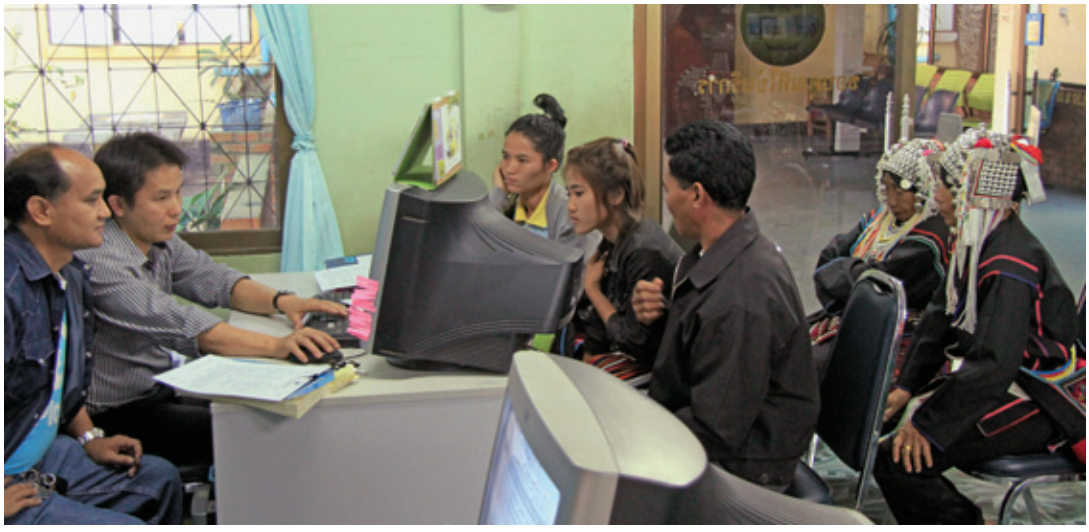
Ensuring equal opportunities for women is another essential issue. Gender inequality and income inequality are closely related. Studies have shown that, in highly unequal societies, girls are less likely to get higher education, parliaments have fewer female members and the income gap between men and women is bigger. In Ethiopia, for instance, the poorest women residing in the countryside are six times less likely to have ever gone to school than the richest male city dwellers.

Oxfam demands equal rights for men and women, for example in laws concerning inheritance and land ownership. Moreover, the NGO is in favour of a fairer division of labour between the sexes. It also wants unpaid care work to be paid.

Most people all over the world reject strong inequality as unfair, unethical and harmful for society, as surveys show. Current debate on excessive manager salaries in Germany and Europe are a sign of such awareness, and so is criticism of corrupt "elites" who are enriching themselves worldwide. According to Oxfam, governments should listen to their people and exercise more control and regulation to reverse the trend towards growing inequality.

LINK

Oxfam, 2014: Even it up – time to end extreme inequality.
https://www.oxfam.de/system/files/20141029-even-it-up-extreme-inequality.pdf



Income disparity enforces other existing inequalities such as ethnic inequality: many members of ethnic minorities in Thailand need interpreters when dealing with public offices.

Photo: kd

AUTHORITARIAN RULE

Stick to principles

For human-rights defenders in Iran, the situation has deteriorated since the 2015 "nuclear deal", in which the USA, Germany, France, Britain, Russia and China agreed to lift some economic sanctions if Iran limited its nuclear programme. The regime must now be held accountable for observing the human rights treaties it has signed. Companies that do business in Iran should pay attention to these matters, argues Amnesty International (AI).

By Ellen Thalman

Last year, authorities in Iran "intensified their repression of human-rights defenders", according to a report recently launched by AI. Arrests of peaceful demonstrators and unfair trials by Iran's Revolutionary Courts are increasingly justified on national security grounds. In addition, detainees are tortured, and there were hundreds of executions in 2016. AI also points out that the regime fails to prevent violence and discrimination towards women, religious and ethnic minorities. Making matters worse, Iranian courts increasingly regard that criticism of the country's human-rights record and related communication with the UN and other international agencies as criminal activism.

Human-rights defenders fear the so-called "nuclear deal" is giving Iran carte blanche to ignore its responsibilities under international law. Iran has signed several relevant agreements, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

With sanctions lifted, the country can now pursue deals that give it access to much-needed goods and technology, guaranteeing hefty exports and profits for trading partners. René Wildangel of AI, however, says that "renewed relations should be used as an opportunity to improve the human-rights situation." He wants western governments to put pressure on Iran in regard to human rights. "There should be a certain conditionality in extending and deepening economic ties." He is in favour of parliamentary delegations from Germany and other European countries demanding to see political prisoners, for example.

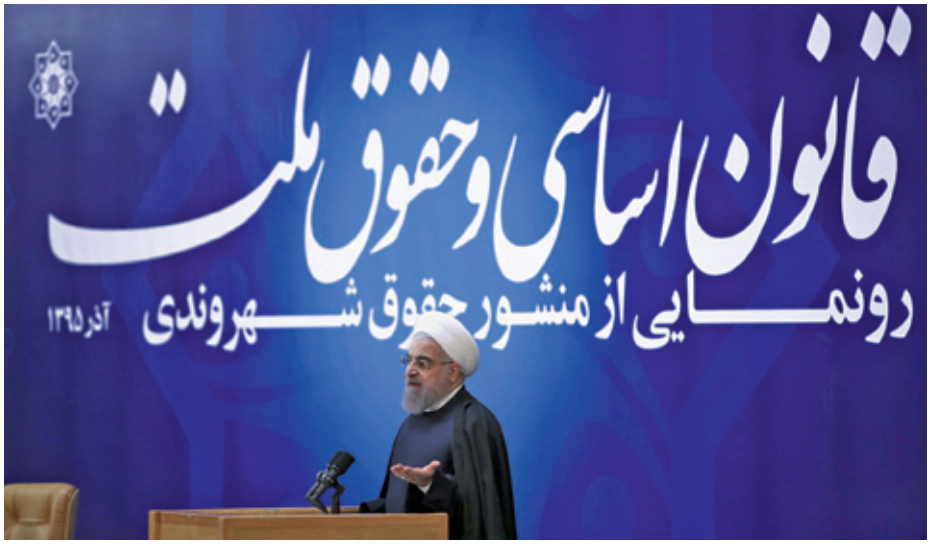
Ali Fathollah-Nejad, who is associated with both the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) and the Harvard Kennedy School similarly believes that western countries have leverage: "Iranian elites are very much aware that they need the west because the west has a comparative advantage: technology and know-how."

Iran's regime is well aware of other authoritarian regimes doing business with the west without serious consequences for flouting human rights, however. Fathollah-Nejad wants the west to "think creatively about the means of influencing human rights and civil society in Iran". Conditionality in business dealings could make sense. At the same time, he warns that it would be a huge mistake to return to the crippling sanctions of the early 2000s, because such a stance would only boost the influence of Iran's hardliners. US President Donald Trump has threatened to reverse the nuclear deal.

In Fatollah-Nejad's eyes, western governments' approach to Iran is guided by a misleading "paradigm of authoritarian stability", a pattern he says is common around the world. He warns that support for dictatorships does not lead to long-term stability, as was "forcefully shown by the Arab Spring". Compounding matters, cooperation with authoritarian regimes tends to only benefit a small group of elites.

According to an analysis done by the news agency Reuters, Iran's hardliners have indeed been the greatest beneficiaries of resurging trade. Of 110 agreements valued at around $ 80 billion, 90 were with state-owned or state-controlled companies. Even Supreme Leader Ayatollah Chamenei was involved in some deals, Reuters reports.

Iran-observers do not expect the human-rights situation to improve in Iran in the run-up to the presidential election in May. Hassan Rouhani, the incumbent head of state, is running again, and hardliners will attack him, arguing that he is weak and the nuclear deal has not paid off for masses of Iranians. At the same time, observers find western trends towards populist leadership alarming – especially in the USA. Experts agree that it makes the situation of human-rights activists more difficult in countries under authoritarian rule if the west is seen to neglect its own democratic principles.



President Hassan Rouhani wants to be re-elected in May.

Photo: picture-alliance/AP Photo

LINK

Amnesty International Annual Report on Iran:
https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/iran/report-iran/

CRISES

Neglected by the world

Burundi is a troubled country – protest rally in Bujumbura in February.

Media attention and the fundraising of humanitarian agencies are interrelated. According to CARE, the aid agency, journalists matter because their coverage has an impact on the willingness of people in rich nations to donate money as well as on the action of their political leaders. Unfortunately, many crises do not make headlines internationally.

By Dagmar Wolf

A recent report published by CARE has the title "Suffering in silence". It lists 10 major humanitarian crises that only got little media attention in 2016. In cooperation with the Meltwater Group, a media agency, CARE has assessed more than 250,000 sources online.

One of the neglected crises concerns Eritrea. According to CARE, the country has been largely sealed off, and neither journalists nor aid agencies get sufficient information. The UN reckons that some 2 million people in Eritrea do not get enough food, and about 50 % of the children are affected by malnutrition and stunting. About 5,000 Eritreans are fleeing the country every month in order to escape violence, economic misery and lifelong military service.

Burundi is another country on the CARE list. The authors write that a political conflict has escalated into a crisis so severe that some 3 million people require humanitarian aid. Many farmers cannot till the land, the report points out, and women and children lack basic services – including health care, water, food and sanitation. The estimates are that some 130,000 people have been displaced internally, and 300,000 have fled to neighbouring countries.

North Korea is another country that did not get sufficient attention in 2016. Apart from sporadic news concerning nuclear tests, the international community does not get much information. The humanitarian situation is bad, however, as CARE points out, with 70 % of the people – including 2 million children, pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers – not getting enough to eat.

The media, moreover, are not showing much interest in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which has been haunted by strife for over 20 years. Increasing violence has shattered hopes for peace last year, according to CARE, and many children and teenagers consider violence and war to be normal. Several issues are said to be compounding the humanitarian problems, including clashes of armed gangs, draught, the impact of the climate phenomenon El Niño and the inflow of refugees from neighbouring countries such as Burundi, South Sudan and the Central African Republic.

Other neglected crises on the CARE list concern Madagascar, the Lake Chad Bassin, Bangladesh, Papua New Guinea, the Central African Republic and Sudan. Since neglecting crises means to neglect people, CARE calls for more media attention.

In Germany, CARE and ten other humanitarian agencies have joined hands with the German Foreign Office in a campaign called "#nichtvergesser" (not-forgetters). The idea is to raise awareness of the plight of millions of people who desperately need support in order to be able to survive.

To facilitate humanitarian relief, CARE raises the following demands:

- Conflicts must end. Accordingly, political leaders must rise to their responsibilities, and the UN Security Council needs to be reformed.
- More money must be made available. Major humanitarian crises must be acknowledged, and funding decisions must not depend on political convenience.
- International humanitarian law must be upheld. Attacks on aid workers must stop, and perpetrators must be taken to court.
- Local people must be empowered. National and local capacities for dealing with disasters must be developed.
- Women must be made agents of change. They are worst affected by strife. Moreover, the most humanitarian relief is relief that directly addresses women. Nonetheless, only one percent of funding for fragile states was invested in women's groups in 2013, for example.
- The media need a boost too. Because of reduced revenues and budgets, media houses have slashed the number of reporters in crisis regions.

LINKS

CARE, 2017: Suffering in silence. The 10 most under-reported humanitarian crises of 2016.
http://insights.careinternational.org.uk/media/k2/attachments/REPORT_Suffering_in_Silence_web_version.pdf
Campaign #nichtvergesser:
http://www.nichtvergesser.de

Photo: picture alliance/AA

Call for Papers and Inputs

PEGNet Conference 2017

Understanding national inequalities and how to address them

Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, NADEL – Center for Development and Cooperation, Zurich, Switzerland

11-12 September, 2017

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Dramatic threat to maize harvest

A new pest is threatening maize crops and thus undermining food security in various African countries. It is called the armyworm, but is really a kind of moth, the caterpillars of which eat their way through vegetation at their march across fields. The pest is native to North and South America and was first identified in Africa in 2016. Its presence has been confirmed in West Africa as well as in the South and East of the continent. Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa and Zambia are among the affected countries.

The armyworm's scientific name is spodoptera frugiperda. It is a kind of moth that spreads very quickly. The caterpillars feed on almost anything: maize, soy, peanuts and potatoes. The impact on maize is worst. Young plants die completely. In older plants, the caterpillar destroys the corncob from inside. The farmers only notice too late that their fields are infected. Depending on the extent of the infestation, 15 % to 73 % of the harvest is destroyed.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) held an emergency meeting in Harare, Zimbabwe, in mid-February. At least seven Southern African countries are now affected. Their people make up more than 70 % of the total population of Southern Africa. According to David Phiri, the FAO's subregional coordinator, "the armyworm is a new threat in Southern Africa, and we are very concerned with the emergence, intensity and spread of the pest. It is only a matter of time before most of the region will be affected."

At the emergency meeting, 16 African countries agreed on plans of action. They fast want to boost the region's capacity to manage emerging crop pests and livestock diseases by strengthening early warning systems as well as response and preparedness plans.

According to Dora Siliya, Zambia's minister of agriculture, the armyworm had destroyed an estimated 124,000 hectares of cultivated maize fields in the country by mid-February. Such destruction may lead to food insecurity in Zambia and neighbouring countries Malawi and Zimbabwe, which depend on imports from Zambia. The armyworm also destroyed maize fields in Malawi in the current farming season. Zambia's President Edgar Lungu ordered the Zambian Air Force to assist in distributing chemicals to control the pests. However, not all the farmers have access to the chemicals. Farmer Maria Chilonga says that she had to resort to using washing detergent. "I smeared detergent on the maize leaves," she reports. "Some of the worms died, but most of my crop was destroyed."

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Photo: picture-alliance/Photoshot

Armyworms on corn plant.

IMPRINT

D+C DEVELOPMENT AND COOPERATION
Vol. 44, 2017
D+C is published together with the German edition E+Z
Internet: www.DandC.eu
D 12 107 ISSN 0721-2178

Published on assignment from:
D+C Development and Cooperation is funded by Germany´s Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and commissioned by ENGAGEMENT GLOBAL. D+C does not serve as a governmental mouthpiece. Our mission is to provide a credible forum of debate, involving governments, civil society, the private sector and academia at an international level. D+C is the identical twin of E+Z Entwicklung und Zusammenarbeit, the German edition.

ENGAGEMENT GLOBAL gGmbH
Service für Entwicklungsinitiativen
Tulpenfeld 7
53113 Bonn
Tel. (02 28) 2 07 17-0
Fax (02 28) 2 07 17-150
www.engagement-global.de

ADVISORY BOARD:
Thomas Loster, Prof. Dr. Katharina Michaelowa, Prof. Dr. Dirk Messner, Petra Pinzler, Hugh Williamson

PUBLISHER:
Frankfurter Societäts-Medien GmbH
Executive director: Oliver Rohloff

ADDRESS OF THE PUBLISHER AND EDITORIAL OFFICE:
Frankenallee 71–81, D-60327 Frankfurt am Main, Germany

This is also the legally relevant address of all indicated as responsible or entitled to represent them in this imprint.

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ADVERTISING AND SUBSCRIPTION SERVICE:
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c/o InTime Media Services GmbH
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PRICES (INCL. MAILING CHARGES):
single issue: € 2.20
annual subscription, Germany: € 14.00
annual subscription, world: € 18.00

PRINTING:
Westdeutsche Verlags- und Druckerei GmbH
Kurhessenstraße 46
64546 Mörfelden-Walldorf, Germany

MENA

Maghreb at risk

In the lack of sustainable development and social progress, political stability is at risk in the Maghreb. Instability may have fatal consequences for Europe.

By Nassir Djafari

More than six years ago, the Arab spring began in a provincial town in Tunisia and quickly spread to the entire Arab world. Millions of people took to the streets to protest against injustice, despotism and corruption. Europe applauded, and hopes were high for a democratic transformation.

Today, however, Tunisia is the only Arab country that managed to not only overthrow a dictatorship, but replaced it with an operational democracy.

In Morocco, the King held onto power by introducing selected reforms. In Algeria, uprisings were limited, since people were still too exhausted from almost a decade of civil war in the 1990s. In Libya, the state collapsed, posing risks to the entire region. Global attention was fast distracted from the Maghreb as escalating violence in Syria and Iraq seemed more important.

In the meantime, people from the Maghreb have perpetrated terrorist violence in Europe. These attacks made it evident that something is brewing in North Africa that directly threatens European security.

The social conditions that led to mass protests in 2011 remain unchanged. In fact, Tunisia is economically worse off now than it was in 2011. Tourism is Tunisia's most important industry, but in view of worsening security, fewer tourists are coming. A sense of hopelessness prevails in Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco due to extremely high youth unemployment. Corrupt state authorities compound the problems.

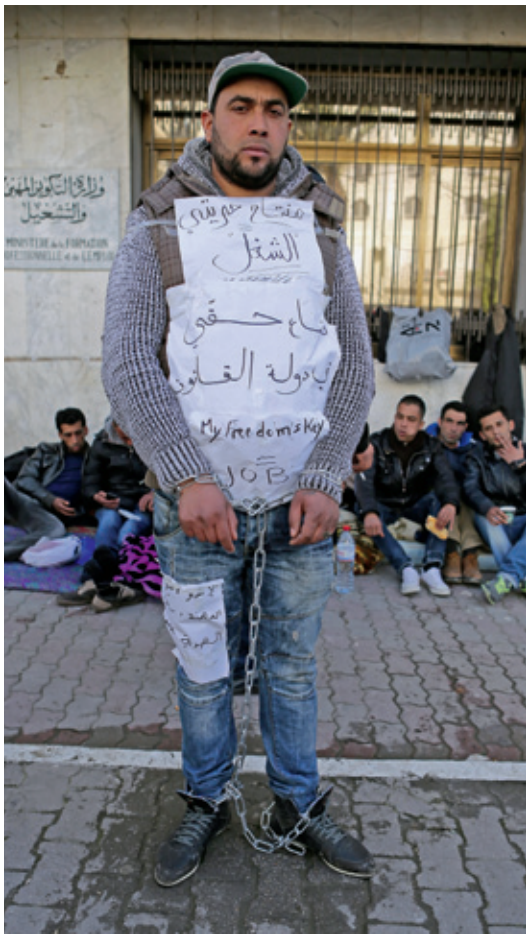
The governments did introduce some reforms, but their commitment was only half-hearted. The fear of new uprisings is great. The Algerian government, for example, is shying away from implementing tax reforms and reducing the food and fuel subsidies it can hardly afford. In Tunisia, a reform of public administration is failing because the government is afraid of reducing the extremely high number of civil servants.

Meanwhile, the people's problems are getting worse. Frustration is vented again and again in mass protests. The most severe social unrest since 2011 rocked Tunisia in January 2016. Morocco and Algeria also saw violent clashes between demonstrators and police. The rallies were triggered by the reduction of subsidies for goods that matter in daily life as well as by authorities' abusive behaviour. That protests escalate further is only a matter of time. With ISIS, the civil wars in the Middle East and the chaos in Libya, the political situation in the greater region is even more explosive today than it was before the Arab spring,

Nonetheless, the policies adopted by the EU and its member states in regard to the Maghreb are primarily marked by domestic concerns. The focus is on sending asylum seekers and criminal offenders back to where they came from. European policymakers are interested in bilateral readmission agreements and the establishment of refugee camps in North Africa. In return, the EU suggests that cooperative governments will get more development aid. At the same time, it threatens to cut aid to countries that do not cooperate.

It is certainly legitimate for European diplomats to take domestic concerns into account. However, it would be short-sighted to dismiss the risks that an economically weakened and politically fragile Maghreb will pose. To tackle the issues, concerted action by the EU and its member states – above all Germany and France – is needed. The ticking social time bomb must be defused.

To support sustainable development and inclusive economic growth, a mix of instruments is required. It exceeds development aid. The EU, after all, is by far the biggest trading partner of the three North African countries. To unlock new opportunities and generate more employment, closer economic cooperation and the reduction of trade barriers make sense. Growth could offer alienated young people prospects at home. This is what policymakers must stress in dialogue with North African partners. Conditionality or even threats are not helpful. For Europe's future, peace and stability in North Africa matter more than ever before.



Young Tunisians protesting in front of the Ministry of Labour in February 2016.

Photo: picture-alliance/dpa

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MARGINALISATION

Anglophone estrangement

At first sight, Cameroon is the perfect example of an African country which has managed to merge diverse political, historical and cultural backgrounds into one united nation. However, recent tensions in the two Anglophone provinces of the north-west and south-west have exposed the fragility of the country's political system and triggered a huge crisis. It originates from years of frustration and failed nation building.

By Jonathan Bashi

Cameroon's education system is dominated by the Francophone majority – sometimes to the detriment of pupils like six-year-old Nguewou Arthur, who is enrolled in the Anglophone section of his school in the capital Yaoundé.

The Republic of Cameroon was established in 1972. It resulted from a full merger of two formerly distinct entities: French Cameroon, which achieved its independence from France in 1960, and the southern region of neighbouring British Cameroon, which voted to join the former in 1961. The arrangement was concluded on the basis of equality and respect in order to promote national unity and guarantee the integrity of the territory. The country adopted both French and English as official languages. Both Civil Law (inspired by the French system) and Common Law (inspired by the British system) are integral parts of its legal system.

Nonetheless, the Anglophone population has always felt frustrated. The people concerned feel that their distinct origin, culture and history have been gradually assimilated by the Francophone majority in the name of national unity. Indeed, the government seems to favour the Francophone lifestyle and culture. Anglophones are denied key positions in the state system and only get deputy positions which do not hold real power. This is even true in the two Anglophone provinces and is also evident in most state-owned companies as well as in the judicial system.

Accordingly, the call for strikes by the teachers' trade union in November triggered a bigger protest movement. The people in the Anglophone regions used the opportunity to express their anger about the marginalisation and discrimination they experience.

The strike was launched in response to the dominance of Francophone teachers in English speaking schools, the government going as far as appointing Francophone teachers to teach English in those schools. A similar strike was called by lawyers' associations in the Anglophone regions to denounce a Francophone dominance in the judicial system and to demand a better recognition of Common Law.

In some places, protests escalated into violent clashes with the police and the burning of tires and the national flag. The government responded with robust repression. Measures included the arrest of opposition leaders. Internet access was shut down in the Anglophone regions.

This crisis is not just a simple dispute between the Anglophone populations and the Cameroonian government. It is the symptom of a more complex problem of governance that affects the entire country. President Paul Biya has been in office since 1982. His attitude is authoritarian. The protests have exposed the huge gap that exists between the central government and a population which does not identify with it. Moreover, there is a feeling shared by a large segment of the population, even including the Francophone section, that the aspirations of the people are not the government's priority.

Thus, what began as a strike and a list of demands from a certain fringe of the population, has turned into a struggle for true democracy, freedom of expression, the right to a decent life and self-determination. In response, the government should engage in an open dialogue with the people and revise the country's political system to allow the entire population, both Anglophones and Francophones, to express themselves and flourish freely.

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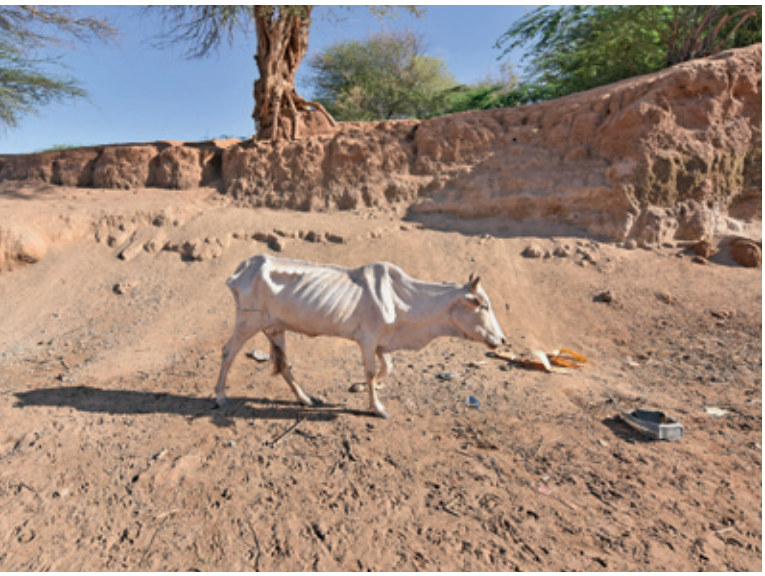
Photo: Kepseu/picture-alliance/africamediaonline

EMERGENCY RELIEF

Save human lives



When the animals die, the people lose hope: bull near the Somali-Ethiopian border in March 2017.

Famine in East Africa? Not again! That's the general impression one might get from the Western news and level of donations for disasters in Africa.

By Christoph Schneider-Yattara

Unfortunately, there have been many hunger catastrophes in the past years. It is also true that decades-long civil wars and bad governance have consequences. Ultimately, it is mostly the weakest in society – children, women and the elderly – who suffer and die.

Some claim that climate change is a political invention, while others recognise it to be a life-threatening reality. In 2015 and 2016, East Africa experienced severe droughts and floods, and at the beginning of 2017, the rainy season failed once more. Rains have always been influenced by the shifts of El Niño and La Niña – but the fluctuations are becoming stronger.

Failing rains mean lack of water and barren fields. Rivers and water sources dry up. Pastoralists (traveling herders) find no fields on which to graze their herd. Animal carcasses line the roads, portending the threat of famine.

In East Africa, pastoralist's herds generate income and serve as savings. When the animals die, the people lose hope. Hundreds of thousands of people are currently fleeing starvation in East Africa. They are contributing to a regional migration crisis that is hardly being noticed in Europe.

In East and Central Africa, millions are trying to escape drought, hunger, terror and civil war. Poverty and violence are closely interrelated, as conflicts intensify over dwindling resources. People are leaving their villages in Sudan, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda, Somalia, Burundi, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya and – across the Red Sea – Yemen.

Only a few of the refugees find their way to Europe. Most of them stay in the region. Although Ethiopia is not as wealthy as European countries, its borders are open. According to UN data, approximately 900 people are currently arriving in Ethiopia every day and approximately 3,000 are arriving in Uganda every day. In both cases, the refugees are coming from South Sudan.

According to the faith-based ACT Alliance, some 5.6 million people in Ethiopia currently need food aid and 9.1 million people have no access to safe drinking water. While 1.9 million families need assistance for the survival of their animals, 500,000 families depend on receiving new seed.

In Somalia, 6.2 million people – about half of the population – need food aid. Weakened bodies are susceptible to infections, and the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that more than 5 million Somalis are at acute risk of contracting cholera.

In Kenya, 2.7 million people are currently affected by drought and famine. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the situation is most dire in the region bordering Ethiopia and Somalia.

Relief is possible. First and foremost, donations are urgently needed. It is a matter of saving lives. According to OCHA, $ 2 billion are needed in the first half of 2017 for Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia alone. But the emergency in other countries matters too. Over $ 6.7 billion dollars are needed for a total of 23.4 million East Africans affected by crisis. Only half of this amount has been made available so far.

In the past few years, donations have only reached about one third of this need. As a result, aid organisations have only limited opportunities to provide relief.

Famines develop slowly. Timely action can prevent them. Water and food must be provided. Disease must be prevented. Seed must be stored and distributed appropriately, so fields can be tilled at the right moment. The logistical challenges are huge, but they can be dealt with.

Eradicating hunger by 2030 is one of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. This goal is attainable – but it requires decisive action. An old quote by Franklin D. Roosevelt is as timely as ever: "The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little."

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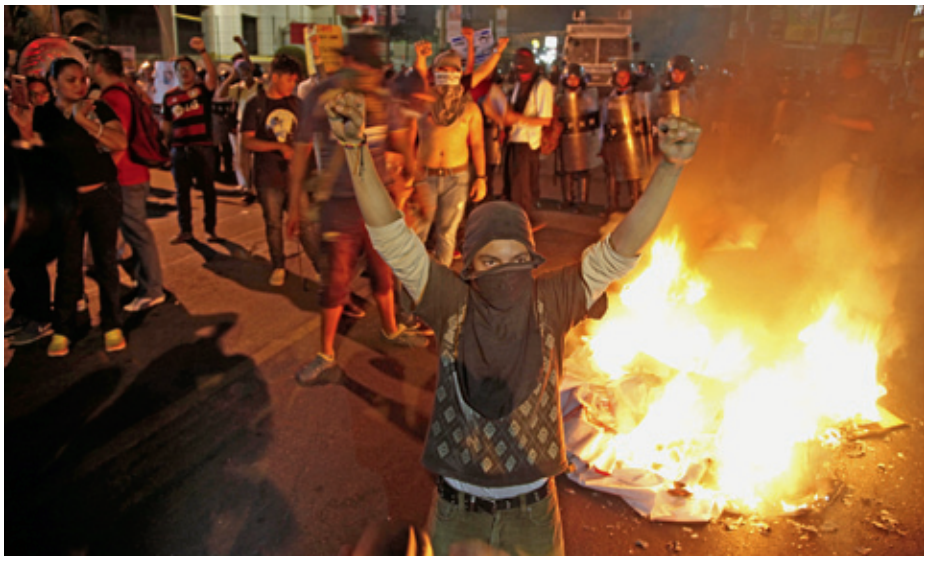
Photo: picture-alliance/zuma-press

DAMAGED DEMOCRACY

Who cares about the constitution?



Rally against President Juan Orlando Hernández in Tegucigalpa in February.

In Honduras, the constitution only allows presidents one single term, so the word "re-election" is a contradiction in itself. Nonetheless, Juan Orlando Hernández keeps telling people he wants to be re-elected. The country's democracy is seriously damaged, and he might put an end to it, should he prevail.

By Rita Trautmann

After dark years under military dictatorship, Honduras adopted a new constitution in 1982. The re-election of a president was ruled out for ever. Most of the constitution, however, was not adapted to democratic requirements, so the need for further reforms remains considerable.

National elites heard alarm bells ringing when Manuel Zelaya, a leftist president, announced a referendum on convening a new constituent assembly. They assumed that he intended to run for office once more, and this became the pretext for a coup.

Ever since, the National Party has been ruling with an iron fist. In 2012, it breached the constitution once more. The Congress fired five Supreme Court judges who had dared to rule against recent legislation. Who cares about the constitution anyway? In this context, it is no surprise that Hernández is quite outspoken about "re-election".

To bypass the constitution's crucial Article 239, his party is using flimsy legal arguments. Isn't it allowed to discuss re-election? Is it a criminal offence when a president declares he wants to be re-elected? And does the constitutional rule, that a president may only serve for one term, really conform with the constitution itself? The Supreme Court had to tackle these questions – and, in line with what those in power wanted – it decided that Article 239 breaches norms of international human rights.

This judgement is paradoxical and undermines democracy in a most dangerous way. The constitution is a democratic nation's supreme law, and it is the duty of its top judges to uphold it. The Supreme Court of Honduras, however, has ruled that a part of the constitution is unconstitutional. Who is to be trusted if the very institution that is in charge of safeguarding the constitution casts doubt on it? Crucial pillars of democracy are at stake, including the separation of the judicial, legislative and executive branches of government. Under Hernández, it has become more evident than ever that the courts are not independent in Honduras. Should he win the next elections, he would be free to establish autocratic rule.

The debate on re-election is ridiculous, especially if one considers the coup in 2009. Its leaders argued that it would be unconstitutional to re-elect Zelaya. It is now obvious that they were not worried about re-election in principle, but only about who was hoping to be re-elected. Unlike Zelaya, Hernández enjoys the support of the country's truly powerful elites. He has reinforced the military and made Congress pass laws that benefit the elite of oligarchs.

Hernández, of all people, is now saying he needs more time to introduce reforms. His track record in office is poor. In a corruption scandal of unprecedented dimensions, his party abused national social-protection funding worth $ 350 million for election-campaign purposes. As a result, government-run hospitals suffered a severe crisis, and about 3000 patients died because of a lack of pharmaceuticals.

The human-rights scenario is awful. Nowhere on earth are so many environmental activists murdered as in Honduras. Lawyers' lives are not safe either. In terms of press freedom, Honduras ranks 137th of 180 countries. Violence and increasing militarisation stand in the way of democratic development. As demanded by the USA, Honduras is fighting drugs – but so far, the results mostly prove that the government, the police and the armed forces have close links to drug gangs.

There are no more legal means to prevent the re-election of Hernández. Only broad-based popular resistance or opposition from the USA can stop him, and it does not look as though President Donald Trump is interested in doing so. Honduras needs the rule of law, separate branches of government and a fully-operational multi-party system. Democracy might help the country to overcome poverty, violence and human-rights abuses.

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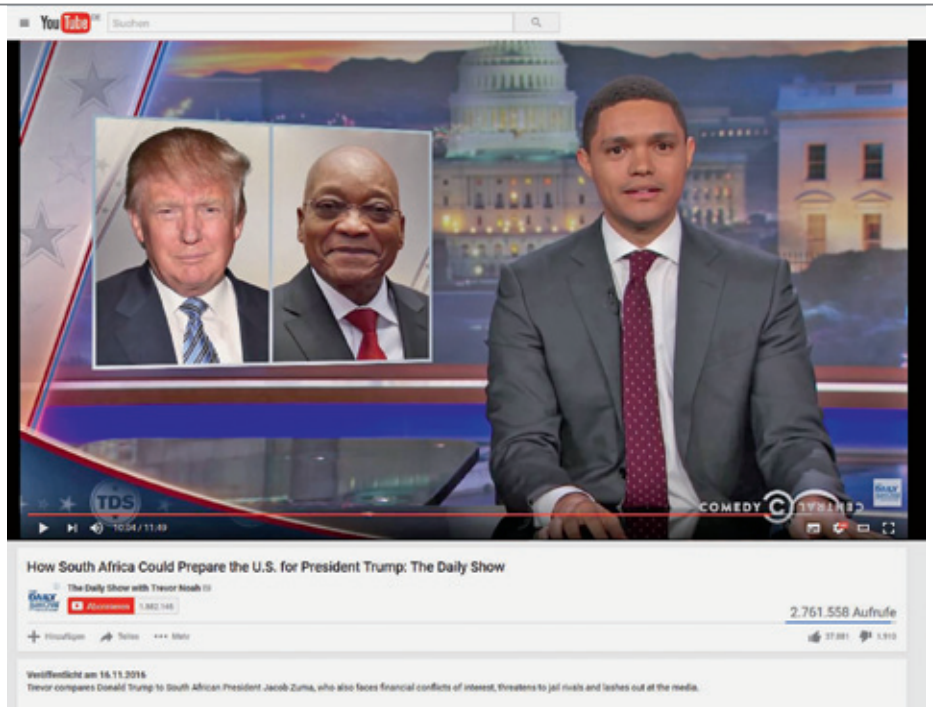
Photo: Antonio/picture-alliance/AP Photo

USA

Plainly unpresidential

People as different as Paul Krugman, the economist and New York Times columnist, and Trevor Noah, the South African TV comedian, have noted that Donald Trump's attitude towards public office is undemocratic and resembles that of Central-Asian or African leaders. He is known to lie, rely on cronies and promote his family's private interests. He shows disdain for constitutional checks and balances, but little interest in technically sound policymaking. He cannot deliver on grand promises and sees conspiracies everywhere.

By Hans Dembowski



Trevor Noah likening Donald Trump to Jacob Zuma.

Trump's first two months in office were chaotic. After his inauguration, he claimed that more people attended than ever before. Photos proved him wrong. Without proof, he said millions of votes had been cast illegally. He issued travel bans for people from seven predominantly Muslim countries, but both were struck down in court. The president's response was to belittle judges. Trump called media outlets that criticise him "enemies of the people". He did not want to shake hands with German Chancellor Angela Merkel in front of TV cameras. In March, he claimed, without evidence, that his predecessor had illegally tapped his phones.

Trump's first national security adviser had to resign because of lies concerning contacts with Russian officials. For similar reasons, his attorney general recused himself from all investigations relating to the election campaign, during which Russian spies are believed to have hacked computers of the party of Trump's opponent.

Previous presidents meticulously avoided conflicts of interest, but Trump's family business is benefiting. His sons are managing his brand, which has become more famous due to his rise to political power. The emoluments clause of the US constitution does not allow the president to accept money or favours from foreign states. Since he was elected, however, China granted the Trump Organization 39 trademarks of obvious business relevance in the People's Republic. A particularly interesting question is whether Trump depends on Russian financiers. He has a history of bankruptcies, so most US-based banks do not give his conglomerate loans. How does it finance huge investments? The president could clarify matters by publishing his tax returns – but he refuses to do so. Shady finances, of course, are typical of despotic clans.

At the end of February, many journalists wrote that Trump was finally acting "presidentially" because he had addressed the US Congress in a relatively mild-mannered way. However, the Washington Post listed 13 "notable" falsehoods in his speech. Moreover, a president must excel as a policymaker and not only reiterate campaign promises.

Two such promises were to cut taxes and to "repeal and replace" his predecessors health-care reforms with "something much better". Trump's party controls both houses of Congress. The Republicans have a problem however. As E. J. Dionne (2016) has elaborated in an excellent book, they have been making impossible promises for a long time. Throughout the Obama years, they pretended they could drastically reduce taxes and repeal Obamacare without negative impacts on US citizens.

In real life, however, government action matters. In March, their new health-care law failed to get a majority in the House of Representatives. Some Republican members argued it was too harsh, other said it was too weak. This friction shows that, whatever they do, they will disappoint masses of voters. Instead of providing guidance on policy details, the president had only reinterred hollow promises.

Compounding budget problems, they want to increase military spending dramatically. US foreign policy is adrift however. The administration's stance on multilateral organisations from the UN to the WTO to NATO is ambivalent. Trump's secretary of state, who is nominally in charge of these matters, is largely invisible in Washington. At the same time, the White House pins great hopes on the diplomatic skills of the president's young son-in-law, who, by the way, was in touch with the Russian ambassador too. As in any autocracy, personal ties mean more than formal ranks and procedures.

Trump keeps promising to put "America first" and "make America great again". So far, he and his party seem overburdened by problems of their own making. It is scary to consider what will happen in a serious crisis.

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Photo: Screenshot – Youtube

SDGS

Acceptance, not enforcement

A top priority of António Guterres, the new UN Secretary-General, is to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has been called "a contract for the future of the world", for instance by Gerd Müller, Germany's federal minister for economic cooperation and development. The document is not a contract in a binding legal sense, of course, and must be understood as non-binding "soft law". However, it largely reflects and reinforces existing international law.

By Markus Kaltenborn and Heike Kuhn

The UN General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda as a resolution. Unlike international treaties, resolutions are not legally binding. They constitute international soft law, so the question arises what kind of legal relevance a document like this actually has. Doubts are widespread. The truth, however, is that soft law norms often drive the development of international law. They help to lay the groundwork for codification and help to constitute new customary international law.

The political implication of soft law is perhaps even more important. Governments find it increasingly difficult to find the common ground to conclude new comprehensive agreements in view of complex challenges. Particularly at the multilateral level, it often makes sense to resort to "soft" governance tools in such cases. Soft law norms do not require parliamentary approval or the long years of application that customary law is based on. Accordingly, soft law better serves responding to international challenges fast than hard law does.

The application of soft law depends on acceptance rather than judicial enforcement. In the world of politics, this advantage should not be underestimated. High acceptance and peer pressure are important motivators, and respect for soft law is demonstrated by compliance. Reporting obligations and similar monitoring mechanisms can be made transparent and accessible to all.

Another reason why governments like soft law is that it allows them to agree on content that goes beyond a mere minimum consensus. No doubt, this made the resolution on the 2030 Agenda feasible. Given the complexity of international re-

Photo: Lane/picture-alliance/dpa

lations, it would have been an illusion to hope that all countries might conclude a legally binding agreement with similarly far-reaching content.

SDGS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Despite the fact that the 2030 Agenda is not itself a legally binding international treaty, it nevertheless contains several references to international law and largely reinforces existing principles. The delegates of nation states at the UN have thus basically demanded that their nations comply with previously established norms. This was not unprecedented. The degree of attention the 2030 Agenda is getting, however, is great and the planned monitoring mechanisms mean that more transparency is being created than ever before.

If one considers human rights, the extent to which the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) correspond to existing international law becomes obvious immediately. Indeed, the SDGs explicitly refer to human rights in several places. For example, the Preamble states that "the 17 Sustainable Development Goals … seek to realise the human rights of all".

Moreover, individual SDGs align closely with individual human rights. SDG 2.1., for instance, calls on countries to "end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round" by the year 2030. This goal basically reiterates the norms spelled out in Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and in the General Comment 12, which the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) adopted in order to specify this provision. The General Comment 15, moreover, elaborates the closely related right to water, and SDG 6 reflects the Comment's requirements for implementing this right.

The new goals relating to global health (listed in SDG 3) roughly resemble the right to health that is enshrined in Article 12 of the ICESCR and further outlined in General Comment 14. SDG 4 closely relates to the right to education (Article 13 of the ICESCR and General Comment 13). The right to work is enshrined in Article 7 of the ICESCR and was further clarified last year in General Comment 23. It is reinforced by SDGs 4.4. and 8, which relate to employment.

Last but not least, the right to social security matters very much. It is expressed in Article 9 of the ICESCR and is reiterated by the 2030 Agenda, particularly in the goal to "end poverty in all its forms everywhere" (SDG 1). To that end, SDG 1.3 calls on states to "implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable". This goal corresponds with the right to social security, which was also explicitly acknowledged in the Social Protection Floors Recommendation adopted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) a few years ago.

The complete list of overlaps between the SDGs and established human rights goes on much longer. The Danish Institute for Human Rights analysed the 2030 Agenda thoroughly and concluded that 156 of its 169 targets (more than 92%) reflect human rights and basic labour standards. Apart from the ICESCR, relevant human rights are defined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and a variety of more specific human-rights conventions, like the conventions on the rights of women and children.

ODA IMPLICATIONS

Ensuring the social human rights, which, as discussed above, correspond closely to many SDGs, is the duty of the states where the rights holders live, whether they be the country's citizens or foreigners. The 2030 Agenda recognises this fundamental obligation too. It states that "each country has primary responsibility for its own economic and social development". However, the 2030 Agenda also stresses that the global development goals will not be achieved without revitalising and expanding the Global Partnership. One implication is that official development assistance (ODA) will continue to be a prominent part of the effort.

This implication is the intergovernmental aspect of the "contract for the future of the world", and it likewise was preceded in international human-rights provisions. All of the above-mentioned General Comments refer to ICESCR Article 2 Paragraph 1, which obliges the state parties to take steps to realise the rights outlined. This can be done both "individually and through international assistance and co-operation, especially economic and technical". The ICESCR duty to provide international aid is an expression of one of the three dimensions of extraterritorial state obligations. Even beyond their own borders, states have an international responsibility to strive towards ICESCR requirements being met.

Along with the UN charter (Article 56), the ICESCR (Article 2.1) is the primary hard-law basis for the Global Partnership. Soft law still determines – at least to a certain extent – the actual scope of the support obligations as well as the thematic and country-specific allocation of duties. Nonetheless, one may say that, at the latest due to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the obligation to provide ODA does not only meet ethical requirements, but is indeed deeply rooted in international law.

The comprehensive, transformational approach of the 2030 Agenda may well pave the way to local as well as global change. Every individual, group and institution should keep this in mind when reviewing whether governments are fulfilling the respective obligations – which is something they have every right to do so.

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This article expresses both authors' personal views rather than official policy.

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RURAL DEVELOPMENT

May we participate in your lives?

Woman drying grain in Ghana's Upper West Region.

Smallholder farming systems are diverse. One needs to understand this diversity if one wants to implement development projects or launch a business. Researchers must take into account what farmers do for what reasons. Africa RISING is a research-for-development programme that gathers information at the grass-roots level. One lesson our author learned doing rural research is that the point is not that development agents involve farmers in projects. It is, in fact, the other way round: Success depends on farmers allowing development workers to participate in their lives.

By Mirja Michalscheck

Smallholder farms are a key to achieving global development goals such as food security and poverty alleviation. The reason is that their small-scale production systems generate about 80 % of the food consumed in Africa and Asia. Moreover, family farms are also an important employer of rural labour and typically contribute to keeping agro-biological diversity great at the regional level.

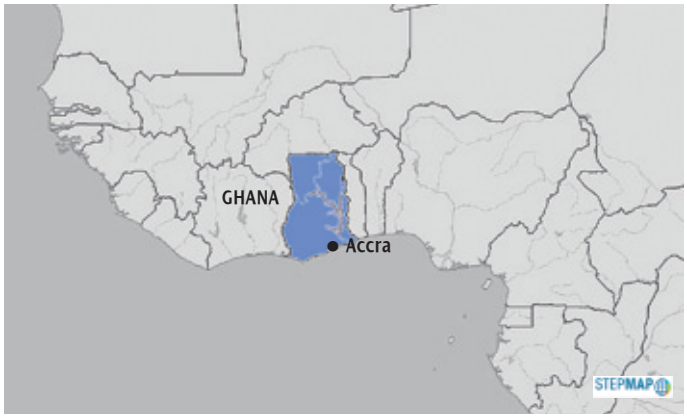
However, smallholders face many constraints. Land tenure is often insecure. Access to markets and financial services tends to be limited and, as a result, access to machinery, advanced technology, fertiliser and quality seed is limited too. The input use of African smallholders tends to be particularly sparing. On average, they apply only 10 to 13 kilogrammes of fertilizer per hectare, according to data collected by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), while their South-Asian counterparts use about 100 kilogrammes.

This huge difference results in part from the fact that most African farmers do not have irrigation. They shy away from investing in inputs because erratic rains may fast destroy their crops. In years with good rains, however, the investments would pay off.

If one understands how farmers think, one can find alternatives to providing irrigation. Innovation for Poverty Action (IPA), a US-based non-governmental organisation, recently discovered another way to make input investments more attractive to farmers: rainfall insurance. An IPA study showed that providing such a financial service to farmers led them to increase fertiliser use by 25 %, extend the cultivated area by eight percent and work 13 % more labour per unit.

The link between insurance and the application of farm inputs is important information for projects like Africa RISING. With funding from USAID, Africa RISING is implementing three regional research programmes in six African countries: in Ethiopia's highlands, West Africa (Ghana and Mali) and Eastern and Southern Africa (Tan-

Photo: Michalscheck



zania, Malawi and Zambia). Africa RISING stands for "Africa Research in Sustainable Intensification for the Next Generation".

To find good solutions, one needs to know what drives farmers' decisions. It is therefore an important research principle to involve the people who make the decisions on the farms – and they are not always the persons who head the households. Agricultural test trials concern issues such as optimal levels of inputs, integrated soil fertility management or the integration of maize and legume cultivation. Africa RISING wants to identify options that improve productivity and safeguard the environment as well as people's health.

A serious challenge for research is that smallholder farmers do not constitute a homogenous group. Their practices and traditions do not only vary from one geographical region to another. They also vary within a single community. Different households own land of different sizes and qualities. They own different kinds and numbers of livestock. Some households have many members contributing family labour, others only a few. The level of education varies as well as their means of transport – ranging from motorbikes to none at all. All of these issues determine their room for manoeuvre. Market access, for instance, depends on transport opportunities.

Researchers must also pay attention to the dynamics within the household. In northern Ghana, for example, a typical smallholder farm is a family farm that consists of several partially independent units, and each unit is run by a different family member. Typically, the male head of the family will cultivate cereals and tubers. He thus ensures the household's basic food security. The women, however, will cultivate vegetables and cash crops, achieving nutritional diversity and covering children's school fees. Livestock, too, is handled by different family members. Generally speaking, questions of ownership, access to production assets and finance depend on age, gender and other issues everywhere. Unless one understands the complete matrix of diverging responsibilities, interests and inner-family power relations, one will not understand how farm management decisions come about. When promoting a new technology or method, one must therefore consult different household members.

WOMEN'S VIEWS MATTER

Our work showed that men and women described the same farm differently. Each respondent exaggerated their own responsibility. Accordingly, researchers need to assess the different statements diligently, putting them into context. It is striking that, in the past, many surveys only consulted the heads of households, who tend to be men. Such research is likely to be distorted by an unwitting gender bias. It is true, of course, that sometimes women who were heading households may have been interviewed too, but their perspective differs from the one of women in male-headed households.

Moreover, it is important to provide all respondents with a safe space to express their opinions. Experience shows that farm women often say different things in the presence of others, particularly their male household members, than when they are interviewed alone. One implication is that researcher teams should include female and male members.

Another challenge is that researchers or development workers, who come from afar to a rural area, are often regarded as persons of authority and influence. To some extent, rural people will hope to get money or some other kind of support, but they may also fear that saying something wrong may trigger some kind of punishment. For these reasons, their responses to survey questions may not always be honest. Such problems are compounded by cultural ideas of gender and hierarchy.

To cooperate well with smallholder farmers, we must understand what they do for what reasons. We have to ask ourselves, as researchers and development practitioners: how well do we understand our target group? Engaging in development work is not just a learning experience for the farmers. In the first place, we have to learn about them.

If we expect honesty, openness and commitment, moreover, we have to open up ourselves. We must constantly test and improve our knowledge and prove to our partners that we are indeed partners. As agents of development, we are not really letting "farmers participate in our projects" as we tend to believe. It is the other way round. To get good results, they must allow us to participate in their lives and decision-making.

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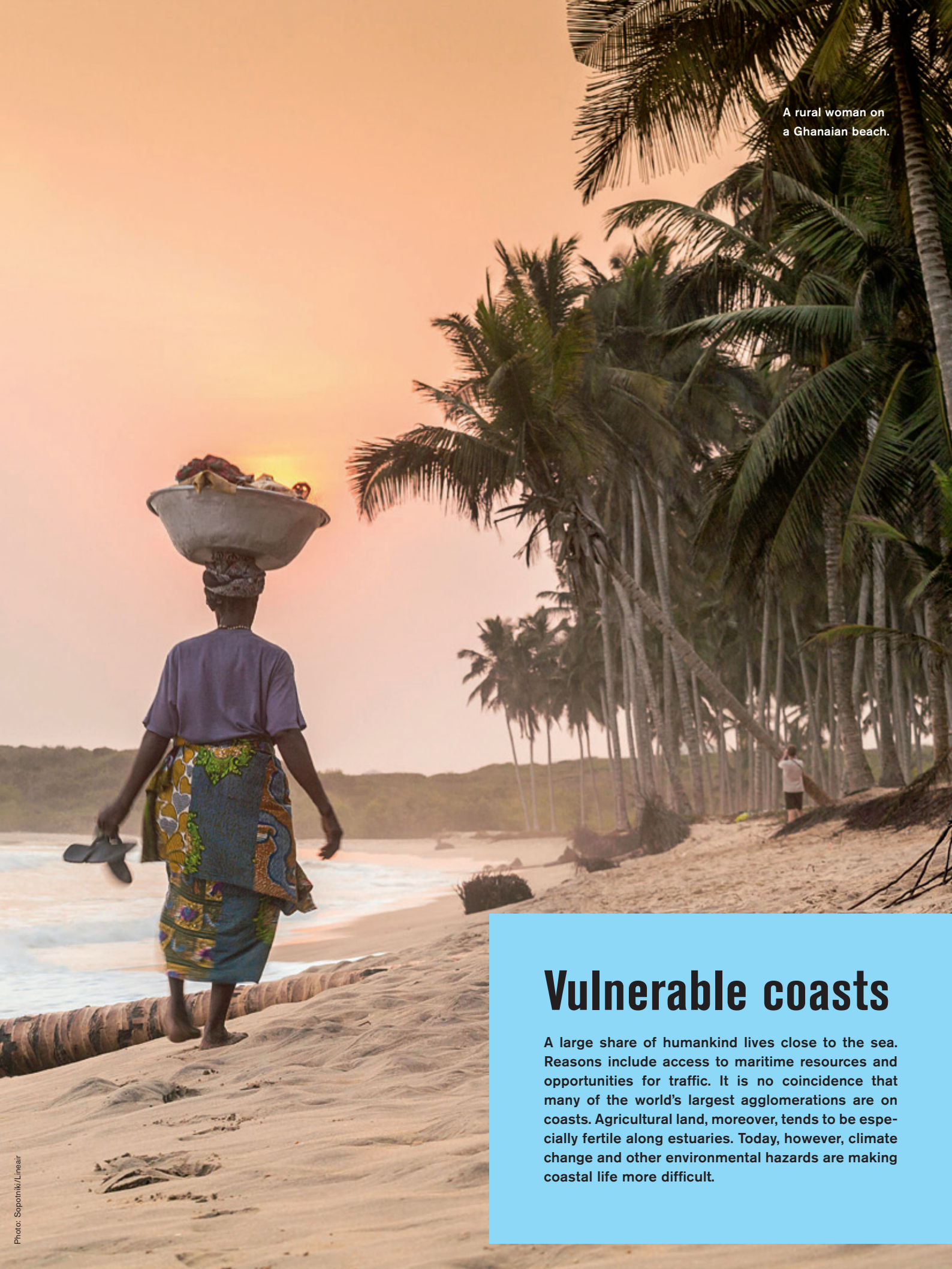


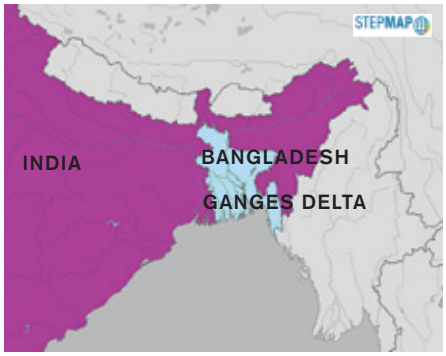
A rural woman on a Ghanaian beach.

Photo: Sopotniki/Lineair

Vulnerable coasts

A large share of humankind lives close to the sea. Reasons include access to maritime resources and opportunities for traffic. It is no coincidence that many of the world's largest agglomerations are on coasts. Agricultural land, moreover, tends to be especially fertile along estuaries. Today, however, climate change and other environmental hazards are making coastal life more difficult.

Predictable disasters



Bangladesh is exposed to the rising sea level. Throughout history, the country's coastal areas have suffered meteorological disasters including cyclones, floods and erosion of land. Climate change is anticipated to make extreme weather events ever more likely. Moreover, increasing salinisation in the coastal areas is affecting people's livelihoods.

By Feisal Rahman

Nearly two thirds of Bangladesh's land area is less than five metres above sea level. The country's terrain is flat and low-lying, situated in the Delta of three major rivers: the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2014), 27 million people in Bangladesh will be at risk due to the rising sea level by 2050.

Bangladesh's Ministry of Environment and Forests reckons that the sea-level rise (SLR) will amount to 14 centimetres by 2030, to 32 centimetres by 2050 and to 88 centimetres by 2100. The common perception is that land will be inundated, so people will be displaced. This danger is real, but it is probably overestimated as inundation of mass land area is unlikely (Nishat, 2017; Brammer, 2014). Migration to the cities from the coastal areas, especially Dhaka, the capital, is more likely to be driven by livelihood stress arising from salinisation (the situation is similar on the Indian side of the border – see comment by A.K. Ghosh on p. 25).

DWINDLING FRESH WATER SUPPLY

The country's fresh water supply will be affected as saline water is pushed upstream. The water logging potential will grow. Salinisation will thus affect arable land. It will also affect underground aquifers. Agriculture in coastal areas will suffer (Huq and Ayers, 2007).

Salinity is not only increasing because of SLR and tidal surges, however. Other issues matter too. For instance, the Farrakka barrage on the Ganges in India has reduced the inflow of fresh water. Land erosion, land-use change and the construction of embankments and dykes along coasts are adding to the problem.

Climate models, however, show that salinity levels will increase further as the sea level rises. Coastal communities will find it ever harder to get safe water.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends a daily dietary intake of 2.0 grammes of salt. As freshwater sources become scarce, people in the south-west coastal region are forced to drink saline water. A study (Khan et al, 2011) found that people's daily salt consumption in the Khulna District already amounted to five to 16 grammes of salt from drinking water in the dry season. Such levels of salt consumption are linked to multiple health risks, including hypertension, kidney failure and diarrhoea. Pregnant women are at risk of pre-eclampsia, which may lead to severe headaches, organ damage and even death (Khan et al, 2014). A study commissioned by the World Bank (2015) showed that saltwater consumption during pregnancy is also linked to infant mortality.

Rising salinity, moreover, degrades agricultural land. Accordingly, fields that were

This shelter withstood Cyclone Sidr in 2007.

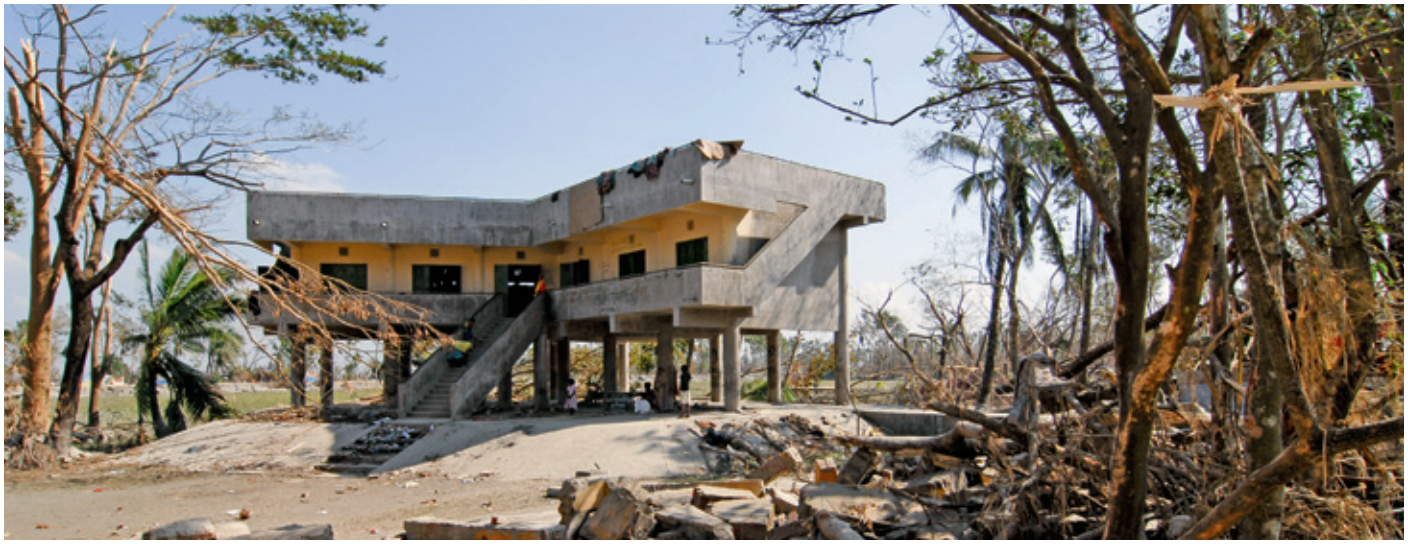


Photo: Böthling/Fotografie

historically used to cultivate rice and other crops have been converted into ponds for shrimp farming. This trend is particularly evident in Satkhira, one of the districts most affected by salinisation. In 1975, 80 % of the area was used for fields. In 2005, the share was only 15 %. In the same time span, the area used for shrimp cultivation increased from two percent to 72 %.

Such developments have serious social implications. Shrimp farming mostly benefits rich farmers, whereas poor farmers and marginalised communities suffer. One reason is that shrimp farming is not as labour intensive as rice farming, so landless labourers and sharecroppers lose out. Eventually, the men are forced to look for work in urban areas, while women are left behind with children and the elderly. In lack of male partners, women become more vulnerable, but their economic activity becomes more important. For obvious reasons, however, there are fewer opportunities to work in agriculture.

Data from 14 districts for the years 1994 to 2010 indicate that crop failures have a strong impact on migration (Gray and Mueller, 2012). Some coastal areas, where three rice harvests were feasible in the past, now only have one crop, mostly because of rising salinity.

Generally speaking, moreover, the poor depend more on ecosystem services which are degraded by climate change. For example, the livelihoods of poor communities who rely on the Sundarbans mangrove forest will suffer because of salinisation. Scholars assessed different aquatic salinity scenarios on behalf of the World Bank (2016). They predict that rising salinity will negatively affect 14 mangrove species, and in particular the valuable Sundari trees. The authors argue that "the greatest negative impacts" will be felt in the poorest sub-districts. The reasons are loss of timber value, reduced honey production and more incidents involving wildlife, including predators such as crocodiles and tigers.

For people's food security, moreover, freshwater fish is very important. Unfortunately, relevant species are affected by salinisation, as research has shown (Gain et al, 2008). In Paikgacha, a highly saline sub-district of Khulna, fresh water species decreased by 59 % from 1975 to 2005. In Rampal, a moderately saline sub-district of Bagerhat, the comparative figure was 21 %.

The way forward

Although the situation seems quite grim, Bangladesh is not giving up. In fact, the country is often considered a climate-change adaptation champion. The government is committed to the cause.

Bangladesh is one of the nations that emits very little carbon, but it is likely to be among those that suffer most because of global warming. However, the country is not waiting to be rescued by others. It has taken several initiatives to facilitate climate-resilient development. In 2008, Bangladesh adopted a 10 year strategic action plan to address the impacts of climate change. Subsequently, a trust fund was created, which has so far invested the equivalent of almost $ 1 billion in tangible projects. The international donor community, moreover, has set up a parallel fund, which is called the Resilience Fund.

At the ground level, Bangladesh has achieved tremendous success in the area of disaster management. The country has a very effective cyclone warning system which is supported by nearly 50,000 cyclone preparedness volunteers. It also matters that the industrial sector has been growing, creating new livelihoods and boosting incomes opportunities. The constant economic growth over the past few years have set Bangladesh to graduate to a lower middle income country by 2021.

More needs to be done, of course. The following issues deserve attention:

- Measures should be taken to prevent further intrusion of salinity. It would be good to retain monsoon waters to increase the rivers' water flow in the dry season, so less saline water would be pressed into the delta. The technical challenges are great, however, and require thorough consideration.
- The existing coastal embankments have to be managed better. They need to be raised and made stronger as the sea level rises. Moreover, there should be provisions to repair damaged embankments fast.
- Agriculture provides livelihoods to most people in the coastal region, so climate-smart agriculture must be promoted. It would make sense, for instance, to rely on rice varieties that are especially salt-tolerant. The same can be said for other crops. Another option is cultivation on raised beds. Appropriate policies should promote interventions like this, ensuring that marginal farmers benefit.
- It is important to build disaster-resilient rural infrastructure, taking into account the needs of women and vulnerable groups.
- As rural to urban migration increases, appropriate urban planning and adequate urban infrastructure must be ensured. Moreover, livelihood opportunities must be created in new urban centres, so migrants will be attracted to other places than the crowded existing cities.

Apart from tackling challenges at home, Bangladesh must ensure in global negotiations that funding and technical expertise are provided to all countries that are vulnerable to climate change, especially if they have hardly contributed to the phenomenon. There are limits to what climate adaptation can achieve, moreover, so the international global community must protect the climate. Global cooperation is needed to achieve the required reduction of greenhouse-gas emissions. Bangladesh's diplomats have their work cut out for them.

Ponds used for shrimp farming.

The slight increase in salt-tolerant species did not compensate for the loss. People's protein supply has thus become more precarious, and biodiversity is dwindling.

WOMEN AT RISK OF DISASTERS

Women and adolescent girls are at higher risk due to the impacts of global warming. They collect water for their families, and in the dry season, when freshwater sources become scarce, they have to walk farther. Sometimes they must hike up to ten kilometres every day. Because of sexual harassment, the journeys are not always safe. Moreover, women and adolescent girls in the area suffer gynaecological problems due to using saline water during menstruation (Islam et al, 2016).

The IPCC (2014) predicts that cyclones and tropical storms in general will become more intense. Bangladesh has actually improved disaster management dramatically. When Cyclone Bhola hit the Delta in 1970, some 300,000 to 500,000 people lost their lives. In 1991, a cyclone of comparable force claimed 135,000 lives. In 2007, Cyclone Sidr, which also had a speed of more than 250 kilometres, killed a mere 3,500 people. Bangladesh now has an early warning system and shelters, so people are much better prepared.

Nonetheless, cyclones cause huge damage. They seriously reduce peoples access to clean water because they destroy infrastructure and contaminate freshwater resources, worsening the salinity scenario.

When extreme weather events such as cyclones occur, women are more vulnerable than men. Historically, the female share of a cyclone's death toll was 90%. When Sidr struck in 2007, the share of female casualties was still more than 83% (World Bank, 2013). One reason is that they have to fend not only for themselves, but also for children, the elderly, the sick and livestock. Evaluations have shown, moreover, that many women were not alerted in time by the early-warning system. On the upside, the absolute number of lives that Sidr claimed was at most about one percent of those claimed by Bhola in 1970.

Extreme weather events cause displacement, of course. The number of people concerned is likely to grow. Cyclone Sidr displaced nearly 650,000 people in 2007. Two years later, Cyclone Bijli, which belonged to a weaker category, displaced nearly 200,000 people. Such are often only temporary, however. The degradation of arable land has a more lasting impact.

In any case, it is estimated that an additional 2000 people move to the Dhaka agglomeration every day. The agglomeration is already one of the world's most densely populated areas. Many migrants come from the coastal areas and hope to escape rural poverty. They mostly end up in slums and do informal work. Climate change is set to accelerate their race to the city.

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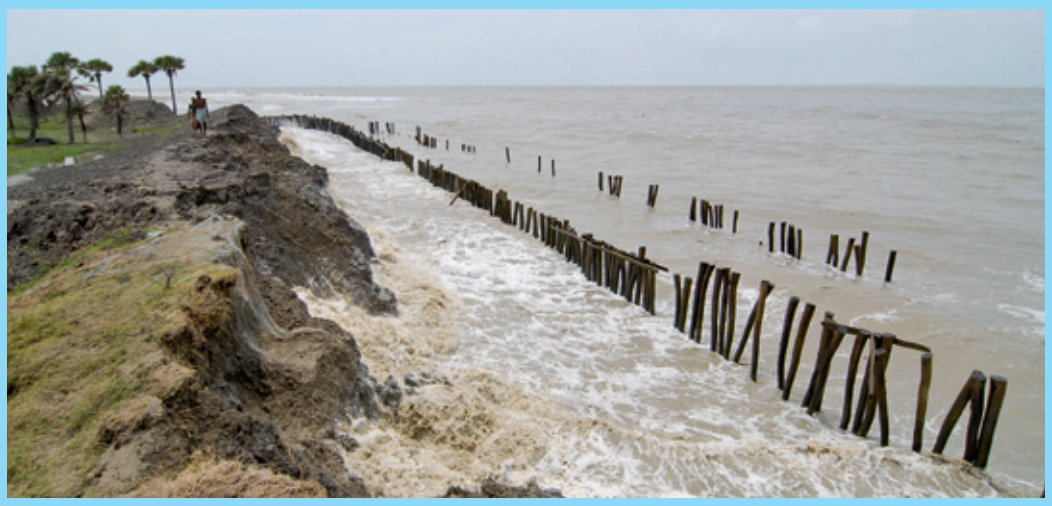
Photo: Böthling/Fotografie

Empower India's climate refugees



Half of all Indian Sundarban villages are exposed to erosion and other impacts of climate change.

More than 4.5 million people currently live in India's Sundarbans. Because of global warming, at least one million will have to leave. Government agencies should invest in skills training, so climate refugees will find attractive new livelihoods.

India and Bangladesh share the Sundarbans, the world's largest mangrove forest. It is located in the Delta of the Ganga, Brahmaputra and Meghna rivers. On the Indian side, 54 Sundarban islands are inhabited, and another 50 islands are protected for wildlife. UNESCO has declared a World Heritage Site. Tourists come to the Sundarbans to enjoy nature and to spot tigers, if they are lucky.

However, the Delta is exposed to climate change. More than half of the Sundarban villages in India are vulnerable to erosion, breached embankments, storm surges, intrusion of saline water and other impacts. According to the Indian section of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF-India), at least 1.2 million people must be resettled in order to prevent disasters that may be caused by cyclones, floods and the salinisation of agricultural land in the future, for example.

The Government of India has announced a National Action Plan on Climate Change, focusing on energy efficiency, renewable energy, sustainable agriculture etcetera. The State Government of West Bengal has also published a Climate Change Action Plan. However, neither plan even mentions migration. There apparently is little awareness of the need to resettle and rehabilitate people in a coordinated manner. So far, not even the UN has officially accepted the term "climate refugees".

The truth is that more than one million people, most of them farmers and fishers, will have to leave the Indian part of the Delta in the years by 2050. Men will have no option but to leave their families behind in search of unskilled work in distant parts of the country.

We have studied the case of four villages (Ghosh, 2015). To date, more than 50 % of the abled-bodied men have left and moved to 11 other Indian states. Most of them are working as unskilled labourers on construction sites. It would make sense to train climate refugees so they can work as masons, plumbers, electricians etcetera. That would enable them to earn more money, and in view of the booming real estate business in India, their skills would certainly be in demand. Practitioners could provide hands-on training. Schemes of this kind would not cost much. Women, moreover, could be trained to work in garments production and other industries with strong female employment.

The Government of India correctly sees a need to train 20,000 people per year for the renewable-energy sector. It is bizarre, however, that neither the state government nor the central government has ever announced any skill-development programme for the inhabitants of the vulnerable Delta region. The people concerned are becoming victims of a phenomenon they have not caused. The infrastructure of the Sundarbans is poor, and carbon emissions from the area are negligible. On the other hand, the island people have contributed to protecting the mangroves and even planting new mangroves, thus strengthening an important carbon sink. They certainly deserve to be empowered to cope with climate change.

If government agencies fail them, perhaps the private sector could step in. India has made it a rule that large corporations must spend two percent of their net profits on corporate social responsibility. Skills training for climate refugees would be a worthy cause.

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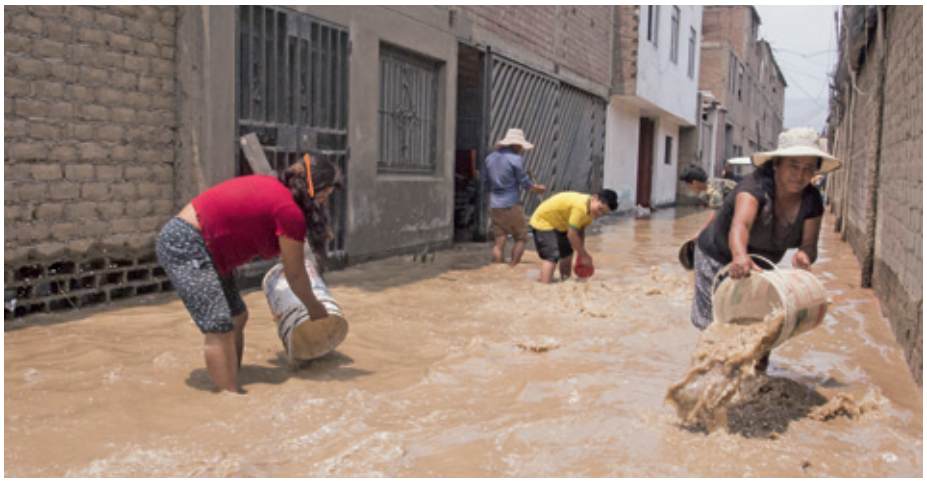
Photo: Bøthling/Photography

The needs of displaced persons

Forced displacement related to disasters is one of the greatest humanitarian challenges the international community must rise to in the 21st century. The impacts of climate change are relevant in this context. As a state-led initiative, the Platform on Disaster Displacement aims to tackle the problems, coordinating efforts of many stakeholders.

By the Platform on Disaster Displacement



Resilience matters: Lima, the capital of Peru, was hit by unusual rains in March.

Every year, millions of people are displaced due to disasters caused by natural hazards such as floods, tropical storms, earthquakes, landslides, droughts, salt-water intrusion, glacial melting, glacial lake outburst floods and melting permafrost. Other people have to leave their homes because of the impacts of the rising sea level, coastal erosion, desertification and environmental degradation in general. Small island developing states (SIDS) and least developed countries (LDCs) are hit hardest, but middle-income countries face specific challenges too.

From 2008 to 2014, 184 million people were displaced by sudden-onset disasters worldwide. That number is equal to more than one third of the population of the EU. Matters are probably even worse, since the estimates may not fully reflect the number of persons who are displaced in the context of slow-onset events. These people are difficult to identify, so there is a lack of data. We know, however, that coastal regions are affected in particular, and a large share of the world population lives within 100 kilometres of the sea shore.

In 1990, the first Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) indicated that global warming could trigger large movements of people, particularly from coastal areas. This has since happened in several world regions. Speaking at the annual council of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Peter Thomson, the president of the UN General Assembly, pointed out in 2016: "You cannot stay in your traditional homeland if it is turned into a desert, and you cannot stay in your traditional rice delta if it is under one meter of water."

Those who cross borders in the context of disasters need protection, but they often do not get any. The situation of people who flee from the impacts of slow-onset events and climate change is particularly difficult. Their needs are not as obvious as those of people displaced by sudden-onset events. Moreover, when persons are forced to cross a border in sudden or slow-onset contexts, they will not be considered as refugees under international law, in most cases, so they have no right to be admitted and stay in a foreign country.

THE NANSEN INITIATIVE

To address the gaps, the Nansen Initative was launched in 2012. Its result was the Nansen Initiative Protection Agenda, which was endorsed by 109 governments in October 2015 (see box, p. 27). To follow up, the Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD) was established in 2016 under German leadership. This multi-stakeholder forum is cooperating with various international partners, including the IOM, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), as well as leading universities. The Platform is based in Geneva and has four strategic priorities:

- address knowledge and data gaps,
- enhance the use of effective practices at the national, regional and international levels,
- promote policy coherence and
- promote policy and normative development in gap areas.

Indeed, knowledge and data gaps persist. In particular they relate to:

- cross-border movements,
- human mobility in slow-onset hazard contexts,
- future displacement risks and
- sustainable solutions for disaster displaced persons.

To address the gaps, the Platform is proposing measures to compile existing data, consolidate information and generate new knowledge. Thorough assessments depend on the availability of long-term data which must be disaggregated by age, gender, diversity and location.

In cooperation with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Platform is preparing a study concerning human-rights based approaches. Special attention is being paid to slow-onset events that lead people to cross borders.

Even though international law is largely silent on whether countries must admit disaster-displaced foreigners, more

Photo: Heredia/picture-alliance/AA

than 50 countries have decided not to return people in such circumstance. The Platform is promoting a pragmatic approach, rather than calling for a new, legally binding international convention. Nations and regional organisation are encouraged to integrate effective practices identified in the Protection Agenda into their own policies.

Delegations from North and Central-American countries agreed on common guidelines for the admission and stay of cross-border disaster-displaced persons at the XXI Regional Conference on Migration (RCM) in Honduras in November 2016. The Platform seeks to facilitate similar processes in other world regions.

The Platform on Disaster Displacement is a state-led initiative for sharing experience and drafting policies. It is based in Geneva. This essay was written by members of its Coordination Unit.

http://disasterdisplacement.org/
Twitter: @DDisplacement

LINK

Germanwatch, 2017: Global Climate Index 2017 – Who suffers most from extreme weather events? Weather-related loss events in 2015 and 1996 to 2015. ***https://germanwatch.org/en/download/16411.pdf***

The Nansen Initiative's Protection Agenda

Norway and Switzerland teamed up with other countries to launch the Nansen Initiative in 2012. The idea was to reach consensus concerning how to better address the needs of people who are displaced by disasters. The Initiative's Protection Agenda was endorsed by 109 States and published in 2015.

The Nansen Initiative was the predecessor of the Platform on Disaster Displacement (see main article). Its Protection Agenda (2015) spells out the following priorities:

- **Reducing vulnerability to displacement risks and building resilience:** resilience determines whether individuals, families, communities and even countries can withstand the impacts of disasters and climate change. Resilience depends on things like good infrastructure and sensible climate-adaptation measures. Other issues matter too. For example, land reforms can make a difference too by ensuring that more people are entitled to the land on which their livelihoods depend. People who own property are more resilient than those who do not.
- **Migration with dignity:** living conditions can deteriorate so badly that people are forced to seek new opportunities away from their home area – either in their own country or abroad. Managed properly, migration can contribute to coping with environmental hazards and bring economic benefits to all parties concerned. Displaced people, however, must be protected from exploitation, violence, human trafficking and sexual abuse. Measures to facilitate migration with dignity include reviewing existing migration agreements. National programmes, schemes for seasonal workers and skills training make sense. Permanent migration may be necessary from low-lying areas as small island states and other countries are likely to suffer substantial loss of territory.
- **Planned relocation:** policies that make people move from one place to another have historically not been very successful, and they do not have a good reputation internationally. All too often, relocation has meant the loss of livelihoods and property, the severing of cultural ties and the abuse of human rights. If however, areas are exposed to growing disaster risks, it may make sense to evacuate people permanently. In a joint project, the UN Refugee Agency, Georgetown University and the Brookings Institution (2015) have spelled out how to handle the matter appropriately. The people concerned should be actively involved in decision-making, for example. It is essential to ensure adequate opportunities, including basic services and housing in the new location. Psychological and cultural issues should be taken into account, moreover.
- **Assisting internally displaced persons and cross-border disaster-displaced persons:** most disaster-affected people stay in their home countries, so the protection of internally displaced persons (IDPs) is particularly important. Disaster preparedness is essential, so risks must be assessed early on. Emergency measures must be planned before disasters strike, and long-term solutions must be considered. Cross-border disaster-displacement could often be avoided if IDPs received adequate assistance in their home countries, and international support might help in such cases. It will not be possible, however, to reduce all risks and prevent people from fleeing across borders entirely. International law does not explicitly address whether countries must admit disaster-displaced foreigners. Governments have been responding to this challenge in different ways. It is essential, however, to clarify the rights and duties of disaster-displaced persons for the duration of their stay, taking into account the capacity of host communities. Long-term solutions must be found, moreover, so disaster-displaced persons are not forced to move again and on to other countries.

Sabine Balk

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Saving the Mekong Delta

Climate change has a dramatic impact on the Mekong Delta, the "rice bowl of Vietnam". Official studies suggest that by the year 2100, up to 39 % of the region could be inundated by the ocean, which would have serious consequences not only for its 17 million inhabitants. The Mekong Delta produces rice for 245 million people worldwide and thus plays a vital role in ensuring global food security.

By Severin Peters and Christian Henckes

The effects of climate change can best be seen on the coast, which is affected by the rising sea level, storms and tidal waves. Unprotected parts of the coastline are breaking away. Up to 50 meters a year are lost to the sea in some places. Houses are being flooded and fertile land is becoming salinated. Many people's livelihoods are at risk.

In order to stop these trends, Germany and Australia have been supporting an integrated coastal management programme in Vietnam since 2011. The programme, which is being implemented by GIZ on behalf of Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), focuses on the restoration of the original mangrove forests as well as on sustainable rice cultivation, shrimp farming and better management of the many water channels that criss-cross the region. Furthermore, Vietnamese authorities are also receiving support for jointly drafting regional strategies for the future that transcend provincial borders. Such strategies will help to protect the coast from the impacts of climate change.

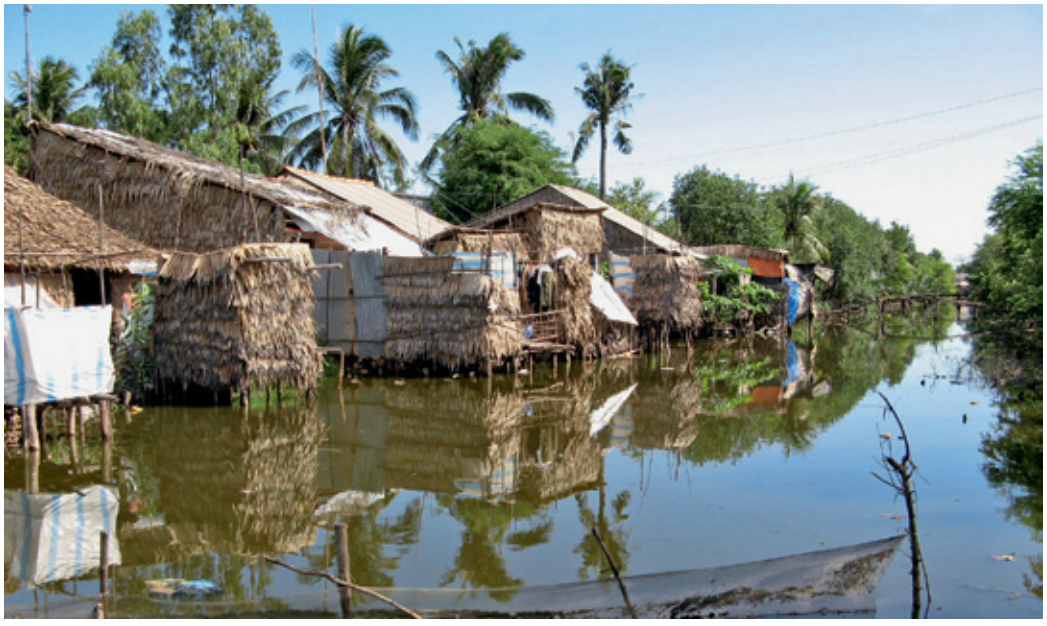
One of the greatest problems in coastal areas is erosion. It is causing more and more land to disappear, with the ocean encroaching further and further into the interior. In many places, houses now stand directly on the waterfront even though they were still hundreds of meters away from the shore only a few years ago. One reason is that the mangrove forests, which grow on an intermediary area between the ocean and dry land, are disappearing along with the coastline. The forests are an ideal buffer for absorbing the impact of storms and floods.

STOPPING EROSION

The coastal management programme has found a solution to erosion: based on complex measurements of the currents, a simple breakwater fence made of bamboo was developed. Set up properly in the ocean, it absorbs the power of the waves. Moreover, the fence collects the sand and mud particles that would be washed away by the water, thus creating new mudflats where mangroves and other plants can grow. The fences do not only stop erosion, but actually allow the coastline to be further extended into the sea by up to 180 meters in some places.

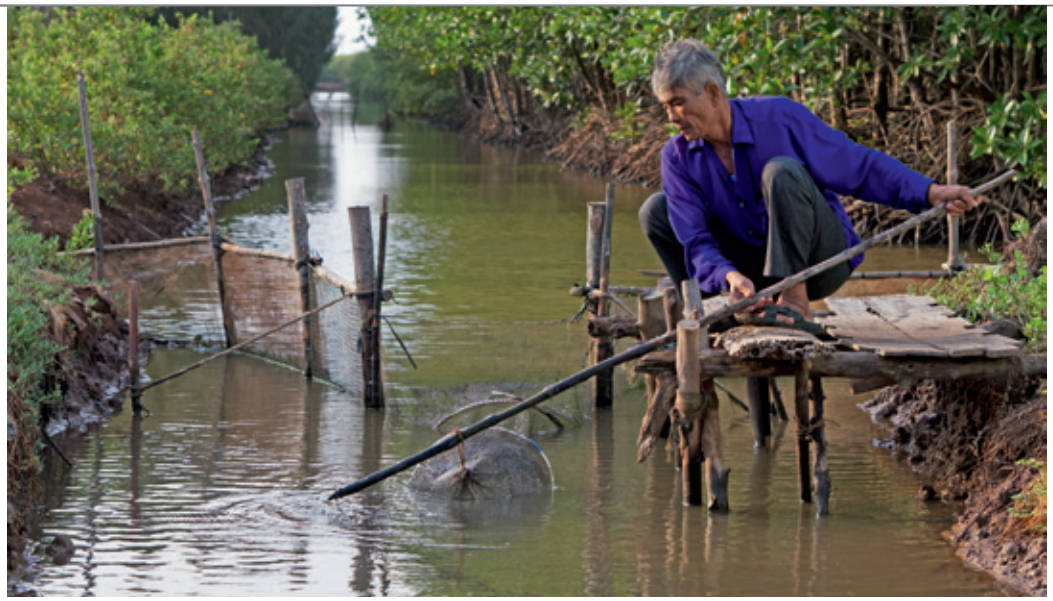
But as effective as the breakwater fences are, they represent only one of many contributions needed to protect the Mekong Delta's 720 kilometres of coastline from the impacts of climate change. The programme has drafted a digital map of the entire coast in order to precisely identify what coastal protection measures are needed where. The measures range from bamboo breakwaters to new mangrove forests to massive walls of concrete in some particularly endangered areas. Such walls may not look beautiful, but they effectively absorb the impact of the waves.

Coastal protection measures cannot solve all the problems the Mekong Delta is facing, however. Many issues are at stake. The Mekong Delta is one of the most pro-



Coastal villages in the Mekong Delta are particularly hard hit by climate change.

Photo: GIZ



The farmer Nguyen Van Son breeds shrimp in a mangrove reservoir using environmentally-friendly methods.

ductive agricultural regions in Asia, but the farming sector is increasingly at risk as the rising sea level is pushing ever more salt water into the delta. At the same time, the river's fresh water supply is becoming scarcer and less reliable – in part because of enormous dams in China and Lao (see D+C/E+Z 2013/12, p. 474).

In the spring of 2016, poor rains and lack of river water contributed to the worst drought the Mekong Delta has seen since weather records began 90 years ago – a shock for thousands of farmers, some of whom suffered severe crop failures (see D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2016/10, p. 44). On the upside, the drought indicated to politicians that they must draft a coherent strategy for the entire Mekong Delta.

After all, the Delta, which is home to about 17 million people, is not a single administrative unit. It is divided into 13 different provinces, which often fail to coordinate plans and investments. Moreover, different national ministries are in charge of defining the region's climate change response.

A new edict by Vietnam's prime minister should help to improve regional coordination in the Mekong Delta. In the future, all actors – in particular provinces, ministries and international partners – will develop shared strategies in order to ensure that available resources are used much more efficiently.

IMPROVING WATER MANAGEMENT

The reform is especially important as it applies to agriculture and water management. The Delta is crossed by thousands of channels that bring farmers the water they need: freshwater for rice and fruit farms and salt or brack water for shrimp farms. So far, however, there is no clear system for determining what products should be cultivated where and how the water system should be adapted accordingly. As a result, the dwindling freshwater resources are often used inefficiently.

A better approach is possible, as the irrigation system in the southern Mekong Delta proves. In this region, water management was optimised in cooperation with local authorities, which led to improvements in 14,000 kilometres of channels – that corresponds to the distance from Germany to Australia. The measures have benefited 1.2 million people living in rural areas.

Nevertheless, water supply is not the only issue that needs to be addressed if agriculture is to adapt to the changing climate and environment. The Mekong Delta is marked by a large number of very small farms, which often have only 0.5 to 2 hectares. The advantage of this system is that many people can earn small but reliable incomes, while maintaining a high degree of autonomy. But the number of many independent farms that are no bigger than a football field makes it difficult to increase productivity and implement reliable standards. Accordingly, most of the products cultivated in the Mekong Delta are of poor quality and only fetch low prices, so farmers do not earn much.

One solution is to form farmer cooperatives. The GIZ supports this approach. Cooperatives make it easier to provide farmers with training concerning better cultivation methods that will boost their incomes and also protect the environment. For example, rice farmers could apply the alternate wetting and drying method, reducing water and pesticide consumption by 30 % and, at the same time, increasing incomes by up to 40 %.

Such approaches are now being integrated into the government's "large rice field" programme, which encourages many small farmers to grow according to shared standards in order to ensure the quality of the product. Basically, they are supposed to act as if they were all farming one big rice field.

These are steps in the right direction, but they need more support. Individual farmers and residents of coastal areas can do little to adapt to climate change on their own. If, however, an initiative is implemented that involves many political actors as well as the local people, the hope is justified that the Mekong Delta will continue to supply food for hundreds of millions of people for decades to come. Right now, things are looking good.

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Photo: GIZ

Valuable protection

The World Bank's WAVE initiative made proposals on assessing the economic benefits provided by mangroves and coral reefs in a study it published in 2016. It wants policymakers to appreciate the economic worth of fragile coastal ecosystems.

Mangroves and coral reefs reduce erosion and soften the coastal impacts of extreme weather. This matters because climate change is making extreme weather more likely and many coasts are densely populated.

To what extent mangroves serve as shield against forceful waves and winds depends on several issues, including the depth of the water and the density of the vegetation. Mangroves may actually withstand the force of tsunamis. Coral reefs have a similar effect as low-crested breakwaters. They have a protective function, for example, when cyclones cause waves to rise very high.

In 2010, the World Bank launched a global partnership called WAVE (Wealth Accounting and Valuation of Ecosystems Services). The idea was to ensure that natural capital is considered in development planning and is factored into national economic accounting. Many national statistical offices are aware of mangroves attracting tourists, but they tend to neglect services provided by ecosystems in regard to things such as coastal protection, fisheries enhancement and carbon storage.

In regard to coastal protection, there are several ways to assess the economic value of ecosystem services. The WAVE experts endorse an approach called "Expected Damage Function", which insurance companies often apply too. This method takes account of every potential risk. It enables experts to compare the damages that accrue with and without a healthy natural habitat und the difference indicates what the ecosystem service is worth. According to the WAVE publication, this method makes more sense than the "Replacement Cost" approach, which is about estimating the value of mangroves and reefs by assessing the costs of building artificial infrastructure.

The WAVE authors argue that the better the benefits of eco system services are understood, the better those systems tend to be protected. Their publication offers the evidence of 20 case studies. They show that green infrastructure thrives where the local people are aware of the matter and raise political demands accordingly. Scientific evidence can be another trigger to protect ecosystems.

The authors recommend several things:

- Mangroves and coral reefs must no longer be considered unconventional coastal protection. Their usefulness has been thoroughly researched.
- Data gaps concerning the coastal protection relevance of mangroves and reefs should be closed.
- Pilot studies would help to incorporate coastal protection services into national economic accounting.
- In many places, the cheapest option for coastal protection is to protect and nurture ecosystems.
- Where such systems have been damaged, restauration should be considered.
- Guidelines for protecting mangroves and reefs would be helpful, and so would international commitments to the cause.
- Developing countries should consider mangroves and reefs when drafting climate-adaptation plans, and donor governments should provide funds for related measures.

Linda Engel

LINK

WAVE, 2016: Managing coasts with natural solutions. ***https://www.wavespartnership.org/en/knowledge-center/managing-coasts-natural-solutions***

Coral reefs serve as sub-surface breakwaters and thus contribute to protecting coasts of Comoro Islands in the Indian Ocean, for example.

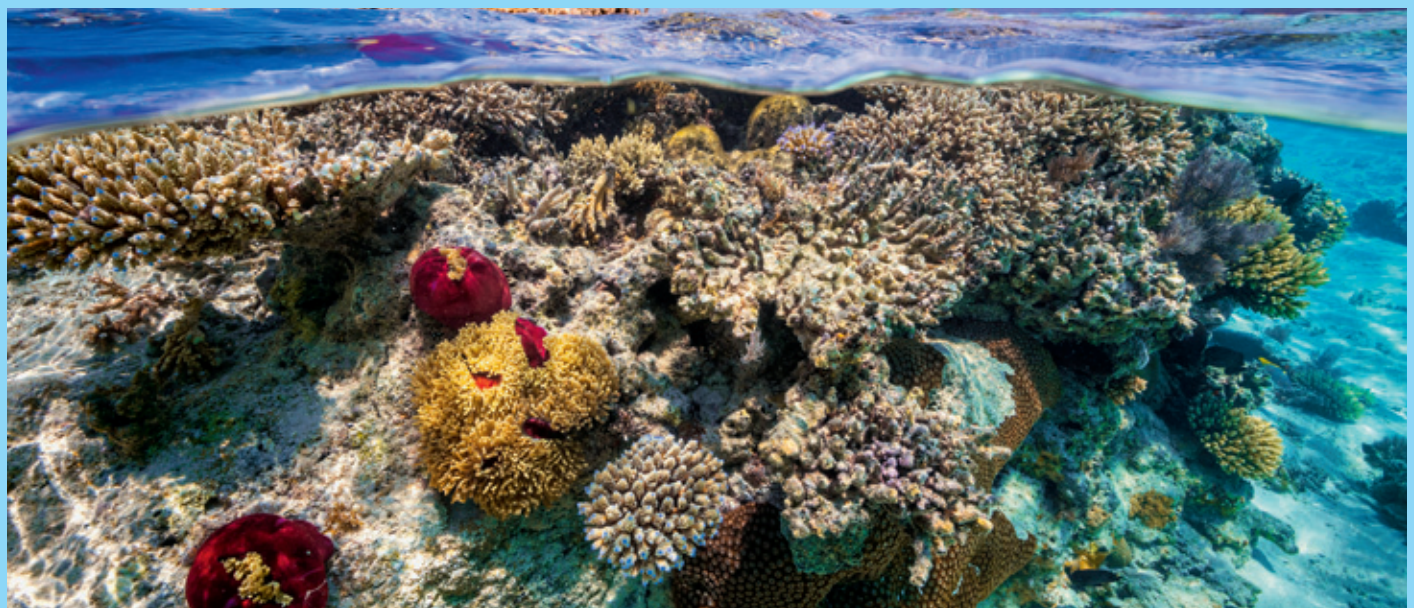
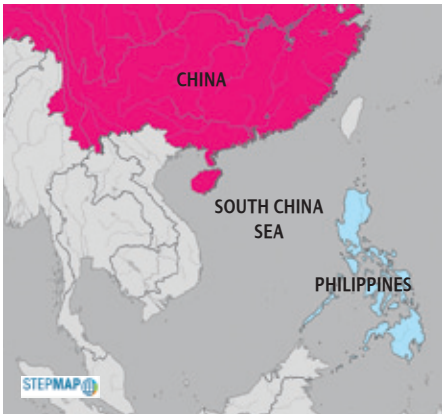


Photo: Barathieu/Biosphoto/Lineair

Pivoting Philippines



Nations are entitled to controlling the waters before their coasts. According to the Chinese government, however, almost the entire South China Sea belongs to the People's Republic. The leaders of South-East Asian countries have always disagreed, but the administration of Rodrigo Duterte, the Philippine's new president, is strangely ambivalent.

By Alan C. Robles

Just a year ago, when Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino was still president, Philippine diplomacy was on a straight and steady course. Manila wanted an international tribunal to decide on China's claim to control the entire South China Sea. The Aquino administration insisted on arbitration in the context of the UN Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS). The idea was to handle the dispute in a multilateral context and build ties to the leaders of other nations who were concerned about Beijing's maritime encroachments.

The policy was actually quite successful. In July last year, a UNCLOS tribunal in The Hague ruled in favour of the Philippines, though Beijing refused to accept its decision. The Communist regime claims sovereignty over the entire area with a historical map that uses a spurious "nine-dash line". The line extends all the way down the coast of Vietnam to Malaysia and back north along the Philippines' most eastern islands. The line is not defined precisely, but it clearly infringes upon several countries' exclusive economic zones as defined by UNCLOS.

In the past, all governments concerned rejected China's territorial claims. Today, however, it has become uncertain where Manila is headed. Even though the Philippines won the arbitration case, the country's new administration has suddenly set the decision aside, flung itself into Beijing's arms and basically left the allies it was courting standing open-mouthed.

The reason is the election of President Rodrigo Duterte, the bloodthirsty populist ex-mayor of Davao City (see essay by Alan C. Robles in D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2017/02, p. 24). During the campaign, he never clarified his position on the South China Sea dispute. In fact, he rambled like a drunkard: he vowed, for example, that he would ride a jet ski to contested rocks and plant a Philippine flag on them to defy China.

After taking office, however, he swiftly set a new course for foreign policy. He repeatedly insulted the United States, called then president Barack Obama a "son of whore" and threatened to abrogate all security arrangements with the superpower. Then he went to Beijing and grovelled before the Communist leadership. Without ever mentioning the dispute over the South China Sea, he told his counterpart Xi Jinping: "This is the springtime of our relationship." Duterte also said "it was time to say goodbye" to the USA and promised the Chinese leadership: "I will be dependent on you for all time."

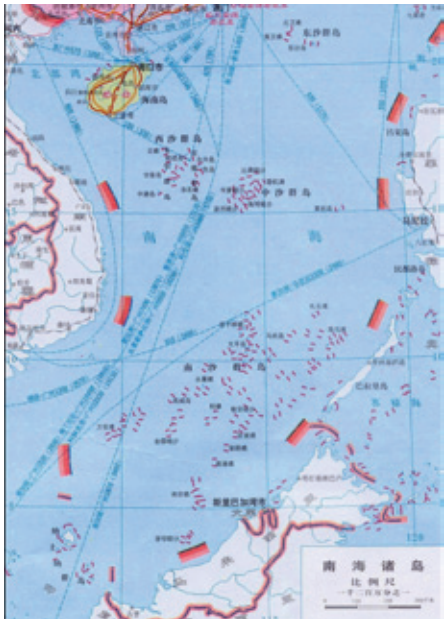
It was all music to his delighted hosts' ears. After kowtowing before the emperor in a 21st century style, Duterte went home loaded with gifts: billions of dollars in loans, agreements concerning trade, investments and security, promises of infrastructure financing as well as a green light for planeloads of Chinese tourists and investors.

There are speculations concerning the reasons for this spectacular diplomatic turnaround. One is that Duterte hates the US because it once rejected his visa application. Others are that China secretly supported his election campaign or is furtively providing medical care to the 71-year old ailing president.

The most generous interpretation of the Philippine pivot is that Duterte is playing the wily Filipino, hedging the country's bets by pitting two powers against each oth-

Chinese coast guard confronting Filipino fishermen near Scarborough Shoal, which is historically claimed by both countries.

Photo: picture-alliance/AP Photo



Chinese map with nine-dash line.

er. Despite Duterte's rhetorical outbursts, he has not actually upset security arrangements with Washington, nor has he moved to eject the five military bases the US currently maintains in the Philippines.

If this reading is correct, Duterte is playing a delicate game. To begin with, China has not budged one inch from its position, which is that it "indisputably" owns the entire South China Sea, as nebulously defined by its nine-dash line. Beijing has never clarified just how far the dashes are from the coast. It is obvious, nonetheless, that the line slices into the Philippines' exclusive economic zone and runs very close to the coastline of Luzon, the archipelago's most important and most populous island.

MILITARY DIMENSIONS

The issue is of great geostrategic relevance. China has seized rocks and shoals in the sea and has begun building them as islands hosting full-blown military installations. According to the US military, the new bases could soon bristle with missiles, turning the world's busiest sea-traffic lane into something resembling a Chinese lake. Accordingly, the US Navy is paying close attention.

Some Filipinos argue the Philippines would be unable to defend the territory against China anyway, so it is best to let the area go. They fail to see the difference between having territory grabbed and giving it away willingly. If Manila surrenders to China now, it will be very difficult to dispute Chinese ownership of the South China Sea in the future.

Moreover, the people who argue this appeasing way are probably unaware of how much is at stake. Alfred McCoy is a historian from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, who specialises in the Philippines. He tells people to "look at the map", pointing out that the Philippines' exclusive economic zone in the South China Sea is equivalent "to about a third of the country's existing sovereign territory". He adds that this is the planet's "richest fishing ground", which will provide protein to future generations.

McCoy says that if Manila were to simply give up the fishing grounds, as well as the hydrocarbons beneath the surface, the Philippines' economic growth would suffer. In the scholar's eyes, Duterte is playing a "dangerous game" in placating China, because Filipino nationalists might become concerned about what the country might be surrendering. The legal UNCLOS victory was important, McCoy argues, but the new president has "virtually abrogated that".

While Duterte's foreign policy pivot represents a drastic – and probably long-needed – change in its largely subservient relationship to the US, Manila is finding out that its new best friend can also be testy and demanding.

In late February, Perfecto Yasay, Duterte's foreign secretary, told reporters: "We vehemently object to China's claim pertaining to the nine-dash line." He added: "If China will attack us, we can only defend ourselves and make sure that our sovereign rights are recognised as we assert them." Yasay also said that ASEAN was concerned about China's militarisation of its artificial islands.

The backlash was immediate. Beijing cancelled a scheduled trip of China's commerce minister to Manila. He was supposed to sign contracts for 40 projects worth billions of dollars. A spokesman for China's foreign ministry called Yasay's words "baffling and regrettable." Duterte stepped in with a statement according to which his foreign minister had been "misunderstood". The Senate later forced Yasay to resign because of awkward questions of citizenship. In the meantime, it has turned out that Duterte gave China the go-ahead to explore the Benham Rise, a resource rich area off the Philippines' Pacific coast. He did not inform anyone else in the government.

LONGER THAN THE CONSTITUTION ALLOWS

China is certainly happy with its man in Manila. In February, Zhao Jianhua, the Chinese ambassador to the Philippines, openly called for Duterte to be granted emergency powers – ostensibly to solve infrastructure problems such as traffic. He said the Chinese were afraid of "taking up projects that go beyond the presidential term" – a hint that China would like to see Duterte lead the country longer than the constitutionally mandated single six-year term. Political observes in Manila, however, know that Duterte himself is quite keen on emergency powers and would like to become a dictator without constitutional constraints.

Duterte's close embrace of Beijing also runs against the inclination of Filipinos in general and the military in particular. The country's armed forces are organised, trained and equipped along US lines, and many officers were trained in the USA.

Finally, complicating matters is the election of Donald Trump, a leader who seems similarly unbalanced and unstable as Duterte. The US president's promise to build up the military, and his perception of China as a threat, is likely to intensify tensions concerning the South China Sea. The Philippines would be a frontline state in any potential conflict. So far, Duterte seems to be getting along with Trump, but his pro-Beijing policy may yet run into opposition from Washington.

For decades, Filipinos have happily led insular lives away from the geopolitics of the Asian mainland. Now they have awakened to find that, in a simmering confrontation between China and the US, the Philippines is of crucial relevance. They are discovering, in short, that as Napoleon is supposed to have said, "geography is destiny".

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Map: public domain/Wikipedia

Trade needs ports

The lack of access to the sea is a major hindrance to development. Developing countries which struggle with an array of structural problems are particularly affected. However, being centrally positioned within a continent presents several opportunities too. Rwanda, for example, is to become a regional infrastructure and service hub in spite of being landlocked.

By Kacana Sipangule

In 2015, a third of the countries that were ranked by the Human Development Index as having low human development were landlocked. These were the countries with the lowest life expectancies, education levels and per-capita income. On average, moreover, the economies of landlocked countries grow slower than those of countries with access to the sea. Mackellar et al. (2000) argue that being landlocked reduces a country's average growth by 1.5% annually.

Landlocked developing countries thus pay a high price for not having a sea port of their own. Their trade depends on ports of other countries. The worse transport links are, the higher the transaction costs rise. Moreover, many transit countries impose fees and road tolls that raise costs even further (Snow et al., 2003).

Poor infrastructure causes delays, and delays at borders are another major concern. Customs procedures, tax procedures and other bureaucratic procedures cause 75% of all delays (Djankov et al., 2010). Such delays especially affect the trade of time-sensitive perishable goods such as agricultural products. On average, it takes landlocked developing countries 42 days to import and 37 days to export goods. Coastal developing countries need only half of the time (Torres, 2014).

Since landlocked countries highly depend on their neighbouring countries for transit, it is vital that the latter are politically stable and reasonably administrated. In case of conflict or instability, alternative routes to the sea must be found. That can be very costly, particularly if new railway or road infrastructure must be built.

A prominent example is the construction of the Tanzania Zambia Railway line (TAZARA). It was built because Southern Rhodesia, which has since become Zimbabwe, closed its borders in the mid-1960s. The aim was to cut Zambia's access to South African ports in retaliation for its support of the liberation movement. Malawi, on the other hand, was forced to reroute its freight from the Mozambican ports of Beira and Nacala to Durban in South Africa and Dar es Salaam in Tanzania during the Mozambican civil war (Snow et al., 2003).

The high costs of trade are reflected in food prices, so the cost of living tends to be higher in landlocked developing countries. Moreover, these countries are especially vulnerable to global price volatility. During the recent global fuel crisis, fuel prices in oil importing landlocked countries such as Zambia rose by nearly 50%.

OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES

In spite of the prevailing challenges landlocked developing countries face, their inland location presents several opportunities too. They can become regional hubs for manufacturing, infrastructure and service provision. One country that has taken advantage of its central position to attract foreign investments is Rwanda. Having made great

East Africa's largest port Mombasa in Kenya serves as an important logistic hub for the entire region, including the landlocked countries of Uganda, South Sudan, Rwanda and Burundi.

Photo: picture-alliance/Photoshot

strides in overcoming the effects of the 1994 genocide, Rwanda has quickly become one of Africa's fastest growing economies. The government wants it to become an infrastructural and service hub for Eastern and Southern Africa. It has attracted several investors who have – or will – set up assembly plants for cars (Volkswagen), computers (Positivo) and mobile phones (A-Link Technologies).

To reduce the dependency on transit countries, air freight can be an option. Botswana's main export good is diamonds for instance. Diamond trade is dependent on air transportation, not ships, trains or motor vehicles. Botswana is one of sub-Saharan Africa's most prosperous countries. That its governance is good has certainly helped.

To facilitate trade, bureaucratic restrictions should be eased, so that business costs can go down. Regional economic associations such as the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) have taken measures to reduce transit delays and administrative hurdles. However, a lot remains to be done even after the adoption of the COMESA Protocol on Transit Trade and Transit Facilities.

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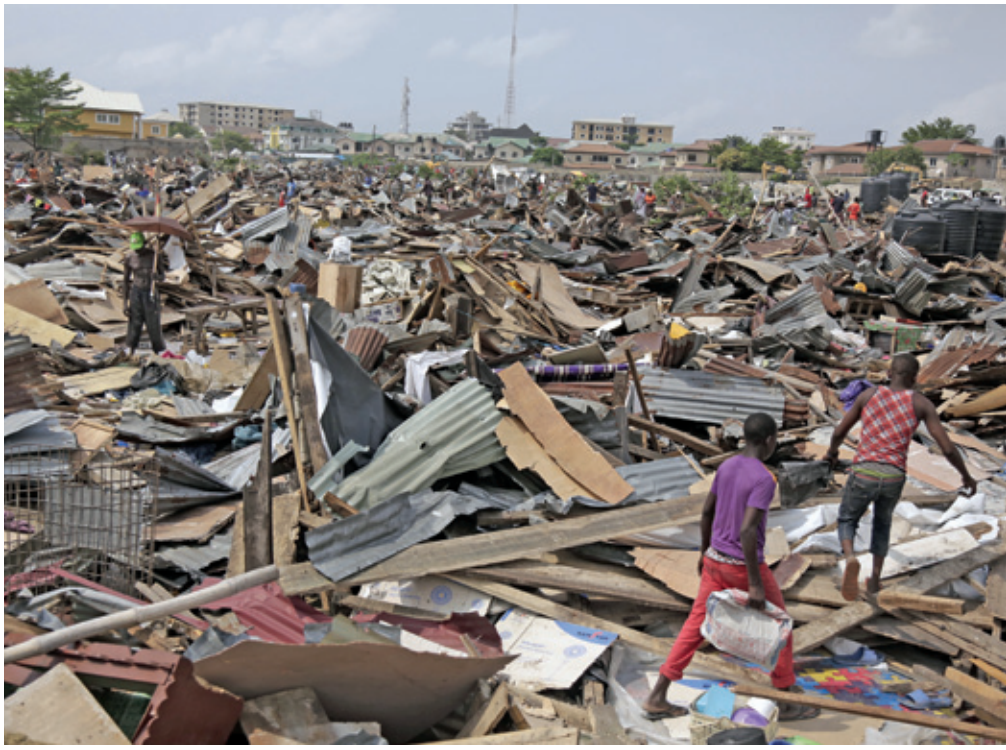
New islands for the rich

Though the sea level is set to rise, Lagos is growing out into the Atlantic Ocean. Urban growth means that land is becoming ever more valuable. Recent years have been marked by a scramble for coastal plots, so poor communities have been evicted from their homes. To provide space for fancy living, moreover, land is being reclaimed from the sea and a lagoon.

By Olamide Udoma-Ejorh



Many poor people's homes were demolished in Otodo Gbame.

In many agglomerations around the world, land on river banks and sea shores was historically left to the poor. These plots were at risk of flooding, after all, and they were useful for all sorts of businesses, since the waterways were used for boat and ship traffic. In more recent times, the interest in coastal land has been growing. These areas' appeal is growing due to less business being done there, less traffic on the water and the ever growing demand for land.

Since the turn of the millennium, the interest in coastal land has increased dramatically in Lagos, Nigeria's commercial hub. Many beach houses and beach resorts have come up. The most beautiful beaches are reserved for the super-rich. Some private beaches charge visitors fees. They are regularly frequented, and the fees vary according to the quality of the beach and the clientele that goes there. Waterfront houses and estates are fenced off.

Throughout the city's history, poor people have been evicted so their land could serve more powerful interests. In recent years, poor communities and informal settlements have been affected along the coast and lagoon shoreline. To make space for new developments, communities were forced to leave. Their homes were demolished, and their human rights were violated.

On 9 October 2016, Akinwunmi Ambode, the governor of Lagos State, issued a notice according to which some waterfront communities would have to leave within seven days. He argued that security had to improve in view of kidnappings. Few people doubted that the real issue was land, not security. The regional High Court soon issued an injunction against the notice.

Nonetheless, some 30,000 people lost their homes in Otodo Gbame a few weeks later. Fire was set to some homes and, after some confusion and clashes, the police and a demolition team tore down the informal settlement. The security forces claimed that there had been ethnically motivated agitation, but they did not provide convincing evidence. Amnesty International and UN experts have demanded that the state government investigate the events. Human-rights activists point out that people have a right to a safe home. Recently, Otodo Gbame has come under attack again, rendering 4,700 homeless.

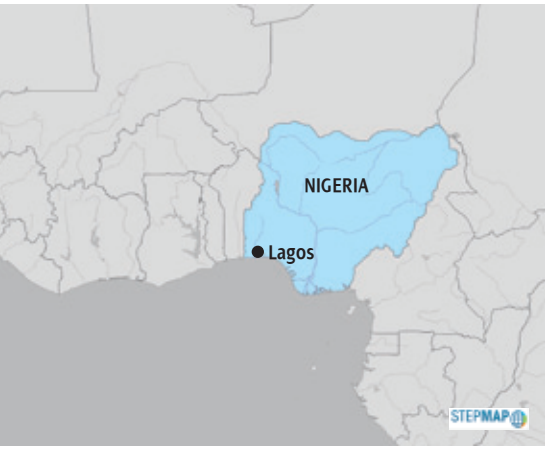
Experience shows, moreover, that forced eviction is no solution. The people concerned have no choice but to occupy other parcels of land. It would make sense to cooperate with the communities and develop liveable spaces. That could happen either where they are or in other parts of the city.

GREAT AMBITIONS

A long-term strategy has to take local people's needs into account. So far, they tend to be neglected. At the same time, some ambitious projects are underway that will mostly benefit the better-off. New land is being reclaimed from the Atlantic and from Lagos Lagoon. This has become something of a tradition in Lagos. The first major projects were Dolphin Estate, which was finalised in 1990, and Banana Island, which was completed nine years later. Both are in the Lagoon and now serve as exclusive neighbourhoods for prosperous people.

Currently, Victoria Island is being extended into the Atlantic, and a new neighbourhood called Eko Atlantic City is being

Photo: Alamba/picture-alliance/AP Photo



built there. Victoria Island is actually no longer an island, but has long become part of Lekki, the long peninsula that separates Lagos Lagoon from the Ocean.

Eko Atlantic City is a controversial project. The authorities want it to become Africa's first eco-friendly, smart city. According to the plans, it will be concluded by the end of 2017. The government of Lagos State promises it will provide new homes and improve the living conditions for the growing population of Lagos. Moreover, it is supposed to protect Victoria Island from storm surges. Journalists, however, have written that Eko Atlantic City "heralds climate apartheid" and is set to become "a utopian city for elites only".

A deep irony of the matter is that no environmental impact assessment (EIA) was presented before work on the project started. Experts have noticed that erosion and flooding have been getting worse along other parts of the urban coast since dredging and landfilling began. Critics had pointed out early on that proceeding without an EIA was irresponsible. Changing coastlines have impacts on aquatic life, moreover, affecting both animals and plants.

In the Lagoon, three new islands are currently being built. The projects were announced in 2016 by the state government and seem to be progressing well. Of course, the water is much calmer in the Lagoon.

It is striking, however, that the expensive developments on all the newly reclaimed sites will only be affordable to at most 20 % of the people. In each case, poor coastal neighbourhoods were destroyed. The state government claims it intends to improve life for the entire population of Lagos, but the real-estate developers' websites do not mention social or environmental concerns.

Urban planners should take climate change into account moreover. The agglomeration is just starting to grapple with it. The coastal areas are exposed to flooding, erosion and storm surges. For protecting the Atlantic coast, groynes have so far been the preferred option. Groynes are walls that are built out into the sea. They break the force of the waves and thus stem erosion. Last year, 36 billion Nigerian Naira (the equivalent of € 110 million) were earmarked to build 18 groynes along 7.5 kilometres of the coast of Lekki.

It remains to be seen whether the newly reclaimed land will prove viable in the long run. The problem is planners are expanding Lagos out into the sea and lagoon precisely at a time when we know that the sea level is rising.

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Coastal location

Many big agglomerations are located on coasts. Lagos is an example. The city's history is closely tied to the water.

Lagos means "lakes" in Portuguese. What is now a megacity, was once a collection of settlements on the shores of – and islands in – the huge Lagos Lagoon, which is about 50 kilometres long. The city emerged where the lagoon meets the Atlantic Ocean. It has since expanded further north and further west into areas now known as the "mainland".

Lagos Lagoon was a natural harbour, and sea-borne trade made the city important. For a long time, the lagoon was the main port in West Africa. By the mid-nineteenth century, the Àpápá port was built in addition. In 1997, a second port was finalised: Tin Can Island Port. Today, Lagos is the commercial centre of Nigeria. Its ports handle 80 % of Nigeria's imports and 60 % of the exports.

In earlier times, Lagos' many water bodies served as important transport routes. Today, however, bridges connect the islands to the mainland, and road traffic has become more important. Many small water bodies have been filled in and become urban land. There still is a vast system of creeks and canals, however, they are regularly used for dumping waste. A number of industries exist along former waterways, and many of them illegally discharge chemical waste. The megacity's six drainage systems, moreover, drain into the Lagoon, causing pollution and adverse effects to the environment.

According to recent research, the water bodies in Lagos contain various pollutants, including metals, detergents as well as human and animal excreta. The dirty water contaminates the environment in general, affects the food chain and spreads diseases. The sad truth is that the historical affinity Lagos has to water does not translate into environmental awareness today.

Fish species are disappearing

An observer looking down from space would probably believe that an invasion of Africa is being prepared in the Gulf of Guinea. The waters are full of ships. What is going on, however, is not a military exercise, but a destructive race for resources. Two sectors are involved: some high-tech vessels serve the oil industry and its offshore rigs, while giant trawlers and masses of small artisanal boats are involved in fishing.

By Nnimmo Bassey

Both industries depend on resources – fossil resources and biological resources respectively. The oil companies have a habit of naming some of their offshore fields after fish species. For example, Shell operates the Bonga Field. Bonga is a regional fish. Otherwise, the two industries do not have much in common.

As the saying goes, however, the grass suffers when two elephants fight. Indeed, the multinational giants that are involved in the two industries before the West African coast care little for the natural environment. Oil corporations and industrial-scale fishing companies are causing serious damage.

The big fish trawlers are mostly from Asia and Europe, and they are depleting West African fish stocks. Some of their business is actually illegal, but it normally goes unpunished. The price of fish is going up, not least because ever more fish is bought by processing plants in Senegal and Mauretania, for example, where fish is turned into animal feed that is sold to industry-scale farms in the supposedly "advanced" nations of Asia and Europe. In the past, trawlers from Japan and the EU mattered most, but more recently Chinese and Russian ships have become relevant too.

Millions of West Africans are employed in fishing. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO, 2014), marine artisanal fishing is a major contributor to gross domestic product in Ghana, Mauritania, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo and other countries.

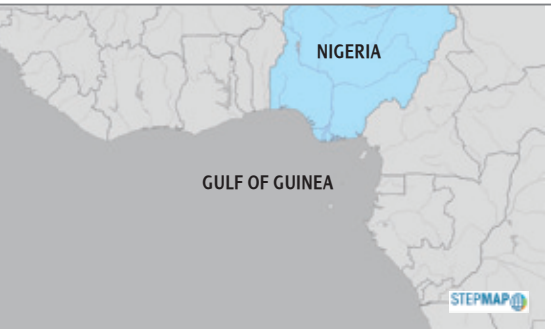
Most people in the region depend on fish and marine foods for their protein consumption. Accordingly, the coastal fisheries do not matter only to the fishing communities. People's food supply is at stake. The International Union for Nature Conservation (IUCN, 2017) warns: "Marine resources form the foundation for food security and livelihoods for the nearly 400 million people in western and central African countries with a marine coastline."

Some fish species are disappearing from West African waters. According to the IUCN, threatened species include the Madeiran sardine (Sardinella maderensis) and the cassava croaker (Pseudotolithus senegalensis). Illegal fishing and overfishing imperil national and regional management efforts, the authors warn, and in many countries illegal catches are said to represent over 40 % of the reported legal catch. Not all illegal fishing is done by foreign trawlers, but without them, the situation would be much better.

The fish resources must be managed competently. So far, this is not happening.

Artisanal fishing boats in Dakar, Senegal.

Photo: dem



Unfortunately, moreover, fossil-fuel extraction is making matters worse.

IMPACTS OF FOSSIL FUEL EXTRACTION

One reason is that oil rigs are treated as security zones. They are off limits to fishing boats, even though their bright lights attract fish. Indeed, the installations of the oil industries normally become hubs of marine life. Complex FPSOs – high-tech floating production, storage and offloading vessels – do so too. In other world regions, fisher folk are allowed to work in the areas concerned. In West Africa, they are not.

On the other hand, the fossil-fuel sector harms ecosystem. Oil spills have a devastating impact on fisheries, not only along the shore, but in estuaries and further upstream as well. Environmental destruction affects mangrove forests and coral reefs, which both are important spawning grounds and habitats of marine life. Increased ship traffic, moreover, means more pollution, and ever more vessels are going up the rivers.

Nigeria has a long history of horrendous oil spills. In 2011, Shell spilled 40,000 barrels of crude oil from its Bonga platform. In the same year, Chevron's gas rig blew up and the fire raged for one month. In 1998, Mobil spilled 40,000 barrels from its Idoho platform. The greatest disaster was caused by Shell in 1979, when Forcados, an offshore terminal, lost 570,000 barrels.

The governments of other countries, where the oil industry is beginning to operate, promise they will avoid the kind of accidents that have haunted the Niger Delta. That is easier said than done, however. The case of Ghana is certainly not encouraging. This country recorded three offshore oil spills before the first shipment of crude was even made. So far, there are no definitive studies that would document the full impact of oil spills on West African fisheries. However, we know that, almost three decades after the Exxon Valdez oil spill, the Alaskan fisheries have still not fully recovered.

The oil corporations deny that seismic petroleum exploration has impacts on marine ecosystems. Environmentalists have noted, however, that such activities do cause damage. For example, incidents of dead whales washing onto Ghanaian shores have been linked to them.

It matters, moreover, that the oil sector is not labour-intensive so it does not employ masses of people. The reasons are that oil production is highly automated and the processing of the commodity is not done in Africa, but in other continents. As a consequence, the oil business only benefits rather few African people.

African policymakers tend to be excited about the money oil exploitation can generate, but they mostly show little concern for the needs of poor rural people, including artisanal fishing communities. This attitude is unhealthy. The economic interests of rich nations are compounding the problems. The truth is that rural people deserve attention – and their livelihoods must be promoted, not endangered. African governments must ensure that development serves all of their people. And they must protect their nations' natural environment form uncontrolled international exploitation.

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LINKS

IUCN, 2017: Overfishing threatens food security off Africa's western and central coast as many fish species in the region face extinction.
https://www.iucn.org/news/overfishing-threatens-food-security-africa's-western-and-central-coast-many-fish-species-region
FAO, 2014: The value of African fisheries.
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Shell-owned FPSO (floating production, storage and offloading vessel) in Nigerian waters in 2011.

Photo: Alamba/picture-alliance/AP Photo

Fishermen versus oil giant

Seven years ago, the Deepwater Horizon drilling rig caught fire and sank in the Gulf of Mexico. It was run by BP, the British multinational oil and gas company. The accident claimed the lives of eleven crewmen and unleashed one of the biggest environmental disasters of all time. Mexican fishermen and other local residents are still fighting today to be compensated for the economic losses they sustained. Mexico's national government has other priorities than to support their legal fight.

By Virginia Mercado and Luis A. Soto

In 2010, the BP drilling rig Deepwater Horizon caught fire in the Gulf of Mexico, unleashing one of the biggest environmental catastrophes of all time.

Photo: picture-alliance/dpa

Along the US coast that was affected by the oil spill, millions have been spent on compensations and an extensive clean-up. But ecosystems do not stop at national borders. Ocean currents carried the pollution to other areas, notably Mexico, where the impacts have not been investigated properly.

In the years after the disaster, which according to one scientific study spilled up to 2 million barrels of oil (around 320 million litres) into the ocean, Mexican fishermen noted a dramatic decline in marine stocks. Some species have not recovered so far. Shrimp, crabs and food fish – which form the economic backbone of the region – are affected. The Mexican states that have sustained the biggest losses are Campeche, Tabasco, Tamaulipas and Veracruz. However, Mexico's national media do not pay much attention to this issue.

The government of then President Felipe Calderón ignored scientists' reports of signs of environmental damage. Nor was appropriate legal action taken. It may have played a role that other deep-water oil fields had recently been discovered and the government wanted multinational corporations to bid for drilling rights in an auction. Previously, only PEMEX, the state-owned petroleum company, had exploited Mexican oil resources.

In view of the national government's initial lack of action, the state governments of Tamaulipas, Veracruz and Quintana Roo sued BP in a US court for the losses sustained. However, the case was dismissed in 2015 on the grounds that the areas affected were the responsibility of the Mexican government. The latter, for its part, had filed a law suit in 2013, and that case is still ongoing. In the meantime, the fishermen have also organised and taken BP to court. The key question is whether they can prove that the losses they suffered are a result of oil spill the multinational caused.

In this context, the work of Mexican scientists will be relevant. The fishermen's case is based on their findings. One of us is an oceanographer at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and heads a research group that has investigated the impacts of two major oil catastrophes in the Gulf of Mexico. The first was an accident at the Ixtoc exploratory oil well drilled by PEMEX in 1979, and its impacts are still evident in the region's ecosystems and beyond. The second was the BP Deepwater Horizon rig disaster in 2010.

Initial research was done in the summer of 2010, three months after the oil leak started, when the slick had not yet reached the Mexican coast. More surveys were done in the winters of the following two years. In winter, the ocean currents run south, so pollution is likely to be carried from the north to greater depths or even reaching the coasts. In the winter of 2012, the microorganisms that live in ocean sediment were assessed. Marked changes in terms of hydrocarbon presence were evident, and they could be connected with oil pollution.

Despite the scientific findings, BP denies that the changes observed on the Mexican coast are due to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. If Mexican authorities spent more money on research in coastal regions, it would be easier to clarify matters. The lack of support stands in stark contrast to the massive resources that BP is mobilising for its legal defence.

In Mexico, critical voices now loudly demand to stop focusing exclusively on oil production to safeguard energy supply. For environmental reasons, they want renewa-

bles to get a greater share in the country's energy mix. Production methods have hardly improved since the oil spill seven years ago, so ecosystems are still under constant threat.

Nearly five years after the Deepwater Horizon accident, an explosion occurred on a PEMEX drilling rig in the Sonda de Campeche. Four people died, several more were injured. Even though there was no oil leakage, the incident showed that there is a permanent risk.

In December 2016, the winning bids were announced in the auction for deep-sea drilling rights in Mexican waters. Two oil fields were awarded to a consortium comprised of Norway's Statoil, French-based Total and BP – even though the company has still accepted no responsibility for the damage done along Mexico's coasts.

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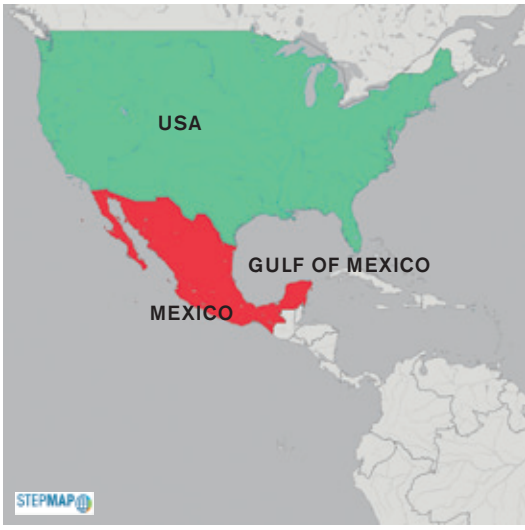

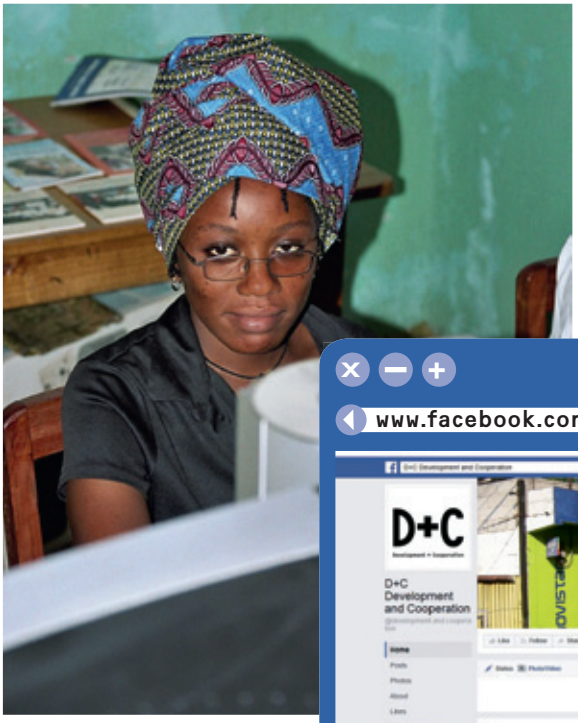

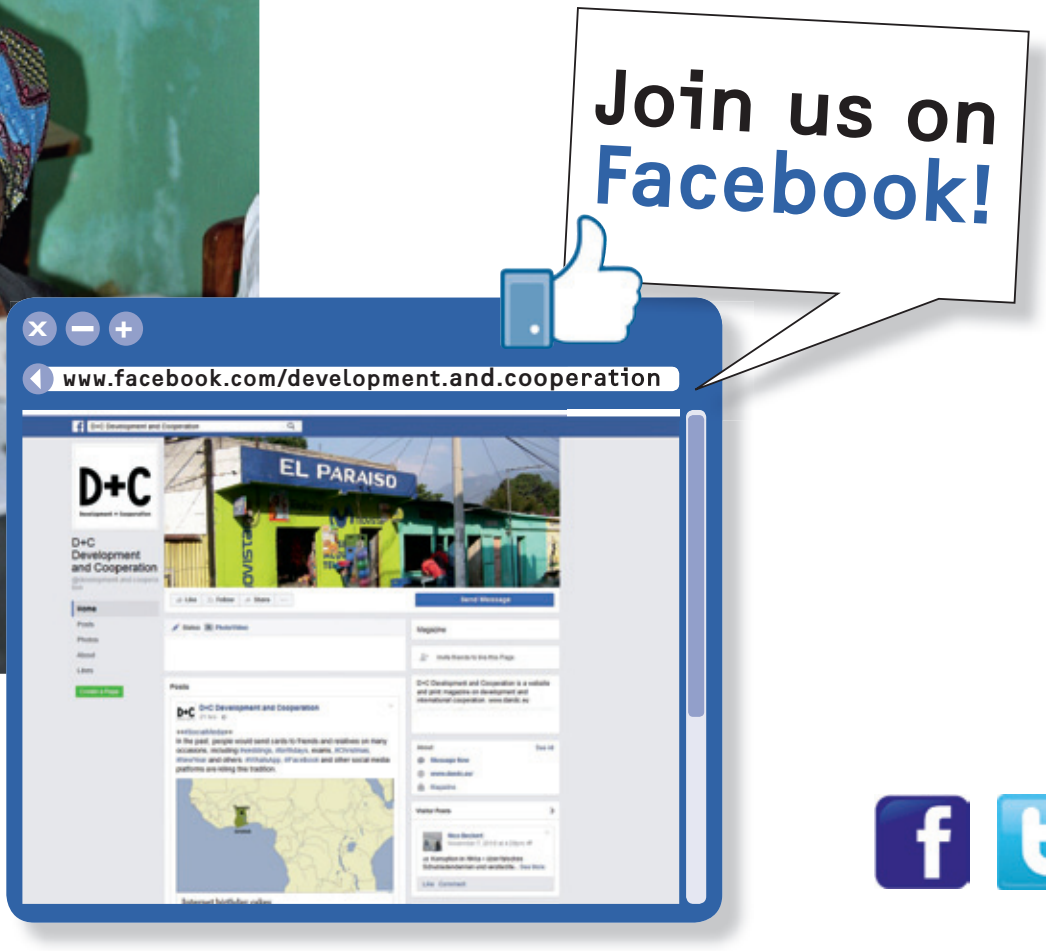

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