

# D+C

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## AFRICA

Germany's Federal  
Government wants to  
boost private investment

## PAKISTAN

Only 3,000 people  
still speak the ancient  
Kalash language

## WTO

Developing countries  
should join forces to  
promote their interests

# Drugs policy



## Drugs policy

### Latin American perspectives

In the past 12 years, some 240,000 people have died in Mexico's "war on drugs". Andres Manuel López Obrador, the new president, has promised change in the election campaign, writes Virginia Mercado of the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México. By contrast, Uruguay's experience of legalising cannabis has been mostly good, according to Sebastián Artigas of the Montevideo-based Universidad de la República. Colombian civil-society organisations, in turn, worry that their new government will prove to be more repressive again. Activist Julian Quintero assesses matters.

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### Time to regulate

In the eyes of the Bristol-based Transform Drugs Policy Foundation, prohibition has failed. In an interview, Steve Rolles, a policy adviser with Transform, discusses the alternative of responsibly regulating production, distribution and consumption.

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### Prohibition in Asia

In spite of NATO support after US-led liberation from the Taliban regime, Afghanistan is largely a narco-state today. Janet Kursawe, professor at a college in Bochum, has kept track of developments for many years. Iran's fundamentalist regime is trying to repress the consumption of alcohol and drugs, but even the death penalty does not seem to make much difference. Mitra Shahrani, a student, reports that the regime is gradually loosening its stance. By contrast, the government of Bangladesh is tightening the screws. Ridwanul Hoque and Sharawat Shamin of Dhaka University argue that the poor are affected most. Journalist Emmalyn Liwag Kotte spells out why the churches criticise the bloody anti-drugs campaign that President Rodrigo Duterte has launched in the Philippines, and her colleague Edith Koesoemawiria takes account of prohibition in Indonesia.

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### African worries

Pharma regulation is ineffective in many sub-Saharan countries. One consequence is a growing informal market for tramadol, an opioid. Assane Diagne, a fact checker based in Dakar, describes West Africa's fake-pharma scenario. In the southern African country of Zimbabwe, many people lack hope for a better future and resort to various intoxicants, writes Jeffrey Moyo, a journalist.

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## Try regulation

Throughout history, human beings have used mind-altering substances. Discomfort with drugs was expressed too. Alcohol is taboo in Islam, whereas European cultures historically ostracised the use of cannabis and opium and its derivatives (with exceptions made for medical painkillers).

In the 1960s, the UN adopted an international drugs policy that declared illegal all the drugs not traditionally used in Europe. Alcohol and tobacco are addictive too, but they are internationally seen as health hazards rather than issues of criminal law. In many predominantly Muslim countries, however, alcoholic beverages remain forbidden.

In the early 1970s, US President Richard Nixon prominently declared a war on drugs. His example was followed around the world. The results are depressing. The production and use of opioids, coca derivatives, cannabis and various synthetic substances has only increased. Illegal drugs are widely used. At the same time, repression is causing massive suffering, especially where the word “war” did not stay a metaphor. In Mexico alone, some 240,000 people are reckoned to have died in drugs-related violence in the past 12 years. Afghanistan was liberated from the Taliban by US troops and then “stabilised” with NATO troops, but it must largely be considered a narco-state today.

By the way, alcohol prohibition has not succeeded either. Even where despotic regimes exert brutal repression, some people drink in secret – in Iran or Saudi Arabia, for example. When alcohol was made illegal in the USA in the 1920s, organised crime became deeply entrenched – and the gangs peddled other drugs along with booze. To a large extent, European nations have been backing off from repression at home. The idea is to prevent harm. In Germany, for example, heroin addicts are provided with safe spaces and sterile syringes, and though cannabis is illegal, processing small amounts for personal use is no longer punished. Germany’s constitutional court ruled two decades ago that sentencing people to prison for these offences is disproportionate. In legal terms, the situation is unsatisfying however. Forbidding something, but not sanctioning transgressions leads to ambiguity.

Repression has generally been much harsher in developing countries and emerging markets. Some countries resort to capital punishment, but extra-judicial killings are far more common. Prisons are full of drug users, and many are recruited into criminal networks after release. It is true that addiction is spreading diseases, petty crime and prostitution, but prohibition is not preventing that. All too often poverty and a lack of prospects motivates people to take intoxicants – or to find a black-market livelihood. Typically, there is a lack of rehabilitation facilities.

The International Commission on Drugs Policy, which is led by Ruth Dreifuss, a former Swiss president, deserves attention. It argues that regulating drug markets is better than prohibition. Obviously, different rules should apply to different drugs, depending on how harmful they are. In any case, the best way to fight organised crime is certainly to thwart its business model. Huge profits empower the cartels to corrupt institutions of governance and to pay the perpetrators of horrific violence. The global community needs a better approach. Regulation could allow state agencies to tax drugs, ensure quality and have some impact on where, when and how people use them. There is no lack of good ideas, and the time has come to test them.

► You'll find all contributions of our focus section plus related ones on our website – they'll be compiled in next month's briefing section.



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## Debate



### Destroying the global commons

The international rise of authoritarian populists is linked to vested interests' opposition to the necessary transformation toward sustainability. As Hans Dembowski, the editor-in-chief of D+C/D+Z, points out, Brazil's new President Jair Bolsonaro considers forest protection an unnecessary burden. In truth, the earth's ecological balance depends on his country's rainforests. **PAGE 11**

## Tribune



### Endangered culture

Today, a mere 3,000 people still speak Kalash, the language of Pakistan's smallest ethnic group. Mahwish Gul, a student from Islamabad, assesses why this culture is at risk of extinction. **PAGE 13**

### Groundbreaking reform not in sight

The World Trade Organization (WTO) must be reformed urgently. What has been proposed so far, however, basically serves the interests of the advanced economies, as the scholars Fabian Bohnenberger and Clara Weinhardt write. In their eyes, developing countries should join forces and promote proposals of their own. **PAGE 15**



GLOBAL WARMING

# A Herculean task

**Climate experts disagree about the extent to which it is still possible to stop global warming. Nonetheless, scientists insist that every tenth of a degree matters to prevent worse droughts, storms and extreme rains.**

By Lea Diehl

In October, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published a special report that warned of the disastrous consequences of a global temperature increase of two degrees Celsius by the end of the century. That is the goal spelled out in the Paris Agreement (see box next page).

Daniela Jacob is one of the scholars who contributed to the special report and who are now urging policymakers to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius at most. "In the past, we didn't think that there was an evidence-based figure that could be scientifically determined with such precision", she explains. Science has advanced, however, and Jacob points out that, if global warming were limited to "only" 1.5 degrees, there would be less extreme weather, including extreme heat and rainfall.

The researcher also emphasises that crops like corn, wheat and rice would fail less often. In addition, biodiversity would not dwindle as fast. Finally, the global sea level rise would be reduced by ten centimetres by 2100.

Jacob points out that the impacts of global warming are already felt in some regions. "Around the world, unprecedented weather phenomena are taking place." However, the changes are not happening at the same rate everywhere. On the other hand, Jacob inspires cautious optimism: she does think it is possible to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees. The technical and financial means are available; but the lack of political will remains a problem. This view is shared by Mojib Latif, climate researcher at the Helmholtz Centre for Ocean Research in Kiel (see E+Z/D+C e-Paper 2018/11, Debate).

Daniela Jacob emphasises, however, that limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius will require unprecedented changes. All in-

dividuals will have to change their behaviour. Emissions will have to be drastically reduced in every sector. New technologies must be invented and investments diverted to carbon-free technologies. In order to limit warming to 1.5 degrees, carbon emissions will have to drop by 2030 to a mere 55 % of the volume emitted in 2010.

Development and Humanitarian Aid NGOs (VENRO).

All experts agree that, to reach climate goals, the global community must cooperate fast and closely. Action must follow words, demands Hans-Christoph Boppel of VENRO. The Paris Agreement of 2015 made it look as though the international community was ready to tackle climate change together. Today, there is a strong sense of disappointment.

According to Boppel, climate change is linked to almost every other development issue, from fighting hunger to addressing the causes of migration. He stresses that the



A model for the future? An ecological village in Denmark.

Christiane Averbeck, the executive director of Klima Allianz Deutschland, an umbrella organisation of 120 non-governmental organisations, considers it good news that the 1.5 degree goal is still achievable. "But policymakers have to set the right course", she insisted at a conference in Berlin organised by Klima Allianz in co-operation with the Association of German

phenomenon is already seriously impeding development in poor countries and putting progress at risk. The consequences are particularly disastrous for the poorest of the poor. Nonetheless, Boppel sees the climate issue as an opportunity for the global community. Rising to the challenges together could create a model for global governance in other areas, he believes.



One question that arises in view of the needed transformation is what to do about workers losing jobs in the oil and coal industry. Antonio Zambrano Allende of MOCICC, a Peruvian civic movement against climate change, sympathises with their protests. “We have to understand the workers,” he says.

He feels that it is important to acknowledge the conflicting interests of different groups and to address their needs. Designing structural change in a fair manner has many dimensions, Zambrano Allende says. In his opinion, three things are essential: “democracy, land and territories”. If change is to be just, it must take into ac-

count the way individual people in different territories live and work.

Furthermore, the interests of indigenous communities as well as the unique history of individual regions must be considered. Zambrano argues that it is important to think locally and bring different interest groups to the table.

## IPCC special report and climate change conference

In early October, the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published a special report in preparation for the upcoming annual UN climate summit, which will be held from 3 to 14 December 2018 in Katowice, Poland. The IPCC report is meant to further elaborate details of the Paris Agreement from 2015.

Ninety-one authors from 40 countries contributed to the special report. It compiles scientific insights into what consequences it will have if global temperatures rise by 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels by 2100. The Paris Agreement, which was concluded by 195 countries, defines the goals of limiting the trend to two degrees at most, but preferably to 1.5°. The IPCC was invited to produce the report as part of the Paris Agreement.

According to the report, the average global temperature in 2018 was about one degree above pre-industrial levels. The authors therefore argue that any additional warming must be restricted to 0.5 to 1 degree. If, however, the global community continues to emit as much carbon as it currently does, global warming would increase by about 3 degrees by the end of the century.

The IPCC report makes clear that limiting warming to a maximum of 1.5 degrees Celsius by 2100 is still possible, but requires rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented action.

Global greenhouse gas emissions would have to be reduced much faster than planned. Moreover, carbon would have to be removed from the atmosphere, for instance by planting new forests.

Climate scientists find it unsettling that the right-wing populist Jair Bolsonaro was elected Brazil's new president. During the campaign,

he announced that his country would withdraw from the Paris Agreement, following the example of US President Donald Trump. Furthermore, Bolsonaro wants to reverse protections for the Amazon rainforests, which are essential for preserving the global climate (see Hans Dembowski in Debate section on p.11). (ld/sb)



The destruction of the Brazilian rainforest is advancing.

SYRIA

# Insights into a war-torn country

**Brutal civil strife has been raging in Syria for eight years, and the international community seems to be losing interest. In first-hand reporting, journalist Rania Abouzeid vividly portrays the people affected by the war.**

By Dagmar Wolf

Only in people's memory and history books does Syria still exist as a coherent state. In its place, there are now several Syrias, argues the award-winning Abouzeid, who lives in Beirut. In an attempt to understand the tragedy, her book "No turning back" spells out the views of many different people.

It all started in 2011 with peaceful protests, when some youngsters wrote graffiti on walls, but it escalated into war and ultimately dissolved an entire nation. As the author reports, the UN stopped counting victims in 2013 because reliable information proved impossible to get. Experts now estimate that half a million have died, and that half of Syria's 23 million people have been displaced from their homes.

Abouzeid regrets that the western public has lost interest in one of our age's worst humanitarian and geopolitical disasters. The images are too horrific, the scenario is too complex, and an end is not in sight. At the same time, the war has impacts on Syria's neighboring countries, and even on the EU, where millions of refugees have arrived.

For five years, Abouzeid has been traveling to Syria repeatedly. She visited the front lines, but she also went to Turkey, Washington and various places in Europe. In her many conversations with Syrian people, she wanted to find out why the situation kept getting worse. Her book consists of moving stories and vivid portraits, it does not offer sanitised coverage from a safe distance.

Abouzeid tells the story of Suleiman, who was a prosperous business man with family ties to autocratic President Bashar al-Assad. He saw no reason to protest and knew the rules of the game. But the courage of the activists and the prospect of a lasting politi-

cal settlement fascinated him. He began to film the protests and post videos online. Assad's security forces became aware of him and he underwent the ordeal of prison and torture.

Another important person Abouzeid writes about is Mohammad, who already opposed the regime before the Arab spring started and who basically identifies with radical Islam. He spent years in Syrian prisons, which have a reputation of torture, and became increasingly radical. Abouzeid

pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, the episodes add up to one big picture that illustrates the tragedy of Syria's war.

The book spells out that there can be no victors in this war. No matter on which side people stand, they all lose. It also shows how diverse political forces incrementally usurped an initially peaceful protest movement. Nonetheless, it becomes clear that none of the country's main political players are in control anymore.

The news for Syria stay alarming; the human-rights situation is depressing. The big question is whether peace will get a chance in some kind of reunited Syria. According to a recent report issued by Germany's Foreign Office, the police, security forces and secret service in Syria are systematically torturing members of the opposi-



None of the country's main political players are in control anymore: member of the Syrian Democratic Forces in the ruins of Rakka in 2017.

neither spares readers the atrocities he witnessed nor the brutal violence he later perpetrated as a commander of the Al Nusra militia.

All of the book's episodes have one thing in common: they show how people's lives were turned upside down at some point during the war. In contrast to conventional war reporting, Abouzeid does not tell us what she saw and witnessed herself. Instead, she lets people tell their stories. Like

tion and people suspected of supporting it. Even women and children are tortured.

Abouzeid's impressive book can contribute to raising fresh awareness of the Syrian drama. Reading "No turning back" changes one's perception of the news. It calls attention to the people affected.

## BOOK

**Abouzeid, R., 2018: No turning back: Life, loss and hope in wartime Syria. London: Oneworld.**



## BANKING

# Inventing narratives

**Given that financial markets have a huge impact on the world economy, the ethnographic research that Stefan Leins did in a Swiss bank is of great developmental relevance. He studied how financial analysts see the world and how they work.**

By Hans Dembowski

Western scholars developed the methods of ethnographic research to study exotic cultures. In recent decades, however, these methods are increasingly applied to understand specific professional communities in western societies. Leins, a social anthropologist, joined the financial analysts' team of a Zürich-based bank to do his research.

His recently published book "Stories of capitalism" shows that analysts' work is highly subjective. They rely on a host of diverse sources of information, including academic studies, company reports, business media, share prices and other stock market information. However, there is no clear hierarchy of exactly what data are essential, and how they are to be interpreted.

According to Leins, analysts develop narratives about how they expect specific financial assets to perform. They then support that narrative with data that fits their hypotheses. In Leins' words, "numbers do not tell stories, numbers are used to enrich previously constructed stories". Selecting useful facts and figures from various sources is called "data mining".

In several ways, moreover, the narratives financial analysts invent are opportunistic. The most important examples are probably:

- Analysts tend to shy away from deviating too far away from what they perceive as the consensus opinion. This attitude gives them considerable protection. If the advice they give later turns out to be wrong, they can always say that everybody got it wrong.
- Moreover, their narratives normally fit the worldview and expectations of the people who receive their advice. After all, the analyst's job is to convince these people.

- Ultimately, financial analysts serve as animators who stimulate others to invest. They therefore need narratives that promise good returns, not messages of doom.

These insights are not entirely new. Observers of financial markets basically know these things. It is one thing, however, to expect a certain profession to tick in a particular way, and another thing to read an empirical account.

Leins points out that analysts' work is legitimate. In his eyes, "the economy needs narratives because they make the unknowable future accessible". The financial analysts do their best to predict the future and certainly hope that their narratives will work

public trust in banks, but it did not change their business models.

Most social scientists understand perfectly well that markets are driven by human expectations. Economists, by contrast, tend to pretend that markets reveal something akin to the laws of nature. Leins shows that this is not so. Indeed, perhaps the greatest challenge financial analysts face is that data do not speak for themselves. How market participants read them varies, and anticipating how others interpret what is going on is just as important as understanding the underlying economic dynamics. If unreasonable expectations are causing a stock-market bubble, it may actually be smart to keep buying shares nonetheless. Selling them right before the bubble bursts will bring maximum profits. Rational investors will thus follow a collective trend even when knowing that the trend is irrational, hoping to get off at the right moment. Rational behavior can thus compound irrational trends.



Paradeplatz is the centre of Zürich's financial district.

out well. The point is that this hope is more an issue of faith and intuition than of rigidly processed data according to some kind of stringent methodology.

The subjective nature of analysts' work helps to explain why the financial crisis on Wall Street 10 years ago came as such a surprise. Many observers knew that problems were brewing up, but they also kept reassuring one another that the problems would somehow be controlled. The crisis shattered

Economists, who like to construct models based on the irrational assumption of human behavior being entirely rational, would do well to consider Leins' work. His book shows that their discipline too is really a social science.

## REFERENCE

Leins, S., 2018: *Stories of capitalism – Inside the role of financial analysts*. Chicago: University Press.

## PUBLIC FINANCE

# African countries at risk

Public external debt is on the rise again in sub-Saharan Africa. Almost 40% of countries are in danger of slipping into debt crisis, according to a new briefing note by Shakira Mustapha and Annalisa Prizzon from the London-based Overseas Development Institute (ODI).

By Monika Hellstern

In the 1990s, most countries in sub-Saharan Africa saw debt ratios decline. The reasons were debt relief and economic growth. From the late 1990s on, the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative and the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative (MDRI) reduced low-income countries' debt burdens. The idea was to free up resources for infrastructure investments and social spending, Mustapha and Prizzon write.

In the current decade, however, public debt and debt-service ratios have been rising again. According to the scholars, they are now higher than they were in 2006 when the MRDI started. Moreover, ratings by the World Bank and IMF suggest that low-income countries are now at high risk of debt distress, which occurs when a country struggles to service its debt.

The number of countries at risk in sub-Saharan Africa has more than doubled from eight countries in 2013 to 18 in 2018. Eight countries – Chad, Mozambique, Republic of the Congo, São Tomé and Príncipe, South Sudan, Sudan, The Gambia and Zimbabwe – are already in distress. According to the authors, borrowing is driven by the desire to mobilise resources for reaching global goals, implementing national development plans and turning low-income countries into middle-income ones.

The authors caution that even though borrowing is often seen as necessary for growth, unsustainable debt burdens may undermine progress. It is unhealthy that some governments are now spending more money on debt servicing than on their education or health sectors. High debt levels make them less able to attract investors and innovators.

Policymakers and practitioners need to pay more attention to the changing composition of debt and its accompanying risks, Mustapha and Prizzon demand. Three trends matter in particular:

- The share of multilateral and concessional debt has declined. For example, sub-Saharan multilateral debt has fallen from 53% in 2005 to less than 40% of the region's external debt in 2016. One reason is that, as countries become middle-income countries, they are no longer eligible for multilateral and bilateral donors' programmes.
- New bilateral sovereign creditors have increased their share in total public external debt from 15% in 2007 to 30% in 2016. For example, Chinese institutions are increasingly financing large-scale infrastructure projects in the region. These loans may lead to repayment problems if they do not generate sufficient returns.
- Sub-Saharan countries increasingly raise funds on international capital markets. They are thus exposed to risks regarding volatile exchange rates and interest rates. Investor interest may shift too.

The new finance landscape may render past debt-relief mechanisms obsolete and exposes countries to more financial risks (also note Jürgen Zattler in Focus section of D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2018/08). Both borrowers and lenders could do more to make

debt more sustainable. The authors recommend reforms in three areas:

- building the capacity of borrowing countries to manage debt responsibly,
- enhancing transparency for all parties involved, and
- developing state-contingent debt instruments (SCDIs) which would link debt service to pre-defined macroeconomic variables, such as GDP growth: in the case of a downturn, the debt-service burden would thus be reduced automatically.

In many sub-Saharan countries, institutional capacity for effective debt management is weak. Shortcomings include the fragmentation of debt management responsibilities across several government entities, lack of political commitment, high staff turnover in debt management units as well as unreliable debt recording systems and data gaps, according to Mustapha and Prizzon. However, improving debt management is not a panacea and has to be supported by sound macroeconomic, fiscal and tax policies.

Lenders need to promote responsible lending too. The authors argue for improving transparency and information-sharing among creditors and borrowers. The World Bank and the IMF should reach out to emerging-market creditors for better coordination. New approaches such as SCDIs might also help.

## LINK

Mustapha, S., and Prizzon, A., 2018: Africa's rising debt. How to avoid a new crisis.

<https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/12491.pdf>

## External debt and debt service in sub-Saharan Africa



Note: excluding SSA high-income economies.



# Stalking women is not love

In a landmark sentence, a court in Uganda sent a man to jail for molesting a female politician with frequent text messages. The ruling has shocked many men. It set a precedent of harassment of women having legal consequences.

In November 2017, Sylvia Rwabooogo, a member of the Ugandan parliament, began to get unsolicited text messages from 25-year-old Brian Isiko. Her attempts to block Isiko did not stop him from expressing “his love”. To Rwabooogo, it felt like harassment. After she alerted the police, Isiko was arrested in June 2018. Even in police custody, he continued to send her text messages.

In court, Rwabooogo broke down in tears as she recounted the trauma of eight months of stalking. The accused, by contrast, laughed throughout the court session.

In her verdict, the judge stated that in Ugandan society it seemed to be normal to demean and disrespect women.

She sentenced Isiko to two years in prison for cyber harassment and offensive communication and said that this ruling was “meant to deter men who find it normal to harass women.”

This did not go down well with some men – they verbally abused the judge, the MP and other women for “denying” men the “right to express their love”. To these men, the feelings such statements trigger do not matter.

Some comments on social media were appalling: “This honourable member of parliament should be sued. Where is it written that when one expresses his interest, it is tantamount to crime, hence imprisonment? I am annoyed.” Another male member of the public wrote: “What can you expect from such a person if just a mere 25-year-old boy can cause her to lose her peace?”

Some say that Isiko’s prosecution and his verdict only came to pass because the victim was a woman of privilege. They have a point. The right to personal space and safety are still a dream to the average Ugandan woman.

The abuse of women’s rights is perpetuated by the very authorities meant to protect them, but refuse to enforce policies that would ensure a safe environment. Typically, the women are blamed for any abuse they experience. Simon Lokodo, Uganda’s minister of ethics, demanded the arrest of victims of revenge porn. Revenge porn means that a former lover publishes nude pictures and sexualised images. Onesmus Twinamasiko, another politician, advised men to beat their wives.

Male authority figures are not held to account for promoting violence against women. Therefore, it is logical that Ugandan men can’t believe that anyone should be sent to jail for something they all take for granted: their right to disrespect women.



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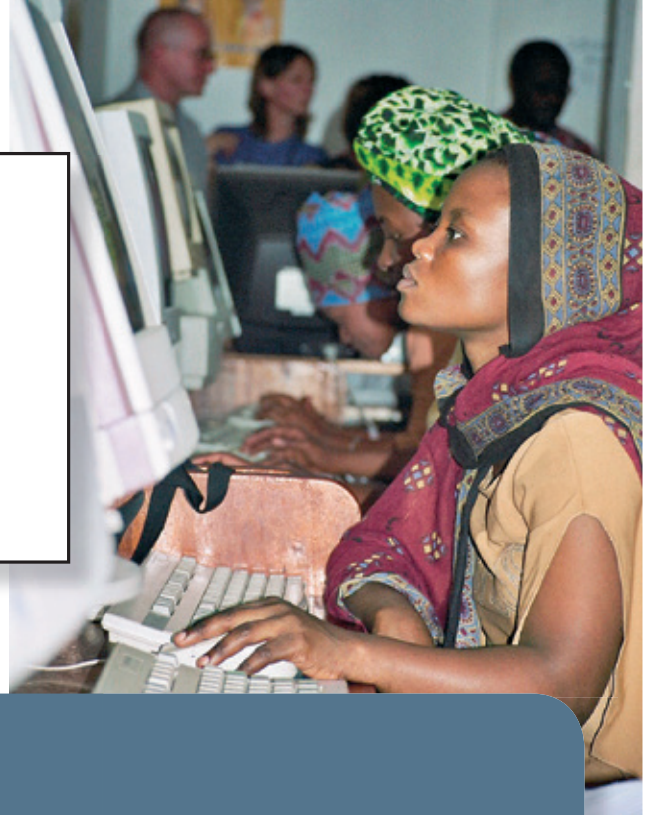
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## AUTHORITARIAN TENDENCIES

# Destroying global commons

**Internationally, the rise of authoritarian leaders is linked to vested interests' opposition to the necessary transformation to sustainable economies. In the eyes of Jair Bolsonaro, the right-wing leader who won Brazil's presidential elections, forest protection is an unnecessary burden. In truth, the earth's environmental balance depends on his country's rainforest.**

**By Hans Dembowski**

By coincidence, Bolsonaro won the first round of the elections precisely when the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change launched its latest report. The consensus of the climate scientists is that action on global warming must be taken fast (see Mojib Latif in D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2018/11, debate). Lead-

arm themselves. He promises violence, not peace.

Ever since Donald Trump was elected US president two years ago, international media pundits have been discussing why right-wing populists are gaining momentum. They have mostly neglected how the trend is linked to climate change. Global warming is a huge challenge that the humanity must rise to, but it means transforming economies. To powerful vested interests, that is a threat. By denying there is a problem at all and reversing climate protection, populist leaders are serving those interests.

In the past, both centre-left and centre-right governments tried to regulate capitalism in ways that solved the problems that market dynamics created. That is how the welfare state and environmental protec-

responsibilities, claiming to put the national interest first.

Under Bolsonaro's rule, rainforest destruction is set to accelerate fast. As Brazil has about one third of the world's remaining rainforests, which are important carbon sinks, this is of global relevance. Protecting forests is a crucial element of climate protection.

According to Bolsonaro's misleading message, however, the nation will benefit from exploiting underground resources below the forests or turning them into farmland. Yes, there will be short-term financial gains – but only because the environmental costs are not factored in. A rather small number of people profits from rainforest destruction, and they do not pay for the damages they cause. The damages, however, affect everyone else.

The populist approach to environmental politics will hurt the nations concerned. If the likes of Trump and Bolsonaro have their way, global warming will spin out of control. Extreme weather will cause ever increasing damages, and failed harvests will lead to dramatic food shortages. The trend is irreversible, moreover, and will become worse if certain tipping points are reached (see Dirk Messner in D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2017/10, focus). Nobody will be safe.

Populists claim to be defending the people from elite interests. In truth, they are protecting vested interests. Their policies only provide protection to the privileged few and leave everyone else to fend for themselves. They care about cash flows, not human rights. As the global commons are destroyed, social tensions will certainly increase.

The cynicism is extreme. As the Washington Post recently reported, the US administration does not want the Environmental Protection Agency to regulate car emissions even though it acknowledges that global temperatures are set to rise by four degrees Celsius. Its point is that action is meaningless because climate change is happening anyway.

Bolsonaro will most likely take a similar approach. Aware of climate change being real, he will probably claim that forest protection is useless. As in the USA, Brazil's institutions may yet restrain the new leader to some extent by enforcing the laws. Given that Brazil's democracy is much younger, they will struggle even harder.



**Bolsonaro's famous campaign gesture symbolising guns.**

ers like Bolsonaro, however, are not interested in scientific evidence.

As is typical of right-wing populists, Bolsonaro's rhetoric is racist, xenophobic and misogynist. He pretends he will re-establish an earlier, social order that was supposedly better and goes on to praise his country's brutal military dictatorship which ended in 1985. He wants to allow the police to kill supposed criminals and citizens to

tion emerged (see my editorial in D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2018/10). Most parties on the centre-left still take this approach, and so are some on the centre-right. However, many established conservative parties are either being taken over or replaced by post-truth populists. The new brand of leaders deny the problems instead of tackling them. They channel related fears by hounding scapegoats. They shy away from environmental

## DEVELOPMENT INVESTMENT FUND

# Linking policies on development and trade

**Germany's Federal Government has announced a Development Investment Fund. The new scheme can become an important milestone for realigning cooperation with Africa – towards dovetailing aid and trade, increasing private-sector involvement and self-sustaining economic development in African countries.**

**By Christoph Kannengießer**

Poor infrastructure is a major obstacle to doing business in African countries – both for local and for international enterprises. But infrastructure – for transport, energy or water, for instance – costs a lot of money. It cannot be financed solely from national budgets or official development assistance (ODA). Private investment is needed for local economies to grow, livelihoods to be generated and people to lead independent lives.

Foreign direct investment does not automatically result in more local jobs, of

course. Even so, it is absolutely essential. In 2017, € 36 billion were invested in African countries, mostly in Egypt, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Morocco. That sum was a mere 2.9 % of global foreign investment. By contrast, € 434 billion flowed into Asia. The major corporate investors in Africa are based in the US, UK and France as well as in China and South Africa. Even firms based in the city-states Singapore and Hong Kong invest more in Africa than Germany's private sector, which still hesitates to engage with Africa. A lack of suitable financing options, risk protection and political support are bemoaned by many German companies, especially small and medium-sized ones.

Many of the thousand German companies which are active in Africa are actually very successful. Interest in Europe's neighbouring continent certainly exists. At the end of October, the German-African Business Association (Afrika-Verein der deutschen Wirtschaft) staged an investor

conference in cooperation with the Sub-Saharan Africa Initiative of German Business (SAFRI). The event attracted a hundred companies. Between them, they plan projects worth an investment volume of €500 million. The projects will create 13,000 jobs in eleven partner countries of the G20's Compact with Africa. They are Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Morocco, Rwanda, Senegal, Togo and Tunisia. Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) supports some of the ventures through its Special Initiative for Training and Employment.

And yet German involvement does not reflect the country's economic weight. Smart action could increase the € 1 billion worth of projects currently in the pipeline across Africa several fold. For that to happen, small and mid-sized enterprises (SMEs) need to see Africa as an attractive investment destination. The Development Investment Fund could offer the right leverage, making a key contribution to creating more jobs for African youth. Items that have long been on the SME wish list include accessible and less expensive guarantees for exports, for project development and for investments. It is good that governmental Hermes export-credit guarantees will become available for additional countries. To better cushion investors' risks, it equally makes sense to reduce Hermes' costs and client excesses. It is helpful, moreover, that the Fund will make financing available for smaller projects than in the past. This will not only benefit German companies; African enterprises will also be able to access capital and grow.

Africa needs private-sector involvement to leap out of poverty and become integrated into the global economy. We must support the continent's catch-up process, harnessing the current momentum. Judiciously linking policies on development and foreign trade is the right way forward – for better infrastructure and more investment in African countries.



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Infrastructure is vital for economic development: electricity pylon in the Sahara.





Kalash women and girls.

#### MINORITIES

## On the verge of disappearing

**The Kalash culture is at risk of extinction. Today, Pakistan's smallest ethnic group consists of only about 3,000 people.**

**By Mahwish Gul**

The Kalash language is classified as being severely endangered. An estimated 3,000 indigenous people who live in the mountains of the Hindu Kush speak it. The language is the most important expression of a distinct indigenous group that has survived millennia and is still maintaining its rich and unique form.

The Kalash people have held on to their religious beliefs, along with their own identity, way of life and language. Hidden up in the mountains near Pakistan's border with Afghanistan, the Kalash tribe loves homemade alcoholic drinks, celebrates and dances for days on festivals and worships a variety of gods. Women choose their hus-

bands, which is otherwise rather unusual in Muslim-majority Pakistan.

The Kalash are blue eyed and fair skinned, so anthropologists, scientists and other authors wonder about their descent. The most popular claim is that this unique tribe has Greek roots. After all, Alexander the Great conquered these lands over 2000 years ago, so it seems convincing that the Kalash are descendants of his Greek troops. It is also concurred that the tribe shows signs, rites, history and possibly the DNA that traces back to the ancient Greeks. Another hypothesis, however, is that the Kalash is an Indo-Aryan tribe and may have arrived much earlier.

Surrounded by Muslim neighbours on all sides, the Kalash are the smallest ethnic group in Pakistan. Estimates vary, but census data suggest that their number has declined from 10,000 or so in the late 1950s to merely 3,000 today.

Kalash lifestyle and culture are very different from those of neighbouring Muslim communities. The Kalash celebrate three festivals in a year. These festivals are celebrated over homemade wine and dancing on the sound of drums. They worship several gods and spirits, making offerings and sacrifices during the festivals. These are also occasions where young women and men choose their husbands and wives.

Kalash women are not only allowed to choose their husbands, but they can also divorce them and are even allowed to elope. At the same time, Kalash women are burdened with superstitious beliefs. For example, menstruating women are said to be impure and hence to bring bad luck to the family if allowed to wander around. Women, during menstruation, are forced to stay in special compartments. All villages have them at some distance from the residential quarters. This is among the many traditions that make them different from other ethnic groups in Pakistan.

Kalash people also hold a unique tradition of funeral ceremonies. Death is mostly celebrated as a joyous occasion. It is believed that it is a union of the soul with the creator. Instead of mourning their dead,

the Kalash give a farewell to the deceased by paying tributes with singing and beating drums. The dead are given food provisions for their final journey. Their possessions are laid besides them during the ceremony. These tributes last for days until the dead is put to his final resting place. In old times, the Kalash used to lay the body of the dead in a coffin anywhere in open, but with time they started burying their dead.

These ceremonies offer a chance to display wealth, showing the importance of the deceased and his or her family. However, the funerals of men tend to be more elaborate.

### TOURIST ATTRACTION

This unique and striking culture, though hidden in the mountains, has started attracting an increasing number of tourists. The Lowari Tunnel is making a big difference. This vehicular underpass is 10 kilometres long and links the districts of Chitral, where the Kalash live, with the district of Upper Dir. The tunnel was formally inaugurated in 2017. Better road access has led to an increase in local tourism. Moreover, modern supplies have become more readily available. The Kalash themselves, however, hardly benefit from related business as respective enterprises are controlled by non-Kalash people.

Discrimination against the Kalash runs deep. The 7.5 magnitude quake that struck parts of Northern Afghanistan and Pakistan in 2015, for instance, was blamed on Kalash community's "immoral ways".

Many people argue that the Kalash should assimilate.

Their traditions are actually becoming extinct fast. One factor is conversions to Islam. This was already happening in colonial times as depicted by Rudyard Kipling in the short story "The man who would be king". Insanity and idol worship figure in it prominently. The location is Kafiristan, which means the land of the infidels.

The subject of Kipling's story were the "red Kafirs", who were brutally converted at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and were then called Nuristanis, the "enlightened ones." In Kipling's time, the Kalash, who live in the same region, were known as the "black Kafirs" because of typical black clothing. There have been media reports of forced conversions and of forced marriages with non-Kalash people. It is estimated that as many as 100 Kalasha have converted to Islam in the past few years.

Kalash culture is also being eroded from within. Young people are adapting to new and modern ways. Many want to get a formal education and have professional career. Lakshan Bibi was the first from her valley to graduate. She became a commercial airline pilot. Wazir Zada is the first Kalasha to become member of the Provincial Assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which was formerly known as the Northwest Frontier Province.

Other issues that threaten the unique Kalash culture include illegal logging and land encroachment. This community is severely marginalised in economic terms. This is another reason why many Kalash

people are abandoning their traditions, but they do not find acceptance in the dominant culture. If the course remains unchanged, only what is documented is likely to survive of their culture. It is therefore essential to record the customs and traditions that have been passed down orally. This knowledge is at risk and must not be lost.

Civil-society organisations have been campaigning to get the Kalash culture included in UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List. The process was initiated in 2008, but has stalled since. Pakistan's government has also been making efforts to protect and preserve the Kalash culture. The authorities worry that it is under threat from exploitative tourism, which is set to get worse. The constitution ensures equal rights to minorities and the law is designed to safeguard Kalash customs, which has helped centuries-old practices to survive so far. What matters most, however, is that some Kalash people are determined to keep their traditions alive – and their resolve seems to be strengthening.



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## Endangered languages

Unique cultures of indigenous peoples are under threat. For instance, 40 % of the 6,000 or so languages spoken today are endangered and may not survive by the next century, according to the UN. Since 1950, 228 languages have become extinct. Due to the immense value of languages not only as a tool for communication but also as

a form of identity, cultural history, and a repository of traditions and memory, the UN has declared 2019 The Year of Indigenous Languages.

According to the World Bank, there are approximately 370 million indigenous peoples worldwide. While they occupy a quarter of the world's surface area, they safeguard

three-fourths of the world's remaining biodiversity. They are said to provide answers to food security and climate change. Their traditional knowledge is considered of immense value in preserving ecosystems. Indeed, they are often considered to be stewards of nature.

Their food systems may offer solutions for expanding and diversifying the current food base and providing nutritious food in areas threatened by climate change. Yet, land

dispossession, forced assimilation and other forms of discrimination are endangering the most fundamental aspects of indigenous peoples, including their identity, language, art, traditional knowledge and spirituality.

Kalash is one of the 26 endangered languages spoken in Pakistan (see main story). According to UN categories, it is even one of the five most severely endangered Pakistani languages. (mg)





Transmission lines in Abidjan, Ivory Coast: the Economic Community of West African States and other regional communities are increasingly cooperating on electric-power supply.

WTO

## No signs of sweeping reform

**The World Trade Organization (WTO) is in urgent need of reform. But recent proposals for institutional changes are limited in scope and primarily serve the interests of advanced economies. Developing countries should seize this opportunity to promote their own ideas on the future of the trade system.**

**By Fabian Bohnenberger and Clara Weinhardt**

Escalating trade conflicts, like the current fracas between China and the US, have rein-vigorated calls for WTO reform. Tempers are running high: US President Donald Trump has threatened to leave the WTO. His ad-

ministration is imposing tariffs on trade partners in defiance of the organisation's principles that were designed to safeguard the multilateral trade system. Moreover, the US is blocking the nomination of new members to the WTO Dispute Settlement Body (DSB). The DSB may thus be largely dysfunctional by the end of 2019.

With traditional proponents and beneficiaries of the WTO system increasingly turning away and the US leading this trend, the reform debate has become much more urgent. The EU and Canada recently proposed reforms, but their initiatives mostly represent damage control that would reduce the negative impact of current trends on ad-

vanced economies. There are few reasons why developing countries should support their suggestions.

The proposals concerning dispute settlement include concessions to the US, but also go beyond Washington's demands. The Trump administration blames the DSB for its judicial activism. This refers to a tendency of the DSB to overstep its mandate by defining rules and obligations that exceed the scope of specific cases. Accordingly, the EU proposes to restrict DSB jurisdiction. But the EU also advocates for more resources for dispute settlement and an increase in DSB staff, which runs counter to the US stance.

The most far-reaching EU proposals, however, concern changes to the special status that developing countries currently enjoy in the WTO, the creation of new WTO rules to guarantee a level playing field and the commitment to pursue plurilateral negotiations, which only involve a subset of WTO members.

The EU is calling for greater differentiation among developing countries and, in particular, wants dynamic economies like China to lose their flexibilities and exemptions. Two thirds of WTO members – including China – claim special treatment as developing countries. This exempts them from cutting some tariffs, permits longer

The proposals mainly serve the interest of the established economic powers and would further restrict the policy space of developing countries. Moreover, many developing countries still refuse to discuss new issues because their priority remains to secure compensation for past concessions; they are thus hesitant to let go of the Doha Round

agreed in subgroups – so-called plurilateral agreements – should be extended to all WTO members, developing countries are often not part of the negotiations. It is thus unlikely that their interests, like reducing rich nations' agricultural subsidies, will be high on the agenda of these plurilateral negotiations or that developing countries will have much say in drafting new rules.

Unfortunately, the much-needed renewal process of the multilateral system is only just beginning. WTO members' interests diverge fundamentally, and the current reform proposals are not far-reaching enough to bridge these differences. Limiting the damage will not suffice; neither will proposals that merely reflect the interests of a minority of the organisation's members.

Developing countries need to highlight the current gap between damage control and modernisation and take advantage of the existing impasse to advance own reform proposals. The deficiencies of the trade system are well known, but mounting conflicts have left member states with a new sense of urgency and willingness to address some of the flaws in the system. A good start could be to assess how the dispute settlement system can be made more accessible for developing countries, which so far have not been using it much. More generally, developing countries need to insist on a significant role in future plurilateral talks. They must ensure that their interests are equally represented and the negotiations advance – rather than diminish – the integrity of the multilateral system.



WTO Director-General Roberto Azevedo speaks at a press conference in Beijing in November.

transition periods and entitles them to some financial assistance. A more needs-driven approach with regular reassessments could benefit developing countries that face increasing competitive pressure from emerging economies like China. But the proposal is highly controversial because it would mean the end of member states' right to self-declare their development status in the organisation.

Other EU proposals will face similar concerns. These address issues such as market-distorting subsidies, state-owned enterprises and forced technology transfers. The outdated WTO rules do not address these more recent concerns satisfyingly. Again, the proposed reforms primarily target China, which, according to the EU, USA and Japan, is deliberately distorting markets.

negotiation agenda. China will pose another hurdle, as it is unlikely that the country will agree to further restrict its domestic industrial policies.

The changes proposed to date cannot fundamentally revamp the WTO. They represent damage control, slight tweaks that do little to address the underlying tensions in the system of global trade governance. Many WTO members have in recent years opted for bilateral and regional agreements to avoid complex and time-consuming multilateral diplomacy. The EU and the US have been driving forces of this trend, fully aware of its undermining effect on the WTO's authority.

The current reform proposals hold little appeal for developing countries. While they emphasise that trade liberalisation



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# Drugs policy

Illegal drugs are dangerous. They cause illnesses, addiction, petty crime and prostitution. Prohibition, however, has not solved the problems. Indeed, things have deteriorated since US President Richard Nixon declared the “war on drugs” 50 years ago. Several countries have therefore begun to pioneer new approaches to regulate the production, distribution and use of mind-altering substances. One goal is to thwart the lucrative black market which has allowed organised crime to thrive.

Legally harvested cannabis drying in a warehouse in Pueblo in the US-state of Colorado.



# Restart needed

Mexico's illegal drug economy has a huge impact both on domestic affairs and international relations. The criminal cartels control entire areas, and their influence is felt far away in the USA. Tens of thousands of people have died in the bloody war on drugs that Mexican governments have been waging. People now hope that Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the new president, will usher in the peaceful change he promised during the election campaign.

By Virginia Mercado

One person is killed in Mexico roughly every 15 minutes, and violence has been getting worse ever since the war on drugs was launched in 2006. So far, some 240,000 people have died, according to people close to the president, who is commonly known as AMLO. 2017 was the year with the most dead, and the number for 2018 will certainly set yet another record. In August this year, the worst affected Mexican states were Guanajuato and the State of Mexico in the country's centre, Baja California in the west and Chihuahua in the north. It is hard to tell how many deaths were directly related to the fight against drug cartels, but it is obvious that violence has escalated after the government started the war on drugs in 2006.

The goal was to regain control of the areas where organised crime holds sway. Major successes included arresting some leaders of powerful cartels. However, their power has not diminished. The cartels simply reorganised. All too often, the gangsters have more and better weapons than the security forces. They mostly get the guns in the USA and use them without restraint.

The policies of the past three presidents were drafted and implemented under considerable pressure from the USA. Washington wants Mexico to stop drugs trafficking across the border. According to a bi-national study prepared on behalf of the Mexican and US governments in 2010, Mexican cartels make an annual \$ 19 billion to \$ 29 billion in the USA.

Vicente Fox, who was in office in Mexico from 2000 to 2006, took initial measures

to get a grip on the problem. He led the right-wing Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) and was the first president in seven decades who did not belong to the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). Fox created the Federal Investigation Agency (AFI), copying the model of the FBI in the USA. He also established the Secretariat for Public Security, which is a ministry of the federal government and has the mission to coordinate policy measures. The new institutions, however, did not succeed in uprooting the criminal cartels.

Like Fox, Felipe Calderón Hinojosa, who became president in 2006, belongs to the PAN. He took a much tougher approach. He decided to confront the gangs head on. At the time, the cartels were battling one another in an extremely violent manner, trying to get hold of specific regions. Calderón declared the war on drugs soon after assuming office, but it did not deliver the desired results, and the failure revealed serious problems within the security forces. Corruption figured prominently. It became obvious, moreover, that some officers of the institutions which are supposed to fight organised crime are actually cooperating with the gangsters.



After two consecutive PAN governments did not end drug-cartel violence, the PRI returned to power. Voters trusted it to have the experience and competence to negotiate with criminal groups and restore peace. That was not what happened however. Though Enrique Peña Nieto, who became president in 2012, promised a new approach in the fight against organised crime, he largely stuck to his predecessor's law-enforcement strategy. He had to admit defeat in April this year, shortly before the most recent municipal, regional and presidential elections.

Once more, peace was the main campaign issue. Frustrated, angry and hurt, the people chose AMLO to be the country's next top leader. He ran for the party Morena – the acronym stands for Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional (see my comment in D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2018/06, opinion section).



Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán being arrested for the second time in 2014. The head of the Sinaloa cartel managed to escape from prison twice, but was extradited to the USA in 2017.

AMLO took office on 1 December, shortly after this e-Paper was finalised. He is a harsh of his predecessors and wants to restore peace by abolishing corruption. He also intends to call the soldiers back to the barracks, arguing that they should not be doing the police's job. On the other hand, he admitted that the police do not have the

capacities to handle the situation alone. The statement triggered a big wave of criticism.

## NEW PERSPECTIVES

Soon after he had triumphed in the elections, AMLO established a council on peace building and reconciliation. Based on its

recommendations, he announced several political principles for dealing with the security issues a few days later:

- First of all, the president-elect pointed out that past approaches failed because they were based on misunderstanding the core problem. According to AMLO, the underlying issue is Mexico's great social disparities

# Missing people

To date, the results of Mexico's war on drugs have been devastating. As Human Rights Watch, the international non-governmental organisation, stated in a country report in 2018, 32,000 persons disappeared from 2006 to 2017. Organisations of victims and their families, however, reckon that the number is even above 35,000. In many cases, official security forces were involved in forced disappearances, but so far, only 12 persons have been taken to court and convicted in related cases.

It was the kidnapping of 43 students from Ayotzinapa in September 2014 that attracted the most international attention. What fate befell them is still unclear. Authorities claim that their bodies were burned, but the relatives of the victims have ample reason not to trust this supposed "historic truth". The kidnapped students were never found.

Given that state agencies largely stayed inactive, the organisations of the relatives of other missing persons have started a painful journey across the country. People dig with their own hands, hoping to find a clue that might lead them to remains of the person they are looking for. So far, they have discovered several mass graves, and the number of officially

registered mass graves has risen to 1,307. Some of the corpses could be identified, but many others remain anonymous. The endless search continues.

Human Rights Watch points out, moreover, that there were extra-judicial killings and that security forces have been

spread and impunity has become the norm.

Internal displacement is another serious issue, but it does not get much public attention. In 2016, Mexico's National Human Rights Commission registered 90,000 displaced people who fled violence. According to other sources, more than 300,000 people were internally displaced in the years 2009 to 2017.

have any officers. Compounding the problems, some units are secretly cooperating with drug cartels, which are fighting one another. Officers' chances of survival often depend on picking the winning side in a gang war. Moreover, the cartels have the financial clout to bribe officers. Tom Wainwright, a former Mexico correspondent for The Economist, has thoroughly assessed these matters in his book "Narconomics" (for a review, see p. 38 in this edition).

In any case, it is well understood that the security forces themselves often infringe on human rights, act arbitrarily and make mistakes that lead to the death of innocent people. Their reputation has suffered considerably in recent years. Whether it can be restored is an open question. It is telling that people are unsure how to interpret a statement made by Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, a prominent cartel boss who is on trial in New York. He said that Felipe Calderón Hinojosa and Enrique Peña Nieto, the previous two presidents, took huge bribes. El Chapo may be lying, of course, but can anyone really be sure? (vm)

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Commemorating victims of Mexico's war on drugs.

increasingly abusing their powers. In a survey, 58 % of prison inmates said they were tortured. The human-rights situation has deteriorated in general.

Extortion, human trafficking and slavery are part of the drug cartels' operations. Journalists and policymakers are at risk. Corruption is wide-

So far, there has been little progress. Police officers are poorly trained and not paid well. They lack security equipment and weapons. Their personal safety and the safety of their family depends on not interfering in cartel activity. The dangers are real. In some villages, the police simply do not



which previous governments' economic policies did not reduce. In his eyes, this issue never got the attention required.

- AMLO promised not to use arms to suppress the people. This statement was an implicit criticism of his predecessors' reliance on the military, and it resonated widely. He plans to create a new, better prepared

### HEAVILY INDEBTED POOR COUNTRIES

Correction: In our focus section on the history of structural adjustments (e-Paper 2018/08, print issue 2018/09-10), we falsely stated that HIPC stands for „highly indebted poor countries“. In truth, it stands for “heavily indebted poor countries”. The mistake was made in the editing process. We apologise to our readers as well as our contributors.

National Guard, which is to be trained by the army, but many people would prefer not to have the military involved at all.

- He announced he would free political prisoners, and a broad-based public debate erupted immediately. Proponents of the amnesty say that activists and members of the opposition deserve justice after having being falsely sentenced to prison. Opponents, however worry that AMLO's stance may compound problems of impunity.

- Another new approach is to pay more attention to the victims of violent crime. One implication can be punishing state-agency officers who were involved in crimes.

- AMLO also wants to revisit two previously taken strategies. The first is to train the police and other security forces with a focus on human rights and peace. The second is compensating victims of crime.

- He wants to establish a permanent advisory council to tackle issues relevant to peace.

- Finally, reform is being considered in regard to Mexico's drugs policy, which has been extremely restrictive so far.

As future cabinet member in charge of domestic affairs, Olga Sánchez Cordero announced in autumn a reform that could be approved by mid-2019 to regulate the production and consumption of cannabis, though it would not permit the commercialisation of this drug.

During the election campaign, the Morena party, cast itself as Mexico's hope. Now people's expectations are very high. They want to see results fast. AMLO's opponents, however, will try to use any little mistake he might make to regain power. The new government now has considerable – but not unconditional – political capital.



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## Legal distribution

**Uruguay was the first country in the world to legalise the cultivation and consumption of marihuana. Pessimists predicted a rise in drug addiction and crimes, but that did not happen. Uruguay now has four years of experience with a legalised drug.**

By Sebastián Artigas

In 2014, the parliament of Uruguay legalised cannabis. There now are three legal ways for the purchase and consumption:

- You can buy cannabis in pharmacies, if you are a citizen of Uruguay and register as a user,
- you can grow it yourself for your personal use, or
- you can consume it in special clubs.

Cannabis is mostly used in one of two forms: as pressed resin (hashish) or dried herbs (marihuana). The psychoactive effect depends on the concentration of the active

agent, tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). THC content varies between two to 20%. The difference between psychoactive and medical cannabis is defined by the THC content.

Since the drug was legalised in Uruguay, the production for personal use and the establishment of cannabis clubs were successful. Distribution via pharmacies has remained sluggish. The main reason is the boycott by big international banks. They threaten to sanction pharmacies that sell cannabis. For instance, they might close the accounts of pharmacies concerned. Accordingly, pharmacy chains are reluctant to become involved in the cannabis market, and this distribution system is not selling much. Otherwise, the regulated market would most likely be growing faster.

Moreover, the authorities delayed the implementation of the law. Only since July 2017 it is possible to buy marihuana in small packages of five grammes. A package

costs slightly more than six dollars. Registered citizens can buy up to 40 grammes per month.

There have been cases of farmers being prosecuted illegally by the police for growing cannabis in the interior of the country. The farmers had actually complied with the law.

In the past year, the government ran a campaign for “prevention and sensitisa-



tion” regarding the use of cannabis. Diego Olivera, secretary of the national drug commission, told the press that awareness raising was “necessary and mandatory by law”.

## COMPANIES AND CLIENTS

For several purposes, the state grants licences to grow cannabis. Recreational use is one of them. So far, two companies have been registered in this context: Simbiosys and International Cannabis Corporation. Moreover, the company Fotmer has attained a licence to produce an annual ten tons for scientific use. Medicplast has a licence for medical cannabis and has registered ten additional companies for hemp cultivation.

The companies for medical cannabis have founded an association, the Cámara de empresas de cannabis medicinal (CECAM), with more than 10 members. They are planning or implementing investments worth \$100 million.

By the end of October 2018, Uruguay’s regulatory body IRCCA (Institute for Regulation and Control of Cannabis) had registered 29,386 buyers (eligible for purchases in pharmacies), 6,863 cannabis growers, 109 clubs and 17 pharmacies (of 1,100 in total in the country), which sell psychoactive cannabis. Pharmacies sold 1,200 kilos of psychoactive cannabis since they started distributing the drug in 2017, according to the IRCCA.

Monitor Cannabis, a scholars’ platform, reckons that the actual demand in Uruguay is much higher, since the national drug commission estimates that more than 160,000 people in the country consume marihuana. That would imply that the legal market share amounts to no more than 20%; with the rest being black market. The comment of Diego Olivera of the national drug commission is: “The numbers are good enough for a first stage, but they are not sufficient if we consider the total demand.”

The IRCCA has published further information regarding the registered cannabis buyers: 49% are between 18 and 29 years old, 34% are between 30 and 44 years old, and 17% are older than 45 years. Seventy percent of the cannabis buyers are male, and 35% have a university degree. Of the people who grow cannabis for their personal use, roughly 70% live up-country and the rest in the capital Montevideo.



Marihuana smokers in Montevideo, Uruguay.

## THE VIEW OF THE DRUG USERS

Hernán lives in Montevideo and has been consuming cannabis for recreational purposes for years, even when doing so was still illegal. Since legalisation, it has become “easier to smoke marihuana,” he recounts. “We always used to be on guard so the police wouldn’t catch us.” Now he is more relaxed, Hernán says, and it is easier to purchase the drug. “Only the long queues in the pharmacies get on my nerves. There are simply not enough pharmacies that sell marihuana. But you can also order it via WhatsApp or online.”

On the other hand, many consumers maintain that the marihuana from the pharmacies is “nothing much”. They prefer to smoke it in the cannabis clubs, where the quality of the product is said to be much better. The fact that the state now regulates not only the sale, but also the quality and potency of marihuana, irritates many drug consumers. “We are not getting the world’s best marihuana of the world, although that would be possible,” says Hernán. “The state keeps a close check on how much THC is contained in the stuff that you get in the pharmacy.” He says black-market dope used to be stronger.

The government is run by the alliance Frente Amplio. It took the legalisation decision and is now contemplating how to use the topic in the next election campaign. For instance, it could propose modifications of existing regulations. Many regions of the country are still under-supplied, because not enough pharmacies are selling marihuana. The bank boycott is a lasting challenge. The legal market is not expanding as fast as the government would like. Diego Ferrer from the party alliance Frente Amplio concludes: “One of the objectives of this law was that the consumers shouldn’t be forced to buy their marihuana illegally. Unfortunately, we have not achieved this goal.”

The people, however, have accepted legalisation and embrace it. It has not brought any disadvantages. Consumers, cannabis farmers and pharmacies see lots of advantages.



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Coca harvest in Putumayo.

## “Drugs are in our country’s DNA”

The war on drugs appears to have failed in Colombia. Despite billions being spent on it, the drug trade is flourishing. Both domestic consumption and the amount of land used for coca cultivation are increasing. Julian Quintero and his civil-society organisation Acción Técnica Social (ATS) are in favour of an alternative drugs policy – one that educates users rather than criminalising them.

Julian Quintero interviewed by Julia Jaroschewski and Sonja Peteranderl

What impact do drugs have on Colombia?

Drugs have been an everyday topic here for more than 40 years. The marihuana market emerged in the 1960s, the cocaine market took off in the '70s and '80s, and heroin came along later. Colombia is the world's biggest producer of psychoactive drugs. Drugs are in our country's DNA.

**That sounds extreme.**

The truth is that drugs and the drug trade permeate all levels of our society – from the poorest rural farmers through the middle class to the highest ranks of the political and military establishment. More than 900 police officers were arrested last year because

of links to the drug trade. That is nearly three arrests a day. Colombia produces two of the world's major stimulants: coffee and cocaine. Coffee is legal and internationally appreciated, but cocaine is illegal and a major source of conflict.

**Why has the war on drugs not been successful – despite the billions spent on it and the military aid and support provided by the USA?**

Because it was based on a fantasy. For two decades, our governments have acted as if the drug trade could be eradicated. No one would admit that this was an unachievable goal. That would have meant they'd spent all that time peddling pie in the sky.

**What impact have the peace negotiations with the FARC militia had on the drug trade?**



Coca is still being grown. Attempts have been made to paint rosy pictures. President Juan Manuel Santos was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for ending the civil war with the FARC. But in June 2018 he was replaced by Iván Duque, a conservative leader who is opposed to the peace deal. Whether EU or US financial support continues to flow has now become his problem. Much was invested in recent times to solve the coca-growing issue. Farmers were given incentives to switch from coca to coffee or other crops. But the budget was too tight, and there is no other product in such lucrative demand as the raw material for cocaine production.

#### **So drug cultivation remains farmers' first choice?**

The climate of our country is ideal for growing coca. What is more, many people are driven into the drug business by poverty and hopelessness. Rural infrastructure is bad, and educational opportunities are few and far between. Drug gangs exploit the situation. Sadly, the government relies on force rather than social inclusion. Corruption is widespread; the cartels have a lot of money. Colombian cocaine is consumed by an estimated 20 million people worldwide, and demand is still strong in consumer countries like the US. Therefore, coca cultivation is economically rewarding.

#### **What is the answer?**

The policy pursued so far has not been successful, so new approaches are required. Our projects at Acción Técnica Social (ATS) emphasise education and harm reduction. We are actually working on a study looking at ways of regulating the cocaine market by 2034. That would give the state control over production, transport, distribution and consumption – which it currently leaves to the gangs and cartels. In a regulated market, coca farmers could operate legally, intermediaries could be eliminated and coca cultivation and the quality of cocaine could be better controlled. The conditions for the legal purchase of cocaine – who can buy how much – would have to be politically negotiated.

#### **Drugs are dangerous – why would regulation be better than prohibition?**

It is interesting to see that various countries around the world are moving towards regulating drug markets in order to reduce harm. There are two dimensions to this. The first



is protecting users' health, and the second is depriving organised crime of a part of its highly profitable business. Both are being achieved. In the 1930s, we saw the legalisation of alcohol, and in recent years it is happening with cannabis. Since cannabis was legalised in the US State of Colorado, all problem indicators there have gone down, while state revenues have gone up. Various European countries and Canada are trialling schemes for dispensing heroin to addicts under state control – by prescription for example. Sterile syringes are provided, and rooms are made available so that the drug is used in a safe environment. The schemes are delivering good results, and ATS is copying them in Colombia. The black market cannot be eradicated completely, but can be radically restricted.

#### **Is there any short-term measure that can reduce the harm done by drugs?**

We were the first in Latin America to offer on-site drug-testing at rock festivals. We tell people what effect drugs have, and we analyse the substances they give us. They can then decide for themselves whether they want to take them or not. Festival organisers hire us because they want to reduce the health risks. The services we provide are cheaper than keeping four ambulances and five doctors on standby and still anticipating fatalities.

#### **Quality-testing of illegal drugs – why do the authorities permit you to do that?**

We have actually had government support since we started. This project was part of the 2007 national drug strategy. Our model is based on users' faith in us. They tell us what they have bought, and we give them information what impact it may have on their health. We have analysed more than 4,200 samples – mostly ecstasy, LSD and cocaine

– and we are able to identify trends in the illegal market. Our relationship with the police is good. Thanks to the information we provide, they warn people when dangerous substances are in circulation.

#### **Is the quality of Colombian cocaine as high as is often claimed?**

There is luxury cocaine, and there is regular cocaine, which can be bought on the streets. A gramme of street cocaine may cost the equivalent of around two dollars. Luxury cocaine is five to six times more expensive. Cocaine prices in Colombia are lower than anywhere else in the world. Cocaine from a street dealer is often of poor quality. It is generally cut with at least four other substances. Caffeine is almost always added. Lidocaine, xylocaine, levamisole and paracetamol as well as simple glucose powder are also common. The actual cocaine content of a street deal may be 50 %, but it is sometimes even less than 15 %. The highest-quality cocaine we have found was 98 % pure.

#### **Iván Duque, the new president, is a conservative hardliner. What will that mean for drug policy?**

Iván Duque fought an election campaign that rejected a progressive approach to drugs. He is against state regulation of cannabis, whether for medicinal or recreational purposes. He also opposes the harm-reduction approach. He wants to go back to using glyphosate to destroy coca crops. However, it is not obvious yet what promises he will keep and what he will actually do. To win the election, he had to forge lots of alliances, make complex commitments and conclude opaque agreements. The global trend in drug policy points in the other direction. I hope that formal channels for dialogue will be created and that discussion will be based on evidence.



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# “Prohibition empowers gangs”

The Bristol based Transform Drugs Policy Foundation wants governments to change their approach. In its eyes, prohibition is counter-productive. As Steve Rolles of Transform told D+C/E+Z, the goal must be to reduce health hazards.

Steve Rolles interviewed by Hans Dembowski

**The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) does not enjoy undisputed appreciation. What's wrong with it?**

Well, the fundamental problem is that it is an office on drugs and crime rather than one on drugs and health. Alcohol and tobacco are potentially harmful and addictive drugs too, but in the UN context, the World Health Organization (WHO) takes care of alcohol and tobacco policy. Its focus is on reducing health hazards, and it is quite successful. By contrast, the focus of the UNODC, which is essentially a crime and enforcement agency, is on eliminating illegal drugs like opiates, cocaine, cannabis and various synthetic drugs. It's a fundamental classification error, and things are not going well.

**Is there any progress on that front at all?**

No, there isn't. The last time that the UN drug control institutions declared that the goal was to rid the world of illegal drugs was ten years ago, and that was supposed to be achieved within a decade. The truth, however, is that the production of opium poppies has roughly doubled in those years, and coca cultivation has increased by about a third. There are no figures on global cannabis production, but it is assumed that it has risen, alongside rising use. Indeed, we are moving ever farther away from the stated goal of a “drug-free world”. At Transform, we think it is time to admit that the goal is a delusional and potentially harmful fantasy.

**Do you have any financial figures concerning the size of the global black market?**

It is impossible to get an accurate, up-to-date picture. After all, organised crime groups don't publish quarterly reports of

the kind that multinational corporations are required to do. We know, however, that the biggest profits are made in the advanced economies where most drugs are being consumed. We also know that profits mostly accrue to the top-tier gangsters who largely live in safety and are only very rarely taken to court. They benefit from money laundering and tax havens. The farmers in the production countries and low-ranking actors in the criminal hierarchy live precarious lives. According to the UNODC, total global turnover generated with illegal drugs is probably between \$ 300 billion and \$ 400 billion annually.

**Let's put that in proportion: the global turnover of German car makers was about \$ 450 billion in 2016. Unlike selling cars, however, selling drugs is illegal. What impact does that have on supply?**

It's a very risky business, so the criminals naturally gravitate towards the most profitable preparations, which also are the most potent and most dangerous. It is not difficult to buy heroin in London, but it is impossible to get opium tea, for example. You

won't find coca leaves either, but crack cocaine can easily be purchased on street corners. Prohibition tilts the market towards the riskiest drugs, but does not eliminate them.

**That is basically the same with alcohol, which is prohibited in various predominantly Muslim countries. In those places, there tends to be a keen illegal interest in high-percentage whisky, but low-percentage beer is hardly an issue.**

Exactly, and things were similar when alcohol was prohibited in the USA in the 1920s. Under criminal control the market shifted to potent, but profitable spirits. When the ban was lifted, most consumers switched back to drinking beer and wine. Consumers will often actually prefer milder drug varieties if they can get them. This is one reason – though not the only one – why prohibition is destructive. It makes more sense to legally regulate drugs than to ban them entirely. If you apply a higher tax rate to drinks with higher alcohol content, for example, that is an incentive to stay away from the more potent drinks. If governments apply regulatory tools responsibly, they can encourage safer use of safer products. Prohibition does the exact opposite.

**But doesn't it protect people from using drugs in the first place? Alcohol consump-**



Shop counter in Winnipeg: cannabis is legal in Canada, but products may not be branded.



**tion is forbidden in Saudi Arabia, and Saudis certainly drink much less alcohol than Germans.**

Yes, but what does that tell us? The evidence suggests that prohibition can sometimes work so long as demand for a certain drug has not yet been established. Once that has happened, however, prohibition basically means that control of the market is surrendered to organised crime, and even extreme repression hardly keeps a check on it. It is well known that drugs are widely available in high-security prisons. What makes a big difference, however, is the social and cultural context. In line with religious norms, for example, alcohol consumption is generally much lower in predominantly Muslim countries.

**Can governments use intelligent regulation to promote healthier attitudes to drugs?**

Yes, consider tobacco, for example. Even as illegal drug use has been rising, smoking has become much less popular in Europe and North America in the past three decades. Awareness raising, mandatory health warnings, restriction of advertising, plain packaging, smoking bans in public places, taxation and other measures have made the difference. Society may have de-normalised smoking to some extent, but tobacco smokers and vendors are not criminalised.

**But you certainly don't want to make crack cocaine or heroin available in supermarkets as cigarettes are in the EU?**

No, there needs to be a graded approach to regulating drugs – there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Stricter regulation is needed for more risky drugs, and some preparations should not ever be made legally available. For example, crack cocaine would still be prohibited, while cocaine powder might be available to registered users on a rationed basis from pharmacies, and lower potency coca-based energy drinks or coca leaves could be sold in specialty shops. In a similar fashion, doctors could prescribe heroin to people with long-term dependencies, as is already being done successfully in Switzerland and the UK. Less risky opium smoking might be permitted in licensed, membership-based clubs. Cannabis, the most widely used illegal drug, is not harmless, but we now have working models of how to make it legally available. The Netherlands, Spain, several US states, Uruguay, and most re-

cently, Canada have done so. More countries are set to follow. The drugs we are discussing here are very different, and responsible regulation has to take account of all these differences. On the other hand, none of them should be promoted as tobacco was in the past and alcohol sometimes still is. Advertising, branding and marketing should be restricted. Commercial entities want to maximise profits, but the goal of responsible policymakers should be to minimise harm and maximise benefits for people who use drugs, the communities they live in and the markets that service them. Prohibition does not serve that goal, but regulation guided by public health science can do so.

**How do you assess the side effects that prohibition has in terms of governance?**

First of all, it empowers and enriches organised crime, in turn fuelling corruption and violence. At the extremes, such groups can undermine the security and viability of the state itself. One example is Guinea-Bissau in West Africa. This fragile state has become an important transit country for Latin American cocaine on its way to Europe, and the situation has rapidly deteriorated. Better known examples are Afghanistan, Colombia and Mexico. In these countries, the drugs economy is undermining institutions and fuelling endemic violence. Peacebuilding and economic development have become extremely difficult. International aid organisations have been trying to promote alternatives to the drugs economy, such as cultivating vegetables or fruit instead of coca, for instance. Even when effective locally, such approaches tend to fail, as the cartels can easily source the commodities elsewhere. The viable alternative to illegal drug crops may be appropriately regulated legal drug crops. We must take into account the wellbeing of millions of marginalised people whose livelihoods depend on what are illegal drugs today.

**Has the war on drugs succeeded anywhere?**

No, it has not, and certainly not in the sense of making any country free of drugs.

**In view of the lack of success, it seems odd that the international community is still largely sticking to this approach. Why is that so?**

Part of the problem is that the prohibition strategy was adopted in the 1960s. The rel-

evant UN treaties – some having been drafted in the 40s and 50s – reflect the political priorities of rich-nation governments of the time. The world has changed in social, cultural and political terms since then. Drug demand has expanded dramatically. But the policy foundations of the global response have not evolved. Today, attempts to eradicate drugs are undermining security, endangering human rights, fuelling sickness and death, and making it impossible to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in much of the world. It is a strange situation. The UN agencies that deal with human rights, health and development are based in Geneva, and they speak about the systemic failings of drug policy. But they are historically disconnected from UN drug agencies, which are based in Vienna and have a bunker mentality. It is clear that major institutional reform is needed. The outdated and malfunctioning UN drug policy must evolve, allowing member states to explore options for regulated markets. The WHO should be put in charge of drugs with a mandate to deal with them the way it deals with alcohol and tobacco. Drugs are primarily a public health issue and should be dealt with as such.

**What difference does it make that Uruguay, Canada and several US states have legalised cannabis?**

It basically shows that change is possible and, increasingly, inevitable. The path ahead certainly remains very challenging. Governments are reluctant to admit failure after decades of populist “drug war” posturing. After so much fear-mongering, the concept of legalising and regulating drugs seems counterintuitive. The truth, nonetheless, is that the war on drugs has been a disaster and that regulation is a much better alternative for everyone involved – apart from organised crime, of course.



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# A sad record

In Afghanistan, the production and trade of illegal drugs are an important industry. Almost 85% of the villages in the country's south cultivate opium poppies. The drug economy provides a regular and somewhat reliable income to rural people in this extremely unstable country. Yield fluctuations have more to do with the weather than with policy measures.

By Janet Kursawe

For over 25 years, Afghanistan has been the world's main cultivation area of opium poppies and the primary supplier of opium, heroin, morphine and other opiates. In the past year, the country's total cultivation area for opium poppies grew by 63 % to 328,000 hectares, thereby achieving a new record. The southern provinces of Kandahar, Uruzgan and Helmand are the centres of production.

Figures concerning cultivation and production vary from year to year, but that has less to do with targeted political interventions in the drug sector than with occasionally unfavourable weather. Trade dynamics matter too. As every free market,

the drug market responds to supply and demand. If supply is abundant, prices drop. In order to put a check on volatility, supply needs to be limited.

Smuggling cartels and distributors thus keep opium in reserve in hidden storage facilities, creating artificial shortages. According to estimates, the total amount of opium in storage is somewhere between 10,000 and 15,000 tonnes. Because opium does not spoil, smuggling networks are free to manipulate supply at any time. Moreover, new substances with different combinations of opiates are constantly being developed in order to stimulate demand.

Because of the record harvest of 2017, experts estimate that approximately 7,600 to 7,900 tonnes of opium can currently be processed into heroin, so a record amount could soon flood the global drug market. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) believes that about 550 to 900 tonnes of heroin with a very high purity of 50 to 70 % will be available globally this year. However, prices are expected to be high. Especially in the lucrative western European markets, the rule of thumb is: the higher the degree

of purity, the higher the price for a gramme of heroin.

## UP TO A THIRD OF THE ECONOMIC OUTPUT

In Afghanistan, the drug sector has been estimated to be worth between \$4.1 billion and \$6.6 billion, which would amount to about 20% to 32% of the country's gross domestic product in 2017. One year earlier, the share was a mere seven percent. In 2017, about 354,000 people were working full-time in the drug business, which also employed many part-timers and occasional workers.

The difference in profits between opium cultivation and the cultivation of legal crops like wheat, rice, corn or tomatoes has decreased significantly. Nevertheless, farmers stick to growing opium because they expect prices to stay stable. Money can be earned not only through cultivation and harvesting. There are also jobs in the transport, trade and chemical processing of opiates.

Agriculture dominates Afghanistan's rural areas with weak infrastructure, and a considerable share of the people depends on poppy cultivation and drug production. In the western and northern regions, poppies are cultivated in about a third of all villages, in the west in over half, and in the south in almost 85%. Drug cultivation pro-



Afghan farmers harvesting opium.

vides not only farmers with secure incomes, but also many day labourers, migrant workers and former refugees returning from neighbouring Iran and Pakistan, for example.

The country's security situation remains volatile, and that boosts the drug economy too. In past decades, the illegal business has become professionally organised. It is now largely immune to any law-enforcement efforts. Such efforts have not been made systematically, moreover. The policy of intentionally including former warlords in the new governance system by granting them positions of power has allowed them to act as official political operators while remaining constituents and protectors of the illegal drug economy at the same time. They have assumed patronage roles in the drug sector. Some managed to rise in its hierarchy.

From the highest levels of government, former warlords have been exerting influence on newly created drug-fighting institutions – especially the security forces. These patrons have torpedoed enforcement



measures such as arrests, the destruction of fields, investigations into smuggling rings and the seizure of large drug volumes. Their attitudes have invigorated the drug economy, but badly damaged the credibility of the state. Government action has been reduced to symbolic engagements like the small-scale destruction of fields and the arrest of low-level poppy farmers or drug dealers.

For decades, cultivation has been concentrated in the southern provinces, which are also the traditional spheres of influence of the Taliban and other insurgent groups.

It has therefore been assumed that the drug economy serves primarily to fund their operations. This interpretation is most superficial, however, and ignores the complexity of the national and regional drug trade.

Yes, the Taliban and other insurgents do indeed profit, but there are many other beneficiaries. They include regional militia leaders, mullahs and village headmen, all the way up to high-ranking officials in the central and provincial governments. They rake in drug revenues, for example, by collecting protection money and tariffs.

Even more drug profits, however, accrue outside Afghanistan. Along the most important route to western Europe, the so-called Balkan route, Turkish and Kurdish mafia organisations and clans dominate the illegal business.



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## International responsibility

The international community is partially responsible for Afghanistan's drug economy having professionalised the way it did. Much too late, international actors realised that incorporating "drug barons" into the government ran counter to efforts to build up new state structures and the security forces.

Attempts to correct this mistake and remove drug patrons from office were made too late and only half-heartedly. A professional and covert smuggling network was already deeply entrenched, systematically protected by persons at the highest levels of government. This network is well connected to all centres of political and economic power in Afghanistan.

Since 2002, the USA alone has invested over \$ 7.5 billion to fight drugs in Afghanistan.

Germany spends an annual € 5 million on promoting the cultivation of legal agricultural products as an alternative to poppies. The impact of such measures, however, is not evaluated thoroughly. Experi-

ence shows that, though farmers grasp such opportunities, the impact is not strong enough to disrupt the illegal drug business, which has come to dominate Afghanistan's political economy.

Since 2001, the drug industry has thus been inextricably linked to the state-building process. Key players understood how to use drugs to shore up their power. A holistic approach will be needed to uproot them. Development programmes must tackle underlying issues such as poverty first and foremost. To date, the focus has been on repressing the cultivation, processing and trade of drugs in the context of counterinsurgency measures. The approach was destined to fail. It will take decades to effectively repress a drug economy that grew resilient in 30 years of war. (jk)



Afghan security forces prepare to burn confiscated drugs.



## “Gravest social malady”

**Today, Iran usually comes up in international debates for its nuclear deal with the global powers, its controversial missile programme, and also the international sanctions. The deep-rooted domestic challenges that the country faces get less attention. One of them is a drastic rise in narcotics consumption in the past ten years.**

**By Mitra Shahrani**

The local reports and statistics indicate that Iran's government has failed to adequately address what has become a looming crisis. The UN Office on Drugs and Crimes considers the situation to be one of the most serious internationally. Opiates are the main cause of concern.

Every once in a while, drug-related issues in Iran make local or even international headlines. The complex drugs crisis has many aspects. In June 2017, Iran's Drug Control Headquarters reported that, according to a representative survey, the number of drug addicts was between 2.8 million to 3 million people of the ages 15 to 65 years. Observers believe the real number to be even higher, but the official data indicated that narcotics abuse had doubled in six years. In August 2018, a member of the Iranian parliament's Social Affairs Committee revealed that some addicts in Iran are merely 11 years old.

Indeed, one trend is that drug abuse is spreading among women and children. Sometimes, addicted women even give birth to addicted infants. The newborns tend to live very short lives or struggle with the difficult recovery process.

Typically, older addicted children are from poor families who live in impoverished areas on the outskirts of metropolitan cities. They are constantly exposed to narcotics, and some of them are used by their families to sell drugs or procure them for their parents.

Poverty probably pushes many people towards narcotics abuse, but not all addicts are poor. The escalation of Iran's drug problem seems like a national epidemic, affecting people of different backgrounds. To some extent, the middle classes may

use drugs for recreational purposes, but hopelessness seems to be an important issue. Despair is widespread and believed to be growing because people lack economic and political prospects. Economic hardship, which is believed to result from decades of mismanagement and corruption as well as international sanctions, has a strong psychological impact on society.

Another important factor is Iran's geographical location. The country is close to the hub of the world's opium production. Afghanistan has about 90% of the world's poppy harvest, and opiates are smuggled

from there to all other countries. Iran shares 921 kilometres of porous borders with Afghanistan. Transit routes run through Iran, and various narcotics are easily available.

According to Parviz Afshar, the spokesperson of Iran's Drug Control Headquarters, opium is the most widely used narcotic in Iran, accounting for about two thirds of the amounts consumed. Marihuana and its derivatives have replaced methamphetamine in second place with about 12% of drug use.

It is believed that cannabis and its offshoots are more commonly used by younger people, who also seem to speak more openly about it than those who use other drugs. Abbas Deylamizadeh, the head of the Re-birth Charity Society, believes that the open discussions about cannabis on social media and legalisation in parts of the western world have contributed to its popularity in



An Iranian woman watches confiscated drugs being burned in Tehran in 2013.

Iran. Another reason may be that people can grow marihuana plants at home.

## POLICY CHANGES

Since the revolution in 1979, the Iranian government has been trying to eradicate the production and use of narcotics as well as alcoholic beverages. They are all forbidden under the country's Islamic laws. The laws are tough and have been enforced vigorously. Until last year, the zero-tolerance policy against drug-offenders officially included capital punishment for anyone possessing even small amounts of hard drugs like heroin or cocaine. In the past decades, thousands of criminals were arrested and executed. Recent statistics and reports show, however, that this rigid policy was not successful. Indeed, the drug crisis only became worse.

In the late 1990s, non-governmental organisations began to deal with drug-related issues as social and medical problems rather than as criminal offenses. At the time, Mohammad Khatami, the reform-

ist president, was in office. More recently, the government itself has begun to take a similar approach. For example, it has now allocated budget money for setting up rehabilitation centres for children. Iran probably needs more rehab facilities, but these are steps in the right direction.

Last year, the government of President Hassan Rouhani got the Parliament and the Guardian Council to pass an amendment to the existing drug laws. This reform abolished the death penalty for some drug-offenders. According to estimates, the lives of about 4,000 prisoners on death row were thus saved. Nonetheless, capital punishment is still in place for offenders who possess or traffic at least two kilos of hard drugs or 50 kilos of opium or cannabis. Repeat offenders will also be sentenced to death.

Another change is that the government may now distribute diluted drugs to addicts. Hassan Norouzi, the spokesperson for the Parliament's Judicial and Legal Commission, emphasised the need to "cut off the relationship between drug-addicts and

narco-traffickers". The idea is that addicts will gradually give up their addiction instead of staying dependent on criminals. Similar rules were in force before the revolution, according to Norouzi.

All in all, Iran's drug crisis seems to have its roots in the country's economic, social and cultural problems. If it is to be dealt with properly, the government may need to address those issues first. As Saeid Sefatian, a member of Iran's Expediency Council, which gives advice to Supreme Spiritual Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, has put it: "Drug addiction is Iran's gravest social malady and the government should treat it with a more serious and professional approach."



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# Cracking down on the disadvantaged

**Bangladesh's government has recently adopted a "war on drugs" rhetoric. Some 200 people have been killed in encounters with the security forces in recent months. By law, alcohol and other drugs are basically prohibited. Unfortunately, state agencies are focusing on enforcing criminal law instead of tackling underlying social problems. According to new draconian legislation, people who are found carrying certain drugs will be sentenced to death.**

**By Ridwanul Hoque and Sharawat Shamin**

In Bangladesh, people who take drugs or drink alcohol have a bad reputation. They are likely to be told things like: "You drink alcohol! It's haram; you filthy spoiled rich!" Or: "You do drugs! You're completely

spoiled!" Government policy reflects the general aversion to addictive substances.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the British colonial power introduced legislation to regulate the production, distribution and taxation of dangerous drugs as well as alcohol. The trade in liquors, other alcoholic beverages, opium and cannabis were a heated issue – not least, because British merchants made huge profits by exporting opium to China (see review essay by Hans Dembowski on p. 38).

From the point of view of the colonised people in South Asia, liquor was "western", while cannabis and locally-made alcoholic drinks, such as the traditional rice beer of indigenous Adivasi tribes, were part of the domestic culture. Today, most liquors are imported. Taxes and tariffs are

high, amounting to 25 % of the imported price. Bangladesh has only one distillery: the state-owned Carew and Co. It was established by a British businessman in 1887.

The law that regulated drugs and alcohol for many years was passed in 1990 (Act No. 20 of 1990). It is based on the constitutional obligation that the state must adopt "effective measures" to prevent the consumption of intoxicating drinks and drugs. Indeed, Bangladesh is overfulfilling international commitments made in the context of the UN. Law enforcement, however, is uneven.





Bangladeshi law makes distinctions for specific cultures and religions:

- Muslims are forbidden to drink alcohol, which fits Islamic rules. Exceptions are made for medical reasons. Patients can get a permit only if an authorised doctor makes a prescription.
- Those who adhere to other faiths are allowed to consume alcohol, but they are also supposed to get a formal permit.
- Foreigners are allowed to drink only in licensed bars or restaurants, of which there are only few.
- According to an amendment passed in 2000, Adivasis and other disadvantaged communities who traditionally make and consume alcoholic drinks may continue doing so.

In theory, alcohol prohibition is thus quite stringent. Breaches of the law are to be punished with two years of prison. Alcohol is not available in shops; there are only very few legal outlets. What many people do not know, moreover, is that drinking alcohol without permit is even forbidden in the privacy of one's home. In practice, however, private drinking seems to be tolerated by the state.

The government sometimes runs drives against the unlawful trade or consumption of alcohol, with mobile courts summarily punishing individuals or restaurants if found guilty. Most cases of seizure of illicit alcohol regard smuggled liquors for which no tariffs were paid.

Two serious issues are that:

- domestically made spirits regularly cause poisoning, which all too often kills people, and
- drink-driving, especially among the drivers of long-haul buses and trucks, leading to deadly traffic accidents.

All summed up, the enforcement of alcohol-related rules is rather weak. Prosperous men, among whom the occasional whiskey is quite popular, have little reason to fear the law.

## ENFORCEMENT ISSUES

As for other drugs and narcotics, the 1990 law imposes a complete prohibition of use, production and trade, with the exception of medical purposes. Drug users and dealers are generally shunned by society.

In spite of the prohibitive law, drug problems are escalating. A new drug called



Soldiers of Bangladesh's Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) rounding up suspected drug dealers in Dhaka.

yaba (a mixture of caffeine and methamphetamine) is imported from neighbouring Myanmar. In the context of the recent influx of Rohingya refugees, yaba trafficking has increased. Observers say that yaba is now the most popular drug in Bangladesh, but it is not yet on the list of prohibited substances under the 1990 Act. In October, however, the national parliament passed a new law which foresees the death penalty for anyone found carrying 200 grammes of yaba or 25 grammes of heroin or cocaine.

In recent months, the government has adopted a "war on drugs" rhetoric. It is stepping up repressive measures with the intention of getting a grip on the problem. So far, some 200 people have died in encounters with the security forces, but no police officer or soldier has been taken to court for an extra-judicial killing.

The government thus certainly seems to be determined to enforce anti-drugs legislation, but it is facing various implementation problems. One of them is that government staff, including police officers, are allegedly corrupt and involved in drug trafficking.

According to a report in the newspaper Dhaka Tribune, 35 % of inmates are in prison because of drug offences in Bangladesh. This ratio shows that the situation is serious indeed. Adding to the problems, the country is close to the "Golden Triangle" of Myanmar-Thailand-Laos. It is affected by international trafficking, which is a security problem and makes intoxicating and addictive substances easily available.

Unfortunately, the government is mostly focusing on the enforcement of criminal law, neglecting the social dimensions of the endemic narcotics problem. There are,

however, 184 rehabilitation centres across the country. Considering the need, they are too few and too poorly resourced.

Cannabis, which used to be very common in our country's past, is seen with a little bit more leniency than hard drugs. It is actually less dangerous and less addictive than more potent drugs such as heroin. Nonetheless, the government handles both kinds of narcotics more restrictively than its counterparts in many western countries.

Germany and other European nations, for example, have decriminalised cannabis in the sense of no longer punishing people who possess small amounts for personal use. Canada and several US states have even legalised this drug. Moreover, heroin users are provided with safe syringes in many European cities. Nothing like this is done in Bangladesh.

It is noteworthy that law enforcement is biased against the poor. The better-off in Bangladesh are frequently alcohol consumers. Their habits are illegal but are generally not prosecuted. By contrast, the users and dealers of cannabis, yaba and domestically produced booze tend to be poor. They are at considerable risk of being charged, tried or even killed.



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## “War against the poor”

In the Philippines, Christian faith leaders oppose President Duterte’s bloody “war on drugs”. This stance was recently reconfirmed at an ecumenical conference in Bonn.

“When we entered the convent, we did not give up our citizenship.” This is what Sister Mary John Mananzan tells critics who say that she should not meddle in politics. The Benedictine nun has a long history of fighting the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos in the 70’s and co-founding GABRIELA (a federation of women’s organisations) in 1984. She also served as its national chairperson for more than a decade. These days, Mananzan is involved in campaigns to stop the killings related to President Rodrigo Duterte’s so called “war on drugs”. In her eyes, faith leaders have a moral duty to speak up against people getting killed.

According to government data, the Philippine police killed 4,948 people in anti-drug operations from 1 July 2016 to 30 September 2018. The police say that the dead were suspected drug pushers or users who resisted arrest. They also claim that drug traffickers and dealers kill each other. Human Rights Watch (HRW) reckons that Duterte’s clamp down has so far claimed 12,000 lives. The international non-governmental organisation reports that the police “carried out extra-judicial killings of drug suspects, and then falsely claimed self-defence”. According to a recently published report, eyewitness accounts “portray the killings as coldblooded murders of un-

armed drug suspects in custody” and “no one has been meaningfully investigated, let alone prosecuted, for these killings”. To judge by international standards, moreover, the Philippines is not facing any dramatic drugs crisis, according to Amnesty International.

Photojournalist Raffy Lerma spoke at the Ecumeni-

a war against the poor, since most of the dead are from the impoverished settlements of Manila and neighbouring cities.

Last year, Bishop Pablo David called on the Philippine government to stop its “cruel and simplistic” campaign against illegal drugs. Speaking at the funeral mass of a teenager killed by the police, (also see Alan Robles in Debate section of D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2017/10), he reminded government leaders that they should not abandon

Bishop David’s response, since doing so would imply that “the victims of drug-related killings are not human”. The clergy leader pointed out on Facebook that “drug use is not a crime that deserves death”. What people with substance-use disorder need is rehabilitation.

Father June Mark Yañez agrees. He is a Protestant Philippine pastor who works for the German Seafarers’ Mission in Hamburg. He points out that valuing human lives is a deep



Commemorating victims of Duterte’s war on drugs in Manila on All Saints day, 30 October 2018.

cal Philippine Conference (ÖPK) in Bonn in late October. It convened members of Catholic and Protestant church organisations in Germany. Lerma showed pictures he took, including of drug-war victims. He says he wants the government to get a grip on the illegal drug trade, but questions Duterte’s approach: “Why do poor people get killed without due process?”

According to Lerma, people who get caught with millions worth of drugs are taken to court and sentenced to prison. “They do not die, unlike the poor who get killed with 200 pesos (ca. three dollars) worth of drugs.” Lerma sees Duterte’s so called war against drugs as

the rule of law. Bishop David is the vice president of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) and one of Duterte’s most outspoken critics.

Other faith leaders have joined Bishop David’s call to stop the killings. The most prominent is Archbishop Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle of Manila. Nonetheless, President Duterte announced in his state-of-the-nation address that his war against illegal drugs will stay as relentless and chilling as it began.

“Your concern is human rights, mine is human lives,” Duterte told his critics. The Catholic Church cannot agree with that statement, was

Christian tradition. Respect for it means to support “only those state policies that uphold basic human rights and respect human lives”.

### REFERENCE

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Police raiding an ecstasy lab in Bogor in 2018.

## President Widodo's war on drugs

**Anti-narcotics laws and their enforcement tend to be tough in Southeast Asia. In Indonesia, however, drug use is not in decline.**

By Edith Koesoemawiria

Be prepared. If you are planning a visit to Indonesia while still under treatment with narcotic based medication, be sure to have an official medical statement from a doctor or hospital about your condition and an extra prescription. You may be questioned at customs about your medication. Without proof of its necessity, it may be seized. Worse still, if the monitoring officers believe these “drugs” were intentionally hidden, you could be charged with smuggling. Having to face the law is not a happy way to start a vacation or business trip anywhere in the world. In Indonesia it could be particularly bad.

Illegal drugs, generically called “narkoba” in Indonesia, are considered a major problem. If convicted, smugglers, traffickers, dealers, manufacturers and even users of illegal drugs can be sanctioned to imprisonment between two to 20 years.

Depending on the type and amount of narcotics, even capital punishment or life sentences are possible.

Only rarely are court rulings comparatively mild. Fidelis Arie Sudewarto only received an eight months jail term and a fine worth \$ 67,000 for trying to grow cannabis because he wanted to allay the excruciating pain of his wife, a cancer patient. He benefited from a massive show of support from the media and civil society. The fine was ultimately waived.

The National Narcotics Agency (BNN) defines narkoba closely to the English acronym NAPZA, which stands for narcotics, psychotropic and addictive substances. Besides natural substances like cannabis, cocaine, opiates and their derivatives, highly addictive synthetic drugs are covered too. They include pharmaceuticals like Valium and Mandrax as well as party drugs like ecstasy. Even alcohol can be considered narkoba. Indonesia is a predominantly Muslim country, and Islam forbids the drinking of alcoholic beverages.

Early on in his presidency, Indonesian President Joko Widodo called for a war

against drugs in 2015, arguing that about 30 people die because of drug abuse every day. Ever since, drastic measures have included shooting dead smugglers, traffickers and manufacturers if they resist arrest. Warnings against illegal drugs are posted in public spaces and flit across TV screens during commercial breaks.

### 18 EXECUTIONS IN TWO YEARS

In 2015 and 2016, Indonesia executed 18 drug offenders. Some of them were foreign nationals. Indonesian and international human-rights organisations demand that the death penalty must be abolished, but so far, their calls have fallen on deaf ears. According to the BNN, there were almost 50,000 illegal drug cases in 2017, with 79 suspected drug dealers shot on location.

On the other hand, BNN statistics show that the number of drug offenders is not in decline. A BNN survey carried out in 13 provinces revealed that some 3.5 million Indonesians are drug abusers. This number amounts to 2.2 % of the people. According to the BNN data, 72 % of the drug abusers are men. One survey result was that about one third of the drug abusers try to quit their habit on their own, while others turn to private rehabilitation centres or hospitals.

Evy Harjono, the founder of Second Chance, a civil-society organisation that

supports prison inmates, sees poverty and population growth as major drivers of drug abuse. While the government is concentrating on building infrastructure to ease poverty in the long run, economic disparities will be acutely felt for many years to come.

"We must work at many levels," Harjono says. "There are currently not enough medical rehabilitation centres for drug addicts, so once they are sentenced, they end up in jail with dealers, manufacturers and other criminals." She insists that more rehab centres are needed for all addicts to be able to undergo medical and social rehabilitation as is required by law.

According to Harjono, there are currently over 260,000 inmates in Indonesia's 600 prisons, 482 correctional facilities and 118 detention centres. These institutions tend to be in miserable conditions and overcrowded. Harjono says the inmates are not being prepared for a life in freedom. Many lack vocational skills. Most have spent whatever savings they had on lawyers. Released from detention, moreover, they will face stigma. The civil-society activist expects many to fall back into their drug hab-



its, while some will be recruited into organised crime.

To improve matters, Harjono founded Second Chance. This small foundation offers inmates skills training – from basic literacy to handicrafts and theatre classes. The idea is to allow drug addicts to become self-sufficient. Starting in detention, they generate small incomes, and related savings are useful when they are set free. The foundation currently works in 11 of Indonesia's 34 provinces.

The war on drugs is a challenge for Indonesia. The archipelago of more than 17,000 islands has many small and informal

ports where smuggling is easy. Some 5,000 BNN officers are cooperating with the police and armed forces across the nation. The illegal drug trade is a multimillion-dollar business run by ruthless crime syndicates. The gangsters do not shy away from using violence. They do what they can to get control of the black narcotics market and exploit the addiction of vulnerable people. The death penalty is inhumane, and it is not deterring hardcore criminals.

Confusing victims with perpetrators compounds the problems – and so does conflating highly addictive substances like heroin with comparatively harmless ones like cannabis. Indeed, cannabis was only made illegal by the Dutch colonial power in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Some people wonder to what extent the war on drugs is preventing harm – and to what extent it is actually causing suffering.



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# Epicenter of fake pharma

**One consequence of African poverty is that quality medication is often unavailable. Health-care systems tend to be weak, and the marketing of pharmaceuticals is not regulated effectively. Many patients depend on sub-standard or even counterfeit drugs. In this setting, a powerful opioid has become easily available – addiction is spreading in West Africa.**

By Assane Diagne

Tramadol is an opioid pain medication. Unlike other powerful and addictive opioids, such as methadone or fentanyl, for example, it is not regulated by the International Narcotics Control Board. The consequence is that every country must pass its own regulation. Governments only do so, however, once they see a problem.

Tramadol is valuable for medical purposes, but it can also be abused as a stimulant. It can improve peoples' mood and enable them to work harder. Those who get used to the drug, however, need ever higher dosages to keep functioning at all.

Sub-Saharan Africa is currently experiencing a serious tramadol crisis. The medical journal *The Lancet* published a report in May in which it likened the West African scenario in particular to the current opioid crisis in the USA. A huge black market has emerged. High potency pills with up to 250 mg are available, though doctors would hardly subscribe more than 100 mg pills for medical purposes. An increasing number of addicts overdose and die. There are hardly any rehab facilities for those who want to kick the habit to find professional support.

According to *The Lancet*, African governments have begun to wake up to the problem. The painkillers are typically manufactured in Asia. Some are generic pharmaceuticals, but there are also counterfeit versions. Yearly seizures of tramadol in sub-Saharan Africa are said to have risen from 300 kg five years ago to more than three tons.

However, governments struggle to pass appropriate laws and enforce them stringently. The depressing truth is that many African countries lack effective regu-

latory systems for medical drugs. The mind-altering opioid tramadol is part of a bigger problem, which has several dimensions. Quality pharmaceuticals are often unaffordable or unavailable, so sub-standard, counterfeit and fake drugs are sold. Generics, most of which are produced in India, flood African markets. The quality, however, tends to be unreliable. Researchers from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medi-

cine have found that some 64,000 to 158,000 people die of malaria every year because of low-quality or falsified antimalarial drugs.

## THE BIGGER PICTURE

According to the International Crime Police Organization (Interpol), Africa is the heart of the "biggest black market in the world". The Jacques Chirac Foundation estimates that the trafficking of pharmaceuticals is worth an annual \$ 200 billion. One of the topics the Foundation, which was launched by the former French president, is involved in is promoting access to health care and quality drugs.



All too often, medication may be sub-standard: pharmacy customer in Mali.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has stated: “Low- and middle-income countries, those in conflict, and those with weak or no health systems bear the brunt of the problem of fake medical products.” Many African countries are in this group, and they constitute the most important markets for the deadly trade. The US Food and Drug Administration reckons that one in ten drugs sold around the world is probably fake, and experts believe that the respective shares probably range from 30% to 70% in sub-Saharan countries.

Between 2013 and 2017, the WHO received 1,500 case reports of sub-standard or falsified medicines, and 42% of these reports came from sub-Saharan Africa. This shows that Africa is the epicenter of the illicit pharma market. Between mid-May and mid-June 2017, Interpol led an operation to fight the trafficking of fake medicines in seven West African countries: more than 41 million fake tablets and 13,000 cartons of medical and pharmaceutical products were seized. Their estimated worth was more than \$ 20 million.

According to the WHO, the illicit pharma business is facilitated by ever more people having access to the internet. In 2008, Interpol and the International Forum on Pharmaceutical Crime in the World launched an operation called “Pangea”. It is a global initiative to fight the online sale of illicit and counterfeit medicines. It involves customs authorities, the police, health regulators and private-sector companies. It focuses on the three components illegal websites depend on: internet service providers, payment and delivery systems. One aspect is to raise awareness of the dangers that are related to buying medicines online. Pangea is now being run in 100 countries.

The main reasons for African pharma markets being dysfunctional are poverty, overburdened health-care systems and bad governance. “To sell fake medicines, you need customers,” Marc Gentilini, a former president of the French Red Cross, has said, “and there are more poor patients in Africa than anywhere else in the world.” Considering the low average incomes of African people, quality drugs are often unafford-

able. Moreover, properly regulated distribution systems would be quite complex – too complex for regulatory authorities lacking adequate resources. Cool chains, for example, have a propensity to fail, if they exist at all. Porous borders compound the problems.

Interpol has spelled it out clearly: “Drug trafficking can only be effectively combated in the long-term.” It calls for full-time mobilisation and cooperation of customs, health and law-enforcement agencies from around the world. African governments know the strategies that would change matters. This is more a problem of political will than one of ideas. A good place to start would be providing more reliable and more comprehensive information on the risks and benefits of pharmaceuticals to the public.



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## Drowning the unemployment worries

**Alcoholism and drug abuse are spreading in Zimbabwe, according to the country's Ministry of Health. For many unemployed, it is a way to forget the harsh realities of life. Addiction leads to health problems, including mental disorders.**

**By Jeffrey Moyo**

Jerry Nhemachena is 17 years old. He wears an untidy school uniform and carries a bottle with some clear alcoholic liquid in his right hand. A school bag is dangling loosely from his left shoulder. Jerry is obviously drunk as he walks into his school gate. The security guard pays no attention to him. “In principle, we don’t allow drunk pupils into the school yard,” the guard later says. “How-

ever, Jerry is dangerous to deal with.” Jerry is one of many young people hooked on alcohol in Zimbabwe.

The Washington Post reported in 2014 that Zimbabwean men and women ranked 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> respectively as Africa’s top drinkers. According to the beer and soft drink company Delta Beverages, Zimbabweans consumed almost 200 million hectolitres of its lager beer and more than 330 million hectolitres of opaque (millet) beer in 2012. Companies like Delta Beverages make a lot of money.

Various informally produced alcoholic beverages are flooding the streets of cities and towns, moreover. Home-brewed beer, the alcohol content of which is not measured, is a common drink. A popular

and very cheap alcoholic drink is one called Tegu-Tegu. Its alcohol content is between 30 % and 40 %.

Cannabis and other illegal drugs are used too. Educationists report that substance abuse is derailing some pupils’ performance in school. “Due to alcoholism and drug abuse, many pupils miss classes,” complains a teacher based in Harare. A stroll on the streets of Harare shows that young people are openly abusing alcohol and drugs, although it is an offence to do so in public.

According to the Zimbabwe Civil Liberties and Drug Network (ZCLDN), approximately 290,000 youths in this Southern African nation are abusing drugs and alcohol. The figure has risen fast from an estimated 85,000 for the years 2009 to 2015. Formed seven years ago, the ZCLDN advocates for strategies to address problems related to drug use in the entire Southern Africa region.

### COUGH SYRUP, CANNABIS AND COCAINE

BronCleer has become dangerously popular. It is a medical cough syrup which contains alcohol and codeine. As medical practi-





Empty BronClever bottle on a street in Harare.

tioner Hilton Hungwe explains, codeine is an opioid that serves as a painkiller. Due to its alcohol content, BronClever makes people feel extremely drunk “when they down a lot of it in one go,” Hungwe says, “which is why a lot of young people are turning to it.” The streets of Harare are strewn with cough syrup bottles.

BronClever is manufactured in neighbouring South Africa. According to the Medicines Control Authority of Zimbabwe, BronClever is not licensed for sale here, even with a prescription. However, it is easily available. A 100 ml bottle of BronClever costs seven dollars.

Marihuana is known as “mbanje” or “dagga”. The ZCLDN reckons that up to 20 % of the youth use it. Government policy has been ambivalent. It recently legalised growing cannabis for medical reasons, but then back-peddled to prevent drug abuse. Production and possession were previously punishable by up to 12 years in jail, and no one is quite sure what rules apply now and whether the authorities are enforcing them coherently.

With the economy in tatters, Zimbabwe has also become a transit point for drugs such as cocaine, which is smuggled to neighbouring countries like South Africa and Botswana. Some of the substances stay in the country, however, because the people who transport them are paid in kind, not cash. “They start using the drugs themselves,” reports a police officer.

Drugs and alcohol abuse are getting worse in Zimbabwe. The health ministry has reported that currently 57 % of all admissions to psychiatric institutions are attributed to substance abuse. “Of these admissions, over 80 % are in the age group 16 to 40,” explains Evans Masitara, a psychiatrist in private practice. “It is mostly men who are affected.”

“Young and old alcoholics have become common victims of dementia, seizures, liver disease and early death,” says Andrew Muchineripi, a medical doctor in private practice. He adds that cases of drug-induced psychosis have been reported. Suicidal addicts, moreover, are known to overdose on purpose.

People, who abuse alcohol and drugs, tend to be driven by poverty and hopelessness, according to Edgar Mutambu, a psychologist in Harare: “Millions of Zimbabweans are jobless and therefore stressed. They struggle to cope with life’s daily challenges.”

Hapton Ruvangu is one of them. “I completed my university education, but I never found work. I continue to live with my parents,” the 31-year-old man reports. “This is embarrassing because I still depend on them for everything.” About the substance abuse of many young people like him, Ruvangu’s comment is: “Alcohol and drugs help us to forget our challenges.” It does not cost much money to get intoxicated. “Even for one dollar you can get drunk fast”, Ruvangu says.

Zimbabwean parents find the trend worrisome. Letiwe Mpofu, whose children have fallen prey to drug and alcohol abuse, says: “I helped my three sons to make it to university. However, it was exactly there, at university, where they started abusing drugs and alcohol, at a time when they were still studying.” In her eyes, peer pressure and mob psychology are to blame.

Civil-society groups want the government to act. “The government should strictly control the import of alcohol and drugs,” says Claris Madhuku of the Platform for Youth Development. “Our borders have become so porous and corruption is rampant, so that prohibited drinks and drugs are finding their way so easily into our country.”

However, for young students like Jerry Nhemachena, who comes to school intoxicated, that approach is too simple. “Influential people make money from drugs and alcohol that they sell to us, and they also make the laws.” He believes it may “take ages to end drug and alcohol abuse here”.

#### LINK

**Zimbabwe Civil Liberties and Drug Network (ZCLDN):**  
<http://zcldn.org.zw/>



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# “Free trade” in the 19<sup>th</sup> century

Whether legal or illegal – narcotic substances have meant strong profits throughout human history. Prohibition creates lucrative black markets for mafia organisations. Recent publications show that the war on drugs has failed.

By Hans Dembowski

Tom Wainwright is The Economist’s former Mexico correspondent. His book “Narcconomics” compares drug cartels to multinational corporations. Both kinds of organisa-

tions are profit-driven. They must source commodities, process them and sell them to customers. The big difference is that drug cartels operate outside the law. They rely on violence to enforce contracts, dominate local markets and protect themselves. At the same time, they often form alliances with state agencies.

Wainwright shows convincingly that prohibition is not the solution. Indeed, the “war on drugs” that US President Richard Nixon launched in 1971 and that was adopted by policymakers around the world, only

gave rise to a global black market. In the author’s eyes, one of four major mistakes that governments have been making is to mistake prohibition for control. In truth, he argues, the mafias are in control of the drug business. For business reasons, they focus especially on the most addictive and potent substances. To take control, governments should regulate the drugs market, Wainwright suggests (see contribution by Eleonore von Bothmer in the Monitor section of D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2018/11). He appreciates that several US states have legalised marihuana.

According to Wainwright, the three other fundamental errors are:

- trying to block supply, even though the real issue is demand,
- spending heavily on law enforcement, but being scrumpy in terms of preventing addictions, and
- tackling problems at the nation-state level, even though the industry is global and supply routes are fast diverted through other countries.

Wainwright’s understanding of the market is profound. He interviewed top policymakers and police officers. He portrayed leading gangsters and coca farmers. He visited outlets for legalised marihuana in Colorado and prisons in Central America.

In his view, the demand for legalisation used to be raised by hippyish people who wanted to enjoy their intoxication. Today, however, it is raised by responsible people who want to prevent harm. His conclusion is: “Unless there is a real change in strategy, business conditions for the mafia will remain promising.”

## HISTORICAL EXPERIENCES

Drugs have always been commodities of great trade relevance, as Lucy Inglis shows in “Milk of paradise”. This history of opium starts with the first appearances of opium somewhere in the Mediterranean region more than 5,000 years ago. The final chapters deal with recent poppy cultivation in ISIS-held areas of Afghanistan and the impacts of opioids on modern western culture.

An overarching message of the book is that opium is at once a blessing and a curse. Opioids are indispensably effective painkillers. On the other hand, addiction destroys people, families and communities, while organised crime thrives on black markets.



Cartoon published in the French periodical Le Rire in 1899.





Harm reduction: poster in public facility for heroin addicts in Berlin admonishes users to “wash hands before and after injecting”.

Inglis elaborates convincingly why the term “free trade” does not inspire enthusiasm in China and India. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, masses of Chinese were opium addicts. The drug was shipped in via the Port of Guangzhou, which Europeans called Canton, in the Pearl River Delta. This was where China did its foreign trade. Corruption was rife. In 1939, the Chinese emperor banned opium imports – and that ban triggered the first opium war. The war went on for three years, and the British Navy proved far superior. In the end, China was forced to open four more harbours to international trade, and Hong Kong became a permanent British outpost in the Pearl River Delta.

As Inglis elaborates, British merchants had developed a very profitable scheme. They imported tea from China to their home country. On the return trip, they first brought textiles from England to India, and then opium from India to China. This scheme was so lucrative that British companies made Indian farmers cultivate opium rather than cereals and lentils. When harvests were bad, this policy resulted in fam-

ine. The doctrine of “free trade” was that nothing could be opposed if it was good for merchants. By the way, Amitav Ghosh, the bestseller author from India, has published a fascinating trilogy of novels that is set in these historical circumstances.

Other imperialist powers became increasingly involved in the China trade too. The 2<sup>nd</sup> opium war from 1856 to 1860 reinforced their predominance. Inglis describes that China was brutally exploited, and masses of people found some comfort – though not sustenance – in opium consumption. According to estimates, up to a quarter of the people were addicted. As China increasingly lacked commodities to trade in, it began to export slave-like labourers. They brought along their opium habits to the countries they were shipped to. In the USA, opium was thus available along the railway lines that coolies built. Chinatowns – whether in San Francisco or in small settlements in the wild west – had opium dens.

What really made opiates widely used in North America was the Civil War, according to Inglis. Masses of soldiers were atro-

ciously wounded in battle. Painkillers were needed. After the war, many veterans were traumatised – and addicted. Their demand proved to be lasting, and attempts to curb it failed.

When the USA later outlawed alcohol in the early 1920s, moreover, mafia organisations became involved in the trafficking of all kinds of other intoxicating substances, including opium and marihuana. Often, illegal goods were shipped in from Mexico. Ever since, organised crime has remained deeply entrenched.

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Today, Pakistan's smallest ethnic group, the Kalash, consists of only about 3,000 people. Their culture is at risk of extinction.

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