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GENDER JUSTICE

**Why financial institutions
must pay more attention
to women**

AFGHANISTAN

**The three major
mistakes made by
Bush and Obama**

CLIMATE CRISIS

**Empowering African
women will improve
communities' resilience**



Children's rights

Magazine

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FOCUS

Children's rights

Escaping strife

Every year, hundreds of thousands of children are forced to flee their homes. Qaabata Boru, a journalist from Ethiopia, has lived in a refugee camp. His contribution assesses problematic circumstances in East Africa and the USA. **PAGE 20**

On society's fringes

Children's rights are often breached in Burundi. Human trafficking and forced labour are major issues, as radio journalist Mireille Kanyange reports. **PAGE 22**

West African hardships

Mariame Racine Sow underwent female genital mutilation as a child in Senegal. She now lives in Frankfurt and told D+C/E+Z in an interview about how the civil-society organisation she started is tackling the issue. Media scholar Karim Okanla depicts how children from poor families in Benin are exposed to exploitation. **PAGES 24, 26**

South Asian problems

Minors are doing hard work in Bangladesh. Ridwanul Hoque, a law professor at the University of Dhaka, assesses the legal context. A preference for boys is prevalent in South Asian societies. Consultant Mahwish Gul elaborates what impacts it has on Pakistani girls. **PAGES 27, 28**

Voting at 16

Several Latin American nations have lowered the voting age. Reasons and impacts are discussed by Markus Kaltenborn and Anna Pichl of Ruhr-University Bochum in cooperation with Heike Kuhn of Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. **PAGE 30**

Entitled to climate protection

Young people demand action to stem global heating. Some are going to court. Martina Dase of Save the Children Germany writes about legal action in various countries. **PAGE 32**

Child soldiers

Child soldiers are denied each and every fundamental right. Dirk Bathe of World Vision, the international non-governmental organisation, spells out what needs to happen – not only to re-integrate former combatants, but to safeguard children's rights in the first place. **PAGE 34**

Recurring infringements of children's rights

In past ages, children were their parents' property and not considered persons of their own. That changed in the 20th century. Modern society considers children to be individuals who enjoy personal rights. These are universal principles which the UN General Assembly adopted in 1989 when it passed the Convention on the Rights of the Child. All member nations ratified it, with one exception: the USA. The Convention is the most important human-rights document in regard to children. Girls and boys are entitled to health services, an education, social inclusion and a say in everything that concerns them. They must be free to develop their own personality.

To what extent children's rights are actually respected, is another matter. Things diverge from country to country. Among other things, it depends on how well the rule of law is enforced. It is a huge challenge that infringements of children's rights often have no legal repercussions, even when those infringements are evident.

It is striking that breaches of children's rights are systematically correlated with poverty. That is true in countries with low and high incomes. In many developing countries, poor families depend on the money their children earn doing hard physical work. Poverty also leads to traumatic premature marriages, forced prostitution and enslavement of children. Far too often, parents' income does not suffice to properly feed and take care of all daughters and sons. They have no choice but to "marry off" daughters and traffic children into enslavement.

Because of their families' poverty, many children do not get a formal education. Their parents simply cannot afford to send them to school and make them work instead. Under age refugees struggle in particular. Their rights are seriously breached in many ways.

Even in prosperous nations like Germany, infringements occur regularly. The welfare benefits poor families receive, for example, do not suffice for a balanced and nutritious diet. Moreover, German schools are known to do a systematically poor job of educating children of immigrants. A network of 100 organisations is committed to the full implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Germany. They report that educational opportunities are worse for children from disadvantaged families. The same kids also experience violence and discrimination more often. Their lives are marked by physical wounds and mental trauma long-term.

Experts say that it is not enough to sign up to the UN Convention. Many nations have enshrined children's rights in their constitutions, since adopting the rights in national law facilitates enforcement. It must be possible to take culprits to court. Germany is a laggard in this regard too and has not spelled out children's rights in its constitution in spite of repeated admonitions by the UN.

Regrettably, minors around the world are largely excluded from political life. In most countries, the voting age is 18, though some nations have lowered it to 16 – Austria, for example, and some Latin American countries. Younger kids, however, are denied representation. Governments and legislators must therefore foster serious exchange with children and teenagers. Policymakers must consider the interests of the youngest people – that is especially true in our era of fast escalating climate crisis.

► 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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Magazine



Why things went wrong in Afghanistan

The USA and its allies failed to draft a coherent state-building strategy. That is what Paul D. Miller of the Washington-based Georgetown University told D+C/E+Z in an interview. In his eyes, three major mistakes led to disaster. They were made by two consecutive US presidents: George W. Bush and Barack Obama.

PAGE 12

Online classes' downsides

In the course of the coronavirus pandemic, digital teaching became common around the world. This trend has severely restricted young Indian women's opportunities, argues Ipsita Sapra of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences' Hyderabad campus. One of several reasons is that campus life offers female students a sense of freedom that they do not experience at home.

PAGE 10

Debate



More financial power

The International Monetary Fund has approved a \$650 billion allocation of special drawing rights, boosting member countries' financial resources. Rich nations will receive proportionately more, so they should voluntarily make a share available to poorer countries, writes Kathrin Berensmann of the German Development Institute.

PAGE 15



Kumbirai Mapfumo's smokeless kitchen fire means her health risks are reduced.

ENERGY

Cooking with biogas

Zimbabwe's efforts to promote widespread use of biogas – a renewable energy source – have been slowed by the high cost of biogas production. A new, low-cost technology using available materials aims to solve that problem.

By Farai Shawn Matiashe

For nearly a decade, Zimbabwe's domestic biogas programme has promoted the use of biogas – the mixture of gases produced by the breakdown of organic matter – as an accessible and environmentally friendly fuel. Five years ago the government, in partnership with two Dutch-based development organisations, rolled out a \$3 million project to install biogas units across the country.

But there was a problem. Uptake was slow due to the high cost of biogas processing plants, known as digesters. According to research by Jane Kaifa and Wilson Parawira of Zimbabwe's Bindura University, only about 711 household, municipal and institutional plants had been built by 2019.

Beginning last year, however, a development project led by Care International Zimbabwe, a humanitarian agency, began kick-starting the biogas programme by offering low-cost digesters. They use existing materials such as metal drums and can be built for about \$250, compared to the current \$800 for home and \$2,000 for institutional units.

Biogas is produced when organic matter, such as food or animal waste, is broken down by microorganisms in the absence of

oxygen, in a process called anaerobic digestion.

“The main cost is the drums, which are easily available at low cost even in remote areas,” says Wishborne Mandhlazi of Care International. “In some cases drums can be had for free, especially in mining areas where they are used to hold chemicals.”

The biogas project is part of a broader programme of the Zimbabwe Resilience Building Fund, a long-term development initiative that aims to build up local capabilities. The broader programme is called “Enhancing Community Resilience and Inclusive Market Systems” (ECRIMS). Care International Zimbabwe is the lead organisation.

By July 2020, the project brought low-cost digesters to 40 rural households in the Midlands Province in Zimbabwe's south, and it plans to boost that number to 200 households. The project currently focuses on the Zvishavane and Mbwerengwa districts in Midlands Province.

The region has plentiful organic matter in the form of cow dung. A single cow



produces on average about 10 kilogramme of dung per day, which can be turned into 400 litres of biogas. Cooking with biogas requires between 150 and 300 litres per person and meal.

Having a digester nearby saves time and effort. Kumbirai Mapfumo, a grandmother living in Zvishavane, no longer has to search for firewood as a cooking fuel. “I can now prepare meals using a biogas stove which is easy to use and reliable,” she says. “I use cow dung from the corral.” The resource is actually available without cost in rural areas.

A further bonus is conservation of the nearby forests. “We now use firewood only once in a while,” says Tembelenkosi Hove, a Mberengwa resident.

The next step in the ECRIMS biogas project will be to teach rural Zimbabweans to install their own low-cost digesters, following instructions from those who have already installed their systems. “Some locals have already expressed interest,” Mandhlazi says. “We are training them on installing the

units so they can do this for others once the project is gone.”

Edington Mazambani, head of the Zimbabwe Energy Regulatory Authority, says the government plans to promote biogas technology nationwide. “Through the National Renewable Energy Policy, the government is promoting increased uptake of renewable energy technologies, including biogas,” he says. “Rural communities can rely on biogas as it is a tried and tested technology.”

PROS AND CONS

Proponents of biogas note that it is a clean-burning fuel, producing fewer pollutants during cooking than most other fuels.

The production process for biogas is also environmentally friendly. It is a good example of the circular economy in action, recycling animal waste into useable energy.

“Biogas is a renewable and clean source of energy,” Mandhlazi says. “Gas generated through bio-digestion is non-polluting. Using gas from waste as a form of energy is actually a great way to combat global warming.” He adds that anaerobic digestion deactivates pathogens and parasites, thus reducing the incidence of waterborne diseases.

A by-product of the biogas production process is an enriched organic compound called digestate, which is a good supplement to, or substitute for, chemical fertilisers. According to Mandhlazi, the digestate can accelerate plant growth and resilience

to diseases, whereas some chemical-based fertilisers can harm the environment. Moreover, organic waste left uncollected can allow toxic liquids to drain into underground water sources, causing soil and water pollution.

In summary, “when compared to virgin natural gas obtained by drilling into the earth, biogas is clearly a more sustainable option,” say Tim Juliani and Pete Pearson of the World Wildlife Fund, a conservation organisation, in a blog post.

“And there are additional benefits of biogas,” they add. “Removing the abundant supply of animal manure and food waste from the environment prevents nitrogen pollution and runoff into water resources.”

On the other hand, there is a risk that pathogens harboured in the digester slurry could infect humans who handle the digestate or who eat crops fertilised with it, according to Benson Kibiti, spokesman for Power for All, an Indian government energy initiative. However, he adds that “the potential for biogas is huge in Africa, for both cooking fuel and off-grid electrification systems”.

Further, certain precautions must be followed when operating and maintaining biogas systems, just as they must be followed with energy production systems involving other fuel sources.



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How a digester works

The low-cost, three-drum digester that turns cow dung into cooking gas and fertiliser is a “plug and flow” system, says Wishborne Mandhlazi, an engineer with Care International Zimbabwe involved in a biogas pilot project.

“The digester consists of three drums welded together, laid out horizontally and bur-

ied underground,” he explains. “Cow dung is added at a constant rate at one end, and this forces other material to move through the drums towards the other end in a ‘first in, first out’ manner.”

The organic matter is “digested” within the drums in an anaerobic – which means oxygen-free – environ-

ment. This process releases biogas, which is collected in a gas holder and then moved in pipes to a stove for cooking. At the same time, the digested material is collected in an outlet chamber and then used as fertiliser.

The gas holder can be filled by a flow of 10 litres of cow dung. When the gas holder is full, it provides a cooking time of at least one hour, Mandhlazi says. “The drum can be filled at least twice a day, pro-

viding two hours cooking time per day.” FSM

LINKS

Enhancing community resilience and inclusive market systems.
Zimbabwe Resilience Building Fund.

<http://www.zrbf.co.zw/projects/5/>
SNV Netherlands Development Organisation: National Domestic Biogas Programme – Zimbabwe.
<https://snv.org/project/national-domestic-biogas-programme-zimbabwe>

AFRICAN ECONOMIES

Cushioning coronavirus impacts

The COVID-19 crisis severely affected Africa's private sector last year. Many countries suffered economic recessions. According to a paper published by the KfW development bank and its French counterpart Agence Française de Développement (AFD), the worst hit sectors were oil and gas as well as tourism. The support programmes that African governments offered paled in comparison with those launched elsewhere.

By Aenne Frankenberger

The report assesses the measures African governments took in support of struggling businesses, particularly in regard to compensating lost revenues. Governments lowered water and electricity tariffs, the authors write, but they were also lenient in regard to debt servicing. In middle-income countries, governments offered loan guarantees. Moreover, some central banks reduced interest rates and boosted the banks' liquidity. According to the report, however, Africa's banking system is weak and a World Bank survey showed that only few companies received governmental support in the pandemic.

African stimulus programmes amounted to an average of 2.5% of the region's GDP. The comparative share was up to three times higher in advanced economies, according to the two European development banks. Moreover, government aid was not distributed evenly across Africa because many firms

- did not know about the opportunities,
- did not get what they applied for or
- found the application procedures too burdensome.

The authors point out that e-commerce enabled firms to remain in operation during lockdowns. Especially businesses in African middle-income countries benefitted from this possibility. With the exception of South Africa, however, the share of e-commerce is still comparatively small in Africa.

During the pandemic, household incomes fell and customers spent less money. Many businesses thus had to cope with de-

creasing demand. Many managers reduced working hours and wages, but did not fire staff. The report authors point out that business leaders apparently hoped the situation would improve soon. Nonetheless, employment fell 8.5% in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2020.

According to the report, many African companies still face serious risks so stimulus programmes are needed. Pointing out that governments' fiscal space is shrinking due to growing sovereign debt, the authors emphasise that states need strong and viable taxation systems. On the other hand, governments should consider carefully which businesses and sectors deserve support as not all will be needed in the future.

As anywhere in the world, teleworking increased in Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it only affected 12.5% of African businesses. According to the report, this is the smallest share among all developing regions. Due to poor telecommunication infrastructure, a mere seven percent

of Africa's workforce could work from home. The authors state that infrastructure investments could stimulate growth and boost the teleworking ratio. Reliable power supply and high-quality internet access are said to be particularly important.

The paper concludes that African governments should support the private sector by increasing the scale and scope of their stimulus programmes. Moreover, the authors want the international community to offer financial and technical support to the African private sector, arguing that governmental development finance institutions should ensure that these resources are used in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

LINK

KfW, AFD: The African private sector in the COVID-19 crisis: impacts, responses and perspectives. https://www.kfw.de/KfW-Group/Newsroom/Latest-News/News-Details_664448.html



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Gas and oil companies were particularly affected by the COVID-19 crisis: workers of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation in December 2020.



Not many women are as successful as Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw (right). She is the founder and Managing Director of India's premier biotechnology company, Biocon Limited. In 2006, she and Bollywood star actor Shah Rukh Khan have been launching an innovative cancer drug.

FINANCIAL INCLUSION

Investing in women

Businesses that are owned or led by women, or that focus on female markets, often have trouble getting the capital they need to grow and thrive. This is especially true in emerging markets. But financiers are missing opportunities by overlooking women: such firms offer big benefits to investors, lenders and society at large. A new “gender-lens investing” approach shows investors how to find women-focused firms to invest in, and why they should do so. Jen Braswell, director of value creation at CDC Group, the UK's development finance institution, is a leader in this context.

Jen Braswell interviewed by Aviva Freudmann

Why are CDC Group and other development finance institutions (DFIs) – government-owned agencies that provide risk capital for developmentally relevant private-sector projects – applying a “gender lens” to their own investment decisions?

There is an increasingly well documented commercial case for gender-lens investing. Gender-diverse boards and management teams typically perform better. Managed well, moreover, a more gender-balanced workforce has higher productivity, higher employee-retention rates and many other benefits. In addition, women hold something like 80% of consumers' decision-making power globally. So if businesses do not pay attention to them, they are missing the consumer base that will help them grow. This is also true for businesses like banks that provide financial products. Far too many women entrepreneurs are under-served. We also see a lot of positive social impacts. For example, gender diversity in company leadership tends to translate into more business integrity and better governance, including in regard to environmental and social issues. Gender-diverse leadership teams value men and women equally, so more attention to women marks their entire value chains.

Given there are so many benefits, why must you tell lenders and investors to take note?

What we are seeing is essentially a market failure. There is bias in financial markets concerning women-owned small businesses, for example. The typical expectation is women in business pose greater risks and are not growth oriented. On the other hand, the entire concept of gender-lens investing is untested in the financial industry. It will take five to seven years before we know how today's investments in women-owned small businesses will do. In addition to systemic bias, structural problems hinder female entrepreneurs in financial markets. Women often don't have the collateral or credit rating that they need to access loans through traditional channels. Moreover, banks' data systems are not geared to lending to women entrepreneurs, whose professional track record tends to be short. Not many women have been entrenched in their industries long enough to build the kind of profile that investors look for.

How are DFIs addressing these barriers?

Our ultimate aim is to move capital into women-led and gender-smart businesses on a sustained basis. This is going to require changing “business as usual” amongst investors. As a first step, DFIs set a collective

financial target for investing in women. Around 2017, the seven DFIs of the G7, the group of leading industrialised countries, realised that none of us were even counting where women participate in our investments. At the G7 meeting in Canada in 2018, we launched a call to action, which we called the “2X Challenge”. The name was a nod to the female chromosome, but also a nod to the value we see in women-focused investing. The 2X Challenge initially set a target of \$3 billion in gender-lens investments by the end of 2020. We did much better than that. By the end of 2020, participating DFIs had committed \$7 billion, and on top of that, the DFIs had mobilised another \$4 billion in commercial capital, so the total was \$11 billion. At the same time the 2X project attracted new participants. The current membership is 18 DFIs and multilateral development banks, including the World Bank’s International Finance Corporation (IFC), the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD).

Aside from investing funds with a “gender lens”, how have participants in the 2X Chal-

lenge sought to lower barriers to women in financial markets?

We have jointly developed a framework to guide gender-smart investment decisions. The “2X Framework” is a set of criteria and performance metrics. Specific thresholds define which requirements an investment should fulfil in order to be considered gender-smart. They include:

- the share of women in a firm’s leadership,
- the percentage of female ownership,
- the male-female ratio among employees and
- the proportion of a company’s products and services specifically targeting female consumers.

We have been careful to harmonise these criteria and indicators with investment standards that are already out there. We want to make sure we are not creating confusion. We want to build an open runway for capital to move to gender-smart investees. The 2X Framework allows an investor to track its own performance in gender-lens investing. We are doing this with our own portfolio at CDC Group, and we will ask our investees to track their results. Reporting

and tracking are important elements of the 2X Framework. In the same way that reporting on environmental, social and governance (ESG) criteria has become mainstream for investors and companies, reporting on gender and diversity performance will likely become widespread as well.

Is the 2X project also looking to support female-led investment funds – such as private equity firms, venture capital funds and credit funds?

Yes, and we focus in particular on women-led funds that invest in women-focused businesses.

There is significant momentum in the market right now, but barriers still persist because the women-led and gender-balanced investment fund teams tend to be rather young. Established players therefore view them as higher risk. Adding to the problems, these investment funds are often financed from the owners’ own pockets and from friends and family.

Are DFIs making a difference?

Well, we are trying to help this group of emerging fund managers to leapfrog over

Women at work

The \$7 billion allocated by governmental development finance institutions (DFIs) under the 2X Challenge from 2018 to 2020 went to investees in a wide range of industries. Here are some examples.

Significant investment under the 2X Challenge has gone into infrastructure. The focus was on projects targeted specifically to women, rather than large-scale infrastructure projects that arguably benefit women and men equally. For example, a maritime port in West Africa made a major effort to recruit and train women to operate heavy machinery, such as cranes that move cargo on and off ships. The port man-

agement saw a strong business case for employing women in these jobs: Women have fewer accidents and higher job-retention rates.

A firm specialising in artificial intelligence – another non-traditional industry for women – also attracted 2X Challenge funds. A female-founded digital business in India focused on recruiting rural women to work remotely. The firm’s systems allow it to train new workers quickly. It has some of the highest worker satisfaction rates of any company in the 2X portfolio.

Another business in India, in warehousing and logistics, planned to expand its

workforce by 12,000 people. As part of the 2X partnership with the company, the CDC, Britain’s DFI, provided advice to ensure that the firm planned its re-

cruitment with gender balance in mind, and also consulted it on creating conditions in which women could work comfortably and safely. AF



Women attend a micro-finance meeting in Zanzibar, Tanzania.

those barriers. Over the past 18 months, we have been approached by more than 60 investment funds led by women in developing countries. Typically, they are first-time teams without track records. We can't invest in them right now because of our own investment parameters, and the same goes for the large institutional investors. However, we are developing an accelerator facility to give capital to these fund managers, to get them up and running, so that they can prove they are good risks. DFIs are building a shared global facility that will be capitalised by members of the 2X project. The facility will provide start-up cash to these fund managers. As the funds succeed, they will be considered by ever less scepticism.

What other plans are under way?

At the latest G7 summit in Cornwall we set the next three-year target: \$15 billion. We have additional participants, including the IFC and EBRD, with large portfolios and significant assets under management. We will keep using the 2X Framework criteria, but with an ambition to create innovative platforms to overcome some systemic blockag-

es. For example, there are still challenges in getting capital into the hands of female entrepreneurs in small and mid-sized enterprises (SMEs). The other significant development is that we have created an industry body, called the "2XCollaborative", a global network for gender-lens investing. It will have a professional leadership and be open to all types of capital providers, not just DFIs and multilateral banks. We are speaking with pension funds and other large institutional investors, major commercial banks and development banks for example. Many of them are applying the 2X Framework. What we are developing is therefore relevant for finance writ large.

What do you expect the new network to do?

The 2XCollaborative will offer a few things. The two most important are:

- It will foster working groups focused either on certain asset classes, such as investment banking, or on thematic initiatives. The latter working groups might assess applying a gender lens to climate finance or racial equity. We are also considering applying a gender lens to specific sectors, such as infrastructure.

- It will implement a process to certify and verify whether an organisation – including large institutional investors – meets the criteria of the 2X Framework. So far, lenders or investors had to check for themselves. Establishing a third-party verification mechanism will help to build confidence and ensure effectiveness. At this point, there is so much interest in the market that we are at risk of "pink-washing", if you will – deceptively using marketing to persuade the public that an organisation's products, aims and policies are women-friendly, even if they really aren't. A sound and replicable verification and certification process will help to avoid that.



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<https://www.2xchallenge.org/>

<https://www.2xcollaborative.org/>

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Universities provide spaces with special freedom to women: Students at an Assamese college.

ONLINE CLASSES

Problems with the solution

Online education has become common during the pandemic. For young Indian women, this trend goes along with serious new challenges.

By Ipsita Sapra

The Covid-19 pandemic hit India in February/March 2020 and surged dramatically in the spring of 2021. As a measure to contain the spread of the disease, all educational institutions were shut down early on. Schools, colleges and universities moved online which made it possible for education to continue for a large number of students without risking their lives.

Online teaching and learning presented some important advantages. The costs and efforts spent on commuting were reduced. Classes were often recorded, so students had access to a lesson even if they missed it. Online classes enabled teachers and students from across the world to inter-

act and share their perspective in ways that could not be imagined before.

Notwithstanding these advantages, online teaching presented enormous challenges. In particular, it deepened the existing inequalities in society regarding class and gender. In most developing countries, most families' homes do not have separate rooms for children. In India, for instance, one third of the families live in one-room houses.

Close to 70% of Indians live in villages. In rural areas, only four in a hundred families had a computer. Taking urban and rural together, the number goes up to eleven in a hundred. These numbers are from the national sample survey 2018, and they may have increased somewhat, but they cannot be anywhere near the demand.

Moreover, a family with more than one student would need more devices, and access to the devices depends on gender in various ways:

- First, in patriarchal and gender unequal societies like India, the boys will almost always have preferential access.
- Second, in 2018, not even 13% of women in India were able to operate a computer compared with about 20% of men. In the rural areas, the percentage of women able to use computers was close to half of that of men. Their ability to grasp opportunities is obviously impaired.

Smartphones are a slightly cheaper option for online education, and many more people own them. In India, there are between 500 and 750 million smartphone users. However, these figures hide grim realities. According to the Mobile Gender Gap Report 2020, women own only 40% of the smartphones. India also has the widest gender gap among all surveyed countries in terms of smartphone usage. On average, men used a smartphone seven times per week (for text messages, voice calls et cetera). Women only did so four times. Anecdotal evidence helps to illustrate the barriers that women and girls face. Consider the following example:

Twenty-two-year-old Swati studies at a prestigious university but is struggling to complete her degree. With the pandemic striking India, her university stopped in-person classes. She returned home hoping to continue the course online. However, her large extended family expects a young woman to help with household chores such as cleaning, cooking or laundry. With the men in the family not sharing the responsibilities, the pressure is entirely on the women. Like most Indian families, Swati's family does not own any modern household appliances that might reduce drudgery. Domestic work leaves Swati exhausted, she struggled to complete her assignments. Her grades have fallen. Unable to cope with the stress, she is contemplating dropping out.

Compounding the problems, the pandemic increased household chores manyfold with all family members living together. Online education does not take into account that the settings of the classrooms have changed from an 'equal opportunity' institutional setup to a deeply gendered and hierarchical family setup that disadvantages female students.

Making matters worse, Covid-19 increased care work. In most societies, including India's, women are expected to do far more care work than men. Women also carry

a ‘mental load’, referring to the responsibility of all the planning that goes on in running a household. These take a toll on the academic performances of female students studying from home in an online mode.

Radha’s entire family was tested Covid-positive and her father had to be hospitalised due to complications. Radha’s mother was devastated and spent most of her time crying. Radha, a university student in her final year, not only had to take care of her father’s treatment but also her mother’s physical and emotional well-being. She also had to run the family while taking care of younger siblings. With increased care responsibilities and her own health issues, Radha struggled with her advanced university course that was complex and required uninterrupted focus and attention. The stress also led to mental health issues.

Another detrimental impact of online education on women tends to get less attention. It concerns first-generation learners who live in college dormitories. They typically had to overcome great challenges to access education at all. Returning home in the middle of the course can cause serious difficulties.

Rani was the first girl from her community to enrol in a college. She had worked really hard for it. The first year went well. She learned a lot from the classes and from her peers. She could approach the teachers for additional help after classroom hours. Things changed after the college started online teaching post-Covid. The informal but important after-class academic support was cut off. Plus, there was constant pressure from the family to get married as girls her age in the community were mostly married.

So long as she was staying at the residential college, she was ‘out of sight’. Her presence at home caused her parents to be approached with matrimonial alliances that were difficult for her to keep turning down.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

There is yet another dimension to the gendered nature of online education. UN agencies report increased domestic violence, calling it a “shadow pandemic”. This is particularly evident in societies with high levels of violence against women. A large number of girls and women are victims of or witness to such violence. Moreover, fear of sexual harassment in public spaces discourages

many women from going to cybercafes. In such contexts, academic pursuits are discarded.

Educational institutions are aware of such issues. They have tried to ensure curriculum delivery and have considered pedagogical options. Several school and college boards have reduced curriculum portions. Most universities have also split the courses into synchronous modes (where there is a live class with faculty and students) and asynchronous modes (where the student engages in self-study based on material designed by the faculty). Universities like the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, for example, ensured that all students from marginalised backgrounds had laptops through its laptop bank programme. Jadavpur University in Kolkata pooled resources for students from financially deprived backgrounds to purchase mobile internet data.

These measures make a difference, but they are not universal. They are clearly not enough. Educational institutions must recognise that several ‘worlds’ co-exist around the virtual classroom screen. As online education is delivered now, the assumption is that real and virtual classrooms are basically the same. This assumption is wrong. A physical classroom, despite its diversities and complexities, creates a framework of equality. The online classroom is far more steeped in the realities of a discriminatory world, especially for women.

The point is that, for young women, educational institutions are spaces where they experience a sense of freedom and equality they often do not enjoy within their families and communities. The college is thus more than just another physical space.

Educational institutions are not discrimination-free, of course, but to young women they offer liberating possibilities nonetheless. Online classes do not offer that experience.

Educators need to acknowledge this and improve matters. The responses will have to be context-specific. They could include institution-led, gender-responsive initiatives. Involving families in increased parent-teacher meetings would make sense. Regular counselling services for students and family members would be useful too. All options need to be considered. The state has an enormous role in recognising the gender disparities in online education. Governments must launch initiatives such as prioritised provision of devices and internet access to women and girls. Civil-society organisations have been proactive in their commitment to a gender-equal world. It is time now to take it to another level that encourages women’s education in this changed scenario.

The pandemic has been a major setback. We cannot allow ourselves to lose the hard-earned victories for women’s and girl’s education. The way forward is through a greater understanding of both gender dynamics and social justice. To grasp the opportunities of online education and control its risks, we need proactive public policies.



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In India, typically, sons have privileged access to digital devices.

AFGHANISTAN

Broken promises

Led by the USA, the international community took an ambiguous approach to Afghanistan in the past two decades. The goal was to build a modern state, but from the very start, a “light footprint” was preferred. As Paul D. Miller told Hans Dembowski in an interview, three major mistakes made by two consecutive US presidents ultimately caused failure.

Paul D. Miller interviewed by Hans Dembowski

Today, the common narrative is that it was wrong to try to build a modern, democratic Afghan state. As I remember it, however, the necessity of doing so was generally

understood 20 years ago. After the attacks on New York and Washington DC of 11 September 2001, the goal was to ensure that Afghanistan would never become a safe haven for terrorists again. The implication was that a power vacuum was unacceptable.

Exactly, there was no other choice. That is what former officials of the Bush administration are still saying today. In 2001/2002 that view was shared internationally, including by NATO leaders and UN officials. Unfortunately, this insight did not make them draft a coherent state-building strategy. State building is a complex challenge and takes a lot of time, however. Institutions have to be established and consoli-

dated step-by-step. Capable staff cannot simply be bought. To earn public trust, officers need training and considerable practical experience. However, we and our allies did not commit to long-term engagement.

To what extent was state building attempted in Afghanistan at all?

It varied from year to year. In the first five years, the focus was on political reconstruction in the sense of holding elections and passing a constitution. Both worked out fairly well. The constitution was based on Afghanistan’s 1964 constitution and updated by Afghans who represented the country’s people and understood its constitutional history. The constitution was Afghan owned rather than imposed by western powers. On the downside, there were no significant efforts to build infrastructure. Afghanistan badly needed roads, hospitals and schools, but also institutions such as law courts and municipal governments. Things changed somewhat in the years 2007 to 2011 when insurgents were gaining strength. In that period, much more was done to ramp up the legal system, develop rural areas and build administrative capacities. However, by that point, reconstruction efforts were rushed and thus often wasteful, the conflict further intensified, and international support later focused almost entirely on the Afghan army and police.

Did western allies fight or foster corruption?

They did both. The core problem was that they tried to do too much too fast, especially in the second phase that I just mentioned. A lot of money suddenly flowed into a very poor country that had recently been the world’s worst failed state and lacked competent institutions. The result was the rule of money. The illegal-drugs trade obviously added to the problems. Poppy cultivation began to expand fast from 2006 on, and by 2009 or so, the Taliban were relying on opium money. Others were involved in the drugs economy too, including influential leaders who officially supported the government. By the end of 2010, a destructive dynamic had set in. The focus was increasingly on fighting insurgents and not on reconstruction. The US administration lost faith in state building, which obviously became more difficult the more the conflict escalated.



Chris Donahue was the last US soldier departing Kabul on 30 August.

Why did things go wrong?

Well, I think there were three major mistakes in the first two presidential administrations:

- President George W. Bush insisted on a “light footprint” right from the start. One reason was that he had a track record of disparaging notions of nation building. Donald Rumsfeld, his defense secretary, did not like the idea of deploying masses of soldiers for peacekeeping. Some NATO partners, moreover, were uncomfortable with military missions in a far-away country. Germany was a prominent example. As for the UN, its leaders were wary of assuming responsibility for running an entire country the way the UN had done in Cambodia, East Timor and Kosovo. “Light footprint” sounded attractive to all of them.

- The second major mistake was that Bush started the Iraq war in 2003. It devoured resources that could have been used in Afghanistan. It also distracted attention from Afghanistan, where things seemed to be going well in 2002/2003, though they were really not going well at all.

- President Barack Obama made the third mistake. Though he correctly promised a “civilian surge” to rebuild the country, he also kept saying he wanted to withdraw our troops. His timetable hurt state building, which requires long-term, open-ended commitment. Obama’s rhetoric, however, told everyone he was losing patience. Both the Taliban and our Afghan allies heard the message and began to plan accordingly. The Taliban became increasingly confident that they would eventually prevail, and our Afghan allies had incentives to hedge by siphoning off as much money as possible, but not to take the state-building agenda seriously.

In the later two administrations, I have nothing good to say about President Joe Biden’s withdrawal or about President Donald Trump’s peace negotiations with the Taliban, which bypassed our Afghan partners and placed no meaningful demands on the Taliban, but several decisive mistakes were made long before Trump or Biden took office.

What role did other western governments play?

Well, Washington basically called the shots. At first, the idea was that individual governments would assume specific responsibilities in Afghanistan, but a sense of frustra-

tion set in by 2006. The Bush administration felt that our allies were not doing enough, which was a bit unfair, because it wasn’t doing enough itself.

I find it bewildering that western leaders cared so little about the drugs economy. It accounts for up to 30% of Afghanistan’s gross national product (GNP). Such a huge black market is incompatible with a modern state and the rule of law.

There were actually many proposals for solving the drugs problem. Some suggested saffron cultivation could be an alternative to poppy cultivation. Others said the international community should simply buy the entire harvest to produce medical morphine. There were attempts to eradicate poppy fields. Everything stayed piecemeal, however. The point is that you cannot make meaningful progress against the drug trade if you do not have a legal system. That is especially true in a war zone. We ended up with a chicken and egg problem. Without peace, you cannot build a legal system and other institutions, but you cannot have peace, unless you have a legal system.

It is also estimated that aid accounted for about 50% of Afghanistan’s GNP in recent years. There really was not much of an Afghan state.

Well, you have to consider the history of Afghanistan, which has basically been a client state for hundreds of years. For a long time, it depended on the British Empire, later on the Soviet Union. Afghanistan’s official government always relied on outside funding and used that funding to pay off local clients in exchange for their support. Nonetheless, the country was largely at peace thanks to many different compromises and accommodations. That changed with the Soviet invasion of 1979.

Western failure in Afghanistan is now often blamed on Afghans’ supposedly medieval mindset. I find that rhetoric condescending and misleading. The real problem is that Afghan society is controlled by warlords – as medieval Europe was, by the way. People want to survive. They do not care much about whether the armed men in front of them are legitimate in one way or another. The priority is not to get hurt and somehow keep feeding one’s family. Official legislation hardly matters in the rural regions of



developing countries, where traditions rule daily life – and it is certainly not relevant in situations of strife.

The Soviets destroyed the structures of Afghan society, such as the tribal networks, landowning khans, and local mullahs. That led to the rise of warlordism and, eventually, the drug economy. After 2001, the international community should not have tolerated power vacuums at the local level. The results were persisting warlordism and opportunities for the Taliban. In the west, everyone knows that Taliban rule was brutal when they controlled the country in the late 1990s. It is less well understood that they nonetheless provided a sense of order, which was obviously very rough. They even banned poppy cultivation for one year, though many observers argue they only did so to drive up the global opium price. What matters now, however, is that Afghans are tired after four decades of war. They long for safety and some believed the Taliban were good at providing it.

And they feel disappointed in western powers. Could the US-led intervention have achieved more?

Well, both Bush and Obama signed agreements with Afghan governments, pledging long-term support. I am convinced we could have done more had we had more patience. State building cannot be done fast and definitely not quickly in a very poor, war-torn country. The depressing truth is that our leaders chose the right words, but did not follow up with action. Our Afghan partners lost faith, and the USA failed to fulfil what our presidents had promised.



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Refuge in a storm

The Divine Providence Home in Chawama, a suburb of Zambia's capital Lusaka, is a refuge for some of the country's most vulnerable citizens. It is home to 20 elderly people and 30 orphans, among them disabled, bedridden and mentally ill patients. Residents are admitted regardless of tribe or religion.

The home, founded more than three decades ago, is run by the Missionary Sisters of the Holy Family, a Catholic religious order. It survives mainly on donations from well-wishers. With the impact of Covid-19, however, the home faces growing difficulties. Contributions of food, clothing and medicines from Zambian charities and businesses have all but dried up, as donors face pandemic-related financial problems.

"Since the outbreak of Covid-19 it has been tough to provide for the basic needs of the people being taken care of here," says Sister Judith Bozek, 78, a Polish nun who heads the home. "Everything is more expensive now; it is difficult to cope in this pandemic," Sister Bozek says. "A few people still show up sometimes to donate food, medical sup-

plies, clothes and diapers for the orphans but the needs are great. But we thank God; He is with us for sure."

Residents say the Sisters running the home have managed admirably in these difficult times. Teddy Chipili, 68, from Luapula Province in northern Zambia, has lived at the home for over two years. He says the Holy Family Sisters rescued him from homelessness. "I was admitted to a hospital for six months and after my discharge I lost my income and could not pay my rent. I was stranded, and I thank Sister Bozek and her team for having considered my predicament."

Esnart Kangwa, 62, also arrived destitute. She has chronic diabetes and hypertension and eventually her family was unable to pay her medical bills. "Without Sister Bozek I would be dead now," she says.

The Divine Providence Home is not the only charity facing pandemic-related difficulties. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) says the pandemic has had a devastating impact on all types of social services, particularly those for children. Many children, adolescents and elderly people in Zambia are vulnerable to poverty, violence, family separation, malnutrition and disease.

In an effort to close the gap between their needs and what charities can provide, Zambia's government introduced the Service Efficiency and Effectiveness for Vulnerable Children and Adolescents initiative in 2017. The initiative combines social protection programmes and government cash transfers with case management. The aim is to increase access to services for households caring for vulnerable children and adolescents.

"The government is committed to addressing these vulnerabilities," says Pamela Kabamba, permanent secretary of the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services. "The programme expands protection for the most marginalised Zambians."



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STEP MAP



Kristalina Georgieva, the IMF's managing director, at an Africa summit in Paris in May 2021.

IMF

More financial power for developing countries

At the end of August, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved a \$650 billion allocation of special drawing rights (SDRs). All 189 IMF members will benefit from the increase, receiving substantial financial resources for fighting the Covid-19 crisis. Rich nations will receive proportionately more SDRs and should voluntarily make a share available to poorer countries.

By Kathrin Berensmann

SDRs were established by the IMF in 1969 as a monetary reserve asset. Member countries can convert these book credits into other currencies or use them as foreign exchange reserves. SDRs are cheaper for member countries than borrowing on the markets. Moreover, there are no conditions attached to transactions (IMF 2021).

The current SDR allocation is by far the largest ever approved. There have been four such allocations since 1969; the biggest – in the wake of the global financial crisis in 2009 – amounted to \$250 billion.

Low-income countries (LICs) will get a substantial liquidity boost from the new

SDRs. However, at around \$21 billion, their share of the allocation is a relatively small 3.2 percent. The reason is that SDR distribution is based on countries' quota shares in the IMF, which broadly reflect their relative weight in the global economy. Industrialised countries will thus receive SDRs worth \$375 billion, according to the IMF, significantly more than poor countries will get.

Nevertheless, the \$21 billion earmarked for low-income countries is a big deal in comparison with other IMF allocations. In 2020, the IMF paid out half of this amount to LICs through the Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust (PRGT), the facility for financing LICs, as David Andrews, a former IMF official, and Mark Plant of the independent Center for Global Development in Washington have pointed out (Andrews, Plant 2021).

The group of 20 leading economies (G20) and the IMF support SDR redistribution from rich to poor countries. In its communiqués in April and July this year, the G20 asked the IMF to consider options for implementing that voluntarily.

There are a number of ways in which the new SDRs can be transferred from rich to poor countries. Under IMF rules, industrialised countries are allowed to redeploy a certain amount of SDRs in the form of loans or grants for countries in need, according to Andrews and Plant. In the course of the coronavirus crisis, some prosperous IMF members have already lent about SDRs worth about \$15 billion to the PRGT. However, it would be better to pass on at least some SDRs as grants rather than loans because more than half of low-income countries are either at risk of debt distress or are in debt distress already.

Another option is to set up a new dedicated fund financed at least partly by SDRs. This is what Andrews and Plant propose. Conceivable new vehicles could be a green fund or a global health fund for low-income countries. Their creation would be innovative and would need to be approved by the IMF Executive Board with 85% of the vote (Andrews, Plant 2021). Kristalina Georgieva, the IMF's managing director, recently expressed herself in favour of a new Resilience and Sustainability Trust for poor and vulnerable countries in an article she published in the Financial Times.

Redistribution would be welcome. Indeed, it is necessary, because developing countries will need more financial support from industrialised and emerging countries in the medium to long-term – not only to cushion the effects of the pandemic.

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GENDER JUSTICE

For the climate's sake, empower African women

Global heating is the most complex challenge of our time, but it does not affect us all equally. In Nigeria and other African countries, women and girls are disproportionately exposed to climate impacts, especially when they are poor. Women must be empowered in order to make themselves and their communities more resilient.

By Jennifer Uchendu

Women's disproportionate vulnerability to climate change is man-made since it arises from socio-cultural factors. In Africa, these include a lack of access to education, information and resources such as land.

The vast majority are restrained by general expectations of what they should be, think and do. Consider the example of drought: In times of water scarcity, which are set to become more frequent and more severe, it is girls' task to fetch water for their families. They often miss school for this reason. As drought is making clashes between farmers and herders more likely, fetching

water is also becoming more dangerous in many parts of Nigeria. At the same time, deforestation is making the collection of firewood – another female chore – more difficult (see Gloria Laker Aciro Adiiki in focus section of D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2020/05).

Women generally lack bodily autonomy (see Dagmar Wolf in Magazine section of D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2021/09) and agency, and that compounds communities' vulnerability to climate change. Women often have no say in how many children they have and when they have them. This is true especially in rural areas, but not only there. Wives are typically expected to succumb to male demands. With more children comes the need for more resources, in both material and mental terms. Poor women obviously lack money, and increasing pressure on ecosystems means that natural resources are becoming increasingly scarce. Village women with fewer children have been found to earn more money, enjoy better health and see higher crop yield in their farming. As a result, they provide more nutritious foods to their families.

These are only a few examples of how climate change particularly affects African women and girls. The solution would be to empower women. They must be equipped with the know-how to take their fates in their own hands, which includes rising to the challenges that come with climate change. Access to education and health services – including, of course, reproductive health – are essential. Moreover, women deserve access to economic resources and full rights as autonomous persons.

Women's empowerment will help society at large fight climate change. In Africa and many rural populations, women play critical roles in natural resource management including water, forests and energy. They often have experience dealing with nature that can be applied to climate change risk prevention.

There are examples for the positive effects of women's involvement in projects geared to sustainable development – whether as farmers, entrepreneurs or stakeholders in policymaking. Indeed, women are leading in many environment-minded civil-society organisations in Nigeria, including Wecyclers, Solar Sisters or GreenHill Recycling.

We have also seen innovative technologies such as clean cook stoves that have to a large extent helped reduce deforestation and illegal tree logging in many parts of the country. It has also combatted air pollution and the resultant respiratory health impacts that women often suffered from while cooking.

Experiences of this kind have led to the development of the National Action Plan on Gender and Climate Action for Nigeria. By empowering women, who make up more than half of the world's population, we expand our capacity to manage and counteract climate change. As the world grapples with the climate crisis and seeks ways to mitigate and adapt, we have to include women. The world, Africa and Nigeria simply cannot afford not to do so.



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Covid-19 in Kabul: people waiting to get refilled oxygen cylinders for sick family members.

AFGHANISTAN

The disaster has only just begun

The evacuation missions are over. They only managed to rescue a tiny share of local people who worked for international agencies. The vast majority need help and protection. They are stuck in Afghanistan at a time when several crises are rocking the country at once.

By Ralph Achenbach

Of Afghanistan's 40 million people, at least 18.9 million currently depend on humanitarian aid. The World Food Programme is warning of famine as food is becoming scarce. Drought is undermining masses of livelihoods, and it is a consequence of the climate crisis. The Delta variant is spreading, but not even 1.1 % of the people are fully vaccinated against Covid-19. The health-care system, which was always fragile, is collapsing. According to reports from Kabul, no one is paying health staff any more.

The most recent shift of political power has compounded insecurity in the entire country, fast exacerbating the long-standing humanitarian crisis. The security situation remains precarious. How a future government will act, remains to be seen. The first signs are not encouraging. The number and complexity of the crises currently rock-

ing Afghanistan feel overwhelming – and should be interpreted as a wake-up call.

Like other humanitarian agencies, the International Rescue Committee (IRC)

is committed to keep operations running. We have been working in Afghanistan since 1988. To keep on reaching out to civilians in the current multidimensional crisis, however, all humanitarian agencies need the backing of the international community, including the EU and Germany.

- Safeguard long-term funding. The recent donor conference pledged \$1 billion. This money is essential for supporting Afghanistan's people in need. We appreciate that Germany's Federal Government has pledged an immediate €100 million for relief missions in Afghanistan – plus an additional €500 million long-term. However, we further need long-term commitments for sustained efforts. Our request is that Germany pledge an annual €200 million for the next five years.

- Use diplomatic channels. More is needed than money. Making a financial commitment is not the same as delivering aid to grassroots communities. At the highest diplomatic levels, the German government should make efforts to ensure that people keep access to humanitarian aid under a Taliban government, with humanitarian workers staying able to operate at the grassroots level.

Letter to the editor

LIKE THE ROYAL FAMILY IN BRITAIN

Hans Dembowski: "Why taxes beat philanthropy", D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2021/09, Debate section

I enjoyed reading your editorial on the ultra-rich and their donations and other antics such as spending an hour in space. It seems that for them it is no more than an ego trip. For people in the US these ultra-rich individuals are like the royal family in Britain and their activities hit the headlines. It seems that China does not want to follow this example. They lifted 500 million from poverty and put a hefty fine on the e-commerce platform Ali Baba. Apparently they want to keep



their super-rich entrepreneurs in line. On the other hand, they do not seem to want to do a "Robin Hood" – robbing the rich and giving to the poor either. It will be interesting to see what model they will come up with.

Prof. Dr Sivali Ranawana, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Painful climate impacts

Afghans are suffering severe consequences of global warming. The Financial Times reported in mid-September that more than 80% of the country is experiencing drought: “Erratic spring rain and winter snowfall are leading to both more droughts in some parts of the country and flooding elsewhere, according to a UN re-

port from 2016, which warned that droughts would become an annual occurrence.” The FT also pointed out that population growth and war have compounded the problem. Today, twice as many people live in Afghanistan as in the 1990s.

According to the website Climate Home News, moreover, Afghanistan’s climate plan,

which was submitted to the UN in 2015, spells out that all 34 provinces are highly vulnerable to climate impacts, such as drought, heatwaves and glacial lake melts. As early as February 2020, National Geographic ran a long story that included the following lines: “The United Nations Environment Programme estimates 80% of conflict is over land, water and resources. And assistance to help Afghans cope with the effects of drought and climate change-related hard-

ships is often too short term or does not take into account the actual needs of Afghans on the ground, critics say.”

As Somini Sengupta, the New York Times’ international climate reporter wrote in August 2021, parts of Afghanistan have warmed twice as much as the global average. She pointed out, moreover, that other conflict-torn countries – Somalia, Syria and Mali – are similarly struggling with above-average climate impacts. DEM

- Support local workers. Afghan women and men account for 99% of the IRC staff in Afghanistan. Their expertise and their ties to local communities now matter more than ever before. Funding should therefore be channelled not only to overarching organisations like the UN. Community-based organisations and frontline responders deserve support. They understand the local context and know what people need. Unfortunately, the donor conference did not address this issue.
- Protect women and children. Some 75% of the people who depend on humanitarian relief in Afghanistan today are women and children. Since 1995, women’s literacy rate has increased by about 70%. However, female persons are once again

likely to be excluded from education. Germany’s Federal Government must exert pressure to protect women’s fundamental rights. Apart from access to education and health care, that includes the right to work. Should women be denied that right, we will not be able to reach out to the majority of the people anymore.

Welcome people in need of protection. Some Afghans need more than humanitarian aid: they need protection because they are particularly at risk. Chancellor Angela Merkel has said that Germany is committed to local workers who supported German institutions. Her estimate is that some 40 000 persons are hoping to come to Germany. The number includes relatives of local workers. On top of the EU resettlement programme,

Germany should therefore offer refuge to 20 000 people, including women, members of gender minorities and former staff of German agencies.

Afghanistan’s civilian population is facing dramatic times. Germany, the EU and international allies must ensure that life-saving relief can still be delivered so people get support in dangerous times. We must not turn our backs on Afghanistan now.

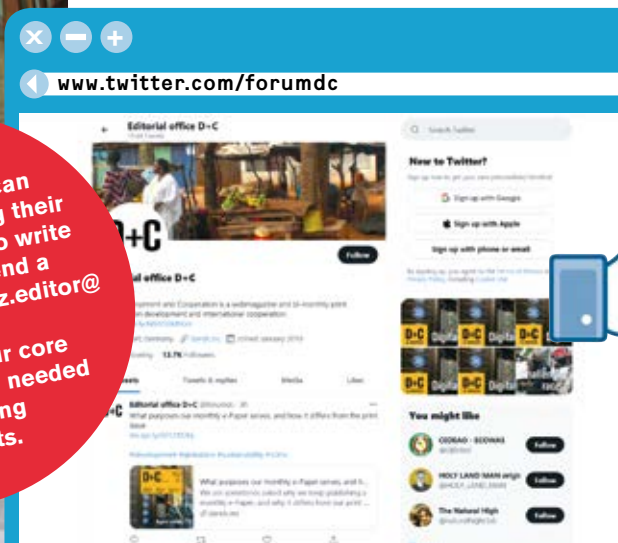


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High-school students' climate protest in Delhi, India's capital region.



Children's rights

Around the world, the rights of minors are being neglected. A core reason is poverty. Some families depend on even their young members earning money. They also tend to “marry off” daughters far too soon. Young refugees in particular must cope with great difficulties. Even in prosperous nations, however, not all youngsters get the opportunities they deserve. Once again, children who

grow up in precarious circumstances are more likely than others to suffer marginalisation and discrimination.



This focus section deals with the first four Sustainable Development Goals: no poverty, zero hunger, health and well-being, quality education. It also has a bearing on the other SDGs.

REFUGEE CHILDREN

A lonely battle

Every year, hundreds of thousands of children and teenagers cross international borders, unaccompanied by a parent or guardian and looking for a better life. When they reach their destination countries they often face further barriers, including bureaucratic delays and poor living conditions. Governments that have signed international declarations of children's rights should put those principles into practice at their borders.

By Qaabata Boru

What happens to unaccompanied minors when they reach their destination countries depends on those countries' laws and institutions. Some take care of the children from the start, putting them in suitable temporary shelters and doing everything possible to find appropriate host families or institutions for the long term. Others view the arrivals as problems to be disposed of as quickly as possible.

The surge of unaccompanied minors from Latin America into the US in the past year has cast a spotlight on how not to deal with unaccompanied children requesting asylum. The influx caught US officials by surprise; their facilities were not prepared to handle it. The result was massive bad publicity about refugee children sleeping in temporary holding pens and denied adequate food and care.

The fate of young arrivals sometimes depends as well on their countries of origin. Mexican children arriving in the US are generally sent home quickly – essentially denied asylum procedures. According to Amnesty International, the US Department of Homeland Security returned more than 95% of unaccompanied Mexican children arriving between November 2020 and April 2021.

The swift deportation of unaccompanied Mexican children may be in keeping with US policy towards Mexico. But it also may violate the US's own Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, which aims to prevent human trafficking. If incoming minors from Mexico are sent right back home

without an in-depth review of their circumstances, the deportation could deny them this legal protection.

The risk of immediate deportation does not stop many Mexican minors from trying their luck. The journey typically involves crossing the Rio Grande – with at-

no home can be found, the agency cares for the minors until age 18.

FLEEING WARS

The reception for unaccompanied refugee minors is somewhat different in Eastern Africa. It is somewhat less bureaucratic, but is also less well organised and funded than in the west.

According to Unicef, the UN Children's Emergency Fund, more than half of the approximately million refugees in Africa are children. Large proportions of them come



Unaccompanied child stuck at the Mexican border to the US in Tijuana.

tenant dangers related to swift currents in some sections and toxic pollutants in others.

The lucky ones who make it across are usually stopped by the US Border Patrol, which screens them briefly for asylum claims and signs of human trafficking. Those who are not immediately designated for deportation are transferred to the Office of Refugee Resettlement, whose job is to find them shelters and/or homes while their claims are heard.

The Office of Refugee Resettlement funds some 200 state-licensed facilities across the US. These shelters try to find suitable sponsors – usually relatives who already live in the US or other foster parents. If

from South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic.

Unaccompanied minors often head for refugee camps in destination countries such as Kenya and Ethiopia. In these relatively safe destination countries, the lack of immigration and visa procedures relevant to minors can complicate the minors' situation. In addition the camps tend to be overcrowded and with limited resources to support unaccompanied children.

Children who make it to one of the camps typically fled civil wars and survived harrowing journeys. One such group of child refugees became known as the "Lost boys of Sudan" – so named by health-care workers

in the refugee camps that received them (see box below).

No less dangerous is the journey faced by unaccompanied African child migrants crossing to North Africa, from which they hope to reach Europe via the Mediterranean. Refugee camps in North Africa provide sanctuary for many of them. But getting to these camps is far from easy: Many children faced violence, extortion, exploitation and neglect along the way.

As in the case of refugee camps in the Horn of Africa, the settlements for refugees hoping to leave North Africa for Europe often become semi-permanent residences for would-be asylum seekers. Even while living in officially recognised refugee settlements, refugee minors often lack attention and protection from violence. Nor is it easy for them to exercise their rights to seek asylum.

This situation contravenes specific protections afforded to children under international law. In its 1959 Declaration of the Rights of the Child, the United Nations

said that children have a right to special protection for their physical, mental and social development. It also asserted every child's right to be "protected against all forms of neglect, cruelty and exploitation". The declaration was expanded into the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been accepted by all member countries behalf the USA.

Hundreds of thousands of children worldwide who have fled their homes and sought asylum still do not receive this special care. Rather than growing up in an environment of understanding and love by parents and society – as the Declaration says is their right – unaccompanied refugee minors typically live in poverty, fear and neglect.

An obvious candidate for improvement is the US system for dealing with unaccompanied refugee minors at its border facilities. Beyond that, destination countries should commit to creating better programmes for young, unaccompanied asylum seekers. That includes introducing safe-

guards to ensure good treatment at shelters, as well as providing children with access to legal advice about their asylum claims.

Children arriving alone from devastated regions also typically require counselling to deal with traumas they have suffered in their countries of origin and on their journeys. Governments should create institutions and programmes to ensure that such counselling is available.

Today's children are tomorrow's adults. If children grow up traumatised and neglected, that serves no one's interest in the long term.



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Lost boys and girls

More than 20,000 children fled Sudan's civil wars in the 1980s, migrating first to Ethiopia and then to Kenya. Many of them died along the way.

The Sudanese civil war of the 1980s killed an estimated 2 million people and orphaned some 30,000 children. Some of the orphans who fled the country became known as the "Lost boys of Sudan" – so named by humanitarian workers who cared for them at their destinations. The "Lost boys" – later also known as the "Lost boys and girls" – initially numbered more than 20,000 youngsters belonging to the Nuer and Dinka ethnic groups.

Some of the child refugees were as young as five years old; younger children simply followed older ones out of devastated villages. The children

left after their homes were burnt down and their parents killed.

The refugee minors first sought asylum in Ethiopia. But in 1991 Ethiopia's leader was

overthrown; the resulting instability forced them to migrate to Kenya, where their destination was the Kakuma refugee camp.

This was a dangerous journey; many children died along the way. Between 1991 and 1992, the number of the "Lost boys and girls" was re-

duced to 12,000. Particularly treacherous was crossing the fast-flowing and crocodile-infested Gilo River between Sudan and Ethiopia.

A refugee camp is intended as a temporary solution for displaced people while permanent accommodation is found. But permanent accommodation for refugees is hard to find. Many young refugees remained in Kakuma, marrying and raising families there. The luckier ones among the "Lost boys and girls" received humanitarian aid to resettle abroad with families.

"I was 12 years old when our village was attacked and my parents died," says Simon Deng, one of the "Lost boys" who still lives in Kakuma. "I saw other children die in the Gilo River. I've lived in Kakuma for 29 years now. Considering our dependence on aid, we do not have much chance of moving on from here." QB



Children in the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya.



Children belong in school instead of working: class in Burundi.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

On society's fringes

Burundi has a variety of legal protections for children on its books, but in practice those rights are often violated. Many infringements of children's rights can be traced back to poverty and lack of sophistication about legal protections. Among the biggest problems facing children is human trafficking and forced labour.

By Mireille Kanyange

Nine-year-old Jérémie and his friends hang out all day and much of the night in the streets of Bujumbura, Burundi's largest city. They have lived this way for more than two years and appear likely to continue doing so for the indefinite future.

"When my mother died, my father remarried and my stepmother was not kind to me," Jérémie explains. "She didn't give me food anymore. So I dropped out of school and came to Bujumbura. My friends and I had no transport tickets, so we rode into the city by hanging on to the back of a petroleum tanker truck."

Jérémie's story is sadly familiar. Thousands of Burundian children face poverty, violence and encroachment on their legal rights, including their right to education, accessible health care and freedom from exploitation.

According to the National Association of Defenders of Children's Rights in Burundi (known as FENADEB – Fédération Nationale des Associations engagées dans le Domaine de l'Enfance au Burundi) recorded violations of children's rights grew from 1,140 in 2019 to 1,310 in 2020.

Recorded cases are of course just the tip of the iceberg. Most instances of child neglect and abuse never appear in official statistics. The recorded cases involve a range of rights infringements, including not issuing a child identity papers needed to access health care, lack of adequate food and water and requirements to work under exploitative conditions (see box next page). Other violations of children's rights include under-age marriage, forced displacement due to wars and natural disasters, sexual exploitation and violence.

On paper, none of this should be happening. Under a 2005 law, children between ages seven and 13 have a right to free and compulsory education. Under another law passed that year, children under five and expectant mothers have a right to free health care. In addition, Burundi's parliament has passed laws supporting children's rights to physical security and freedom from forced marriage. And the government has ratified relevant international agreements, including the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

PRACTICAL BARRIERS

Yet practical barriers still block many children from exercising these rights. For example, informal fees, including charges for books and materials, mean that primary education is not entirely free. Moreover, fees apply to secondary education, causing many teenagers to drop out at that stage.

Further, almost half of all Burundian children live more than 30 minutes away from the nearest medical facility, putting health care out of their reach, according to Humanium, a children's rights NGO. Health problems among Burundi's children are widespread: Half of the country's children suffer from stunting due to malnutrition, the NGO says. Malaria, malnutrition

and respiratory diseases affect many children.

A further barrier is absence of official papers. Many children cannot attend school or access health care because they lack a birth certificate – in violation of their right to an identity. About one-fourth of births in Burundi between 2008 and 2014 were not registered, according to UNICEF, the UN Children's Fund.

While the current number of unregistered births is unknown, the lack of a birth certificate is most likely to affect children born to Burundians who had fled the country and children born to couples who are not legally married. If one or both parents themselves lack birth certificates, this lack of official identity is likely to be passed on to their children.

Civil unrest has made matters worse. More than half of the refugees who fled Burundi during wars in 2015 were children. Many were subsequently repatriated. But by 2019, over 78,000 children were still registered as internally displaced across Burundi's 18 provinces, according to Humanium.

The greatest barrier to enforcing children's rights is poverty. UNICEF reported in 2016 that 78% of Burundian children live in monetary and/or non-monetary poverty. The country has large numbers of children who must fend for themselves, as their parents either cannot support them or have died of disease.

Most often such children end up living on the streets. They can be found in droves in Bujumbura, as well as in Gitega, the polit-



ical capital, and in other cities such as Rumonge, Ngozi and Kayanza. Most of them come from poor families in the country's interior.

Typically they subsist by begging or by performing a range of odd jobs. Some of them turn to petty crime. Seven children were prosecuted for robbery, according to the 2019 report of the Independent National Commission on Human Rights in Burundi (known as CNIDH – Commission Nationale Indépendante des Droits de l'Homme du Burundi).

RETURN TO FAMILIES

The throngs of children on Burundi's streets has not escaped official attention. For the past three years the Ministry of Solidarity and Human Rights, together with provincial governors and the police, has run "return to families" programmes in an effort to get these children off the streets. Under these programmes, street children are picked up, sent first to centres where they are told

about the dangers of living on the street and then sent to their villages. So far, the programme has not produced the desired results. For the same reasons that they left in the first place, the children soon leave their villages again and find their way back to the streets of a big city.

The CNIDH commission is taking a different approach. It has set up a hotline to report cases of child abuse. It also is taking a closer look at guardians who purport to look after children, ensuring that they act in the best interests of children in their care. At the same time CNIDH is planning to establish a fund to help vulnerable families to look after their children. And the commission is proposing a law that would punish anyone who sends children to beg on the streets.

Similarly, UNICEF Burundi is focusing on helping children to realise their right to a safe and nurturing environment. In its 2019-2023 country programme, UNICEF suggests increasing the amount of data and other evidence on child protection issues and encouraging development of a new national child protection policy. All these measures can help. Ultimately, though, it is up to the Burundian government to enforce children's rights which are already provided under existing laws.



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Pressed into service

Although human trafficking is outlawed in Burundi, child-protection officials uncover hundreds of violations every year. A 2014 law in Burundi criminalises human trafficking and forced labour.

But loopholes in the penal and labour laws, including regulations that permit informal work by children under 16, leave some children vul-

nerable to traffickers. A 2020 report by the National Association of Defenders of Children's Rights in Burundi (FENADEF – Fédération Nationale des Associations engagées dans le Domaine de l'Enfance au Burundi) lists 222 child trafficking cases, of whom most (178) involved boys.

These children were trafficked to locations in Bu-

rundi and Tanzania to work in various jobs. Some were used as peddlers, for example selling peanuts in bars. Others were sent to do domestic work. The unfortunate ones were sent to live with their bosses, often enduring sexual abuse.

Based on videos appearing on social networks and some detective work, police were able to prosecute some of the perpetrators. According to the 2019 report of the Independent National Commission

on Human Rights in Burundi (CNIDH – Commission Nationale Indépendante des Droits de l'Homme du Burundi) the government arrested seven child traffickers.

Sadly, traffickers are often known to the children's parents, says Sixte Vigny Nimuraba, president of CNIDH and a lecturer at the National University of Burundi. Traffickers take advantage of parents' poverty and lack of knowledge to exploit their children, he says.

MK



Training of Maa Feew's health assistants in Podor, Senegal.

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

“Violence is related to a variety of social conditions”

In many African countries and some regions of Asia and the Middle East, female circumcision is still common. Mariame Racine Sow suffered female genital mutilation (FGM) as a child. Today, she gives advice to victims of this harmful tradition among Frankfurt's migrant community. She emigrated from Senegal to Germany in 1989 and has founded the civil-society organisation Forward for Women. She also helps families cope with the racism Black children are exposed to. In Senegal, Forward for Women supports a school and a health centre.

Mariame Racine Sow interviewed by Sabine Balk

Your organisation Forward For Women gives advice to women and girls concerning FGM. What suffering do affected women and girls tell you about?

The women are not usually interested in airing complaints or soliciting sympathy for what has happened to them. Instead, they have very practical concerns. Girls want to know what to expect, whether they will be able to experience sexuality normally, whether they will be able to have children normally and whether something can be done about the mutilation. Recently, it has become possible to reconstruct the female genitalia with a surgery.

How do you help affected women?

It depends. I have no standard response; every case is different. If the person concerned suffers pain or has another medical problem, I'll send her to see a doctor with some knowledge of the issue. Every woman has her own way of coping with FGM. As a Black woman who has suffered FGM, I am easier to approach than a blonde, white

woman would be. I try to find out what kind of advice the FGM victim needs. I have no ready-made solutions, but help the person concerned to find her personal solution. My work is actually very much about empowering female migrants.

Did the girls suffer FGM in the countries they came from or does it happen in Germany?

Most girls are refugees or migrants who were hurt in their home countries. We do not know whether FGM occurs in Germany, though we suspect it does. So far, we have no proof however. Before the pandemic, I was approached by employees from a day-care centre for children under three in Frankfurt. They believed one of the infants was an FGM victim, which is very difficult to determine for lay persons.

How did you cooperate with them?

Well, it was certainly good that they turned to me instead of directly addressing the parents and potentially accusing them of something they did not do. The staff of day-care centres here tends to have little cultural sensitivity. To improve matters, we cooperate closely with German institutions. In this particular case, I discussed things with team members from the day-care centre.

The plan was to get together with the parents and assess matters in a conversation with them. That did not happen because of the pandemic, and we lost touch. If parents cooperate, the right thing to do is to have a doctor examine the child. If parents do not cooperate, we turn to the local youth welfare office because a child's rights have been violated.

You have suffered FGM yourself as a child. For us in Germany, that seems a horribly violent act. Are you angry at your parents for having done this to you?

Well, I have never asked myself questions like that. I can't say that I feel anger or resentment towards my parents. In some regions, FGM is a pervasive tradition. Social consensus endorses it. Everyone does FGM. I was about five years old when they circumcised me. I no longer have any clear memories. It surely hurt a great deal. But the meaning of pain is different in every culture. Circumcision marks a stage of life, like marriage and childbirth. Every girl undergoes it; that is simply the way things are. Our goal now is to show people who think that FGM is part of their culture that a different life is possible.

And how do you do that?

We see ourselves primarily as a consultancy service. First of all, it matters very much that I accept every person who approaches us for who she is. I first ask what her motives are. What does she want to change? How does she want to live? What are her goals? And I don't judge anyone. FGM and other forms of violence can't be viewed in isolation. We must consider them in context. They are linked to many social circumstances and situations. Probably some of these practices used to be rituals that somehow ensured survival. I want to reveal that kind of context and examine it. We also reach out to men because society as a whole will not back away from this harmful practice unless we have them on board. It is important to do this work among the diaspora community, because this community has an impact on what people do and think in Senegal, for example.

Has Covid-19 changed your work?

Well, before the Covid-19 pandemic, we held group meetings and did in-person consultations, but nowadays everything is done by

phone. Moreover, it is noticeable that many women and even families are coming to us because their children are experiencing racist violence or discrimination at school. These problems are probably becoming more evident now. Many children's school performance has suffered due to learning at home during the pandemic. In Germany, Black children are generally considered to be the least capable. Certainly, the Black Lives Matter movement has played a role too. Children are increasingly feeling that their teachers discriminate against them. When children feel discrimination, teachers and schools are often helpless or even defensive. Typically, German teachers are not capable of dealing with everyday racism, and neither are schools. Children are mostly left to themselves. Many parents feel frustrated and helpless too.

What needs to happen in your opinion?

There is structural racism in German society, but Germans are not really aware of it. Teachers and schools are overwhelmed, left entirely to their own devices. They don't know what to do. So far, there are no specific workshops or targeted trainings that might help teachers act more competently. The best thing would be to offer anti-discrimination courses and training sessions at the school itself.

What advice do you give parents?

Above all, I tell them to talk to teachers, get in touch with school leaderships and share experiences with other parents. One option is to mention the problems at a parents' night. We try to empower parents and children, enabling them to address the problem. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. I am familiar with the issue because, unfortunately, my own children experienced a lot of discrimination in school. When problems arose, because of a simple misunderstanding, for example, my children were always found to be at fault. They were considered to be disruptive and perceived to have violated social norms. On the other hand, my experience is that teachers would open up and act in a more positive way once they got to know me personally.

On another topic: You are also active in Senegal. What projects are you running there?

Our projects in Senegal primarily benefit women and girls. Our health and educa-

tion project, Maa Feew, is especially close to my heart. This project is supported in part by the Centre for International Migration and Development (CIM), which is operated by GIZ, the German Agency for International Cooperation. "Maa Feew" means "everything will be all right" in Fulani, a language spoken in Senegal. We are conducting the project in Podor, a city in the country's north, where I was born. It provides support for a birthing centre and the construction of school bathrooms and a library. The birthing centre is especially important. Since FGM and early and forced marriage are practised in Podor, complications during childbirth are common. With support from the Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund Hessen, a German humanitarian organisation, we were able to obtain an ambulance for the birthing centre. It transports around 70 women a month 400 kilometres from the hospital in Podor to the capital, Dakar, where they can receive better care in case of difficult deliveries or illness. My grandfather used to be the principal of the school we are supporting. So far, the construction and renovation of the bathrooms has not been completed, nor has the construction of the library. We need more donations, which unfortunately is also true of other projects.

Which projects?

We would love to establish a girls' home in Podor, where girls who have been circumcised, undergone forced marriage or subjected to other forms of violence can find a safe haven, health care and support. Another important goal of ours would be to obtain two vehicles so that we can provide health counselling and care in and around Podor. It is conducted by women – traditional health assistants – who have been trained for this purpose. That kind of outpatient counselling is the only care that many women and girls can access. We very much hope that we will soon receive the donations we need to carry out these projects.



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Child labour is a common problem in Benin.

STREET CHILDREN

Facing an uncertain future

In the streets of Cotonou, Benin's economic centre, young children carrying heavy loads on their heads are a common sight. Here and in other towns across the country, children work as peddlers, selling a variety of wares to pedestrians. They roam the streets from dawn to dusk, some touting fresh fruits and vegetables and others selling manufactured goods. Due to poverty of their families, they face systematic exploitation as low-paid labourers.

By Karim Okanla

The children work regardless of weather conditions, under a scorching sun and during torrential rains. Their employers are market stall owners, who use the children to expand their selling range into the streets. Some of the children, often unkempt and clad in rags, are so desperate to sell their wares that they approach car drivers as soon as they slow down to search for a parking space.

Child labour in Benin takes many other forms as well. Some children work as household servants, cleaning, washing dishes and laundry and accompanying homeowners' young children to kindergarten.

Others work in the construction industry or in carpentry or mechanical repair shops. They carry out tasks meant for adults, using tools and materials that are often too heavy and too dangerous for children to handle.

Employing children for low wages and in tasks inappropriate for their age is nothing new in Benin. It is an outgrowth of poverty. The children usually hail from remote bush villages such as Agbanta in the Ouémé region or Za-Kpota in the Zou region, which tend to have high birthrates and low family incomes.

Parents who cannot care for their children essentially rent them out to wealthier people in cities for as little as 40,000 CFA Francs (about €62) per year. The employers



usually promise to pay the parents a fixed monthly sum, but they seldom keep their word. The urban employers usually also promise to feed and clothe these children and provide a formal education. But often these are empty promises. And very few parents are able to follow up to see what happens to their children after this transaction is completed. Indeed, as time passes, some irresponsible parents even forget that they had rented out or sold their children.

Some of the children who have been rescued by police told their stories recently on national television, in a programme produced several years ago and rebroadcast. The purpose was to keep raising awareness of children's predicament. Viewers could see and hear abused and exploited children complain of severe pains in their necks due to carrying heavy loads on their heads. Some also told of pains in the knees and feet.

The unlucky ones were beaten by their custodians when they were unable to sell enough wares. The television footage showed festering sores and lacerations on their backs and bottoms. Psychic damage was also in evidence, as some of the young victims of abuse and exploitation had obvious difficulties speaking.

A growing number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and opinion leaders are now lobbying for tougher laws and more active law enforcement to end all forms of child labour. Under Benin's penal code, child exploitation is punishable by up to five years' imprisonment and abuse is punishable by longer sentences.

When officials focus on the issue they get results, at least for a short while. For example, in a spurt of enforcement in 2017-2018, Benin's child protection agency freed hundreds of exploited children. Today the agency faces the further challenge of stopping the trafficking of children from Benin to plantations in Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria or Gabon.

To have a long-lasting impact, enforcement should be regular rather than sporadic. Without a concerted effort to stop this abuse and exploitation, Benin's children face an uncertain future.



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CHILD LABOUR

Exploited and denied a school education

Child labour is still common in Bangladesh, with some minors working in unsafe industries. The cost is high in terms of poor health and missed education. Fully prohibiting child labour is not an option in view of wide-spread poverty, but attempts to regulate it have not been successful either.

By Ridwanul Hoque

In July 2021, a devastating fire in a factory on the outskirts of Dhaka killed 52 people. Children and teenagers were among the victims. Employees had been locked up in the food-processing facility, forced to work long hours. A similar incident made international headlines in 2013 when Rana Plaza, an industrial building, collapsed. Back then, minors were among the victims too.

Authorities have been considering options to protect children better for a long time. Since 2013, the legal age in Bangladesh has been 18, but children are allowed to work when they turn 14. Adolescents be-

tween the ages 14 and 17 can be employed as long as their work is not one of the 38 activities the government has classified as dangerous. Before a policy change in 2018, children as young as 12 were allowed to do "light work". Now, youngsters under 14 are prohibited from working. Exploitation of minors by their employers has been made a criminal offence.

To a large extent, however, these restrictions exist only on paper. Child labour is still common. Minors typically work in the fishing industry, agriculture, garment and leather-goods production, brick-kilns, stone-quarries or in households. Household work is not regulated, and many domestic helpers – mostly girls – are severely exploited. Some live in slave-like conditions.

There is a reason why Bangladesh has not fully prohibited child labour. Both trade unions and employers have argued that western ideas of eliminating it do not suit the social reality of Bangladesh where poverty is widespread and education levels

are often poor. The point is that if adolescents are not legally allowed to earn money and support their families, many more of them would be toiling in the informal sector. Moreover, child trafficking is happening – and worse poverty would make it increase.

When Bangladesh's labour law was reformed in 2006, the guiding idea was not to eliminate child labour as such, but to ensure kids went to school. Only hazardous work was prohibited. The government wanted employers to ensure that working children were also sent to school. However, the authorities did not establish an effective scheme for reducing children's work burden in ways that would make that possible. The sad truth, however, is that hardly any working child gets a school education even though primary school is free and compulsory in Bangladesh. There are some, but far too few stipends for girls.

Indeed, millions of children risk their health and life in all sorts of employment. According to the 2013 National Child Labour Survey, 3.45 million children aged 5 to 17 were engaged in child labour. The number is likely larger now. Many children are employed in exploitative, though not officially hazardous industries such as the dry fish industry. The Supreme Court has directed the government to end child labour in related businesses. According to a 2020 report, around 20% of the workforce in the dry-fish industry were minors.

Bangladesh's economy has been growing fast in recent years. However, development is not inclusive and remains quite uneven. The current development agenda of the government generally ignores the needs, and in particular the education, of children. Minors in the workforce are being overlooked.

The government would do well to enforce the existing law. It should eliminate hazardous child labour and ensure that young children really only do light work. Most important, it should offer financial support to families so that poverty-stricken children must not go to work at all but can go to school instead.



A boy working in brick production in Bangladesh.



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GIRLS

Among the worst countries

In principle, Pakistan endorses the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as the UN Convention on the rights of the child. For practical purposes, however, traditional norms are often more important than formal legislation. The implication is that rights are not protected properly – and girls suffer in particular.

By Mahwish Gul

The global childhood report that Save the Children, the international non-governmental organisation, published this year tells a sad story. Pakistan ranks 147th of 186 countries in its End of Childhood Index, which

Girls suffer more, however, as UNICEF's latest State of the World's Children report illustrates. It acknowledges that 18% of boys in Pakistan do not go to primary school, but the comparative figure for girls is 29%. While 64% of boys complete primary school, only 55% of girls do so. To some extent, the families are to blame. According to government data, one quarter of female primary-school dropouts stopped attending classes because that was what their parents wanted.

The gaps widen for teenagers, according to UNICEF. Only seven percent of adolescent boys in Pakistan are not in education, employment or training. By contrast,

whereas boys from affluent urban families on average get at least 10 years. Moreover, fewer girls than boys receive treatment for ailments such as diarrhoea or acute respiratory infections. Similarly, boys are more likely than girls to be fully vaccinated.

In view of such data, it is no surprise that Pakistan is among the worst countries in terms of gender justice. In the 2021 World Economic Forum's recent Global Gender Gap Report for instance, Pakistan ranks 153rd out of 156 countries. The private-sector lobby group compiled its index relying on national data for four key dimensions:

- economic participation and opportunity,
- educational attainment,
- health and life expectancy, and
- political empowerment.

Pakistan performs poorly in all four categories – and gender injustice sets in at an early age. In 2016, Pakistan last submitted a periodic report to the UN Committee on the Rights of Child. The Committee concluded that Pakistan must do more to alleviate gender disparities and ensure equal rights for all children. It bemoaned

- serious discrimination against girls,
- persistent gender disparity in infant-mortality and school-enrolment rates,
- the persistence of early marriages,
- exchange of girls for debt settlement,
- domestic violence targeting girls and
- a growing number of infanticides targeting girls.

The Committee expressed also concern because of “the low level of awareness of sexual and reproductive rights among young persons and the reported lack of access to sexual and reproductive health-care services for girls” (in regard to how important sex education is, please note my contribution in the focus section of D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2020/04).

HARMFUL TRADITIONS

Pakistani society does not value women the way it does men. Accordingly, parents tend to have a strong preference for sons. Due to traditions and customs, they often see daughters as an economic burden, whereas they hope their sons will take care of them in old age. They will have to invest in a dowery to get their daughters married – and later in life, these girls will look after their in-laws.



In Pakistan, girls are less likely to finish primary education than boys: school in Hyderabad.

takes account of “childhood enders” such as death, chronic malnutrition, not going to school, working, early marriage and motherhood. The report does not explore gender disparities in depth, but shows that masses of young Pakistanis are denied a real childhood.

43% of adolescent girls lack any such opportunity.

In 2017, the UN agency published a situational analysis of children in Pakistan (UNICEF 2017). It shows that poor rural girls typically get less than a full year of school-

Survey results thus tell us that, among mothers of three children, 60% of those who have three sons do not want a fourth child. The comparative figure for mothers of three daughters is a mere 21%. Though abortion is illegal in Pakistan, it is estimated that about 2.25 million pregnancies end that way every year – and sex selection is an important motive. In 2019, moreover, the non-governmental Edhi Foundation found nearly 400 bodies of newborn babies dumped in open space and roadsides in Karachi. The main reason was female infanticide.

The plain truth is that poor families struggle to take proper care of their children – and daughters suffer in particular. Economic hardship contributes to the high incidence of child marriage. Indeed, more than one fifth (21%) of Pakistani girls are married before they turn 18, and one in ten gives birth before that age. In rural areas, teenage marriage is considered normal.

Male dominance is deeply entrenched in Pakistanis' mindset. According to government data, more than half of adolescent girls (52.7%) believe that husbands are al-

lowed to beat their wives. The same survey revealed that teenage wives were especially vulnerable to abuse, with one-third (33%) experiencing physical or sexual violence. In its 2019 World Report, Human Rights Watch similarly emphasised the horrors of gender-based violence in Pakistan, including rape, so-called "honour" killings, acid attacks, domestic violence and forced marriage.

Pakistan is still a poor country, and state capacities are not strong. In people's lives, traditional norms typically matter more than formal legislation. Human rights are generally not protected well. Girls are especially at risk. Government agencies and civil-society organisations must do more to ensure they get access to education and health services. Girls need to be protected from violence, neglect and exploitation. Girls' opportunities must improve so they grow up to be fully empowered citizens. Gender discrimination is unacceptable. There has been some progress in recent years. Gender disparities were even greater in the past. However, the rate of

progress is much too slow. Millions of young girls continue to be deprived of fundamental human rights.

The mindset must change. For society to prosper, women must be empowered to take their fate into their own hands and male dominance must be overcome. Our nation cannot afford to leave the human capacities of half of the population undeveloped. If it does, we will not only remain one of the worst countries in terms of gender disparities, but in terms of economic opportunities too.

LINK

UNICEF, 2017: Situation analysis of children in Pakistan.

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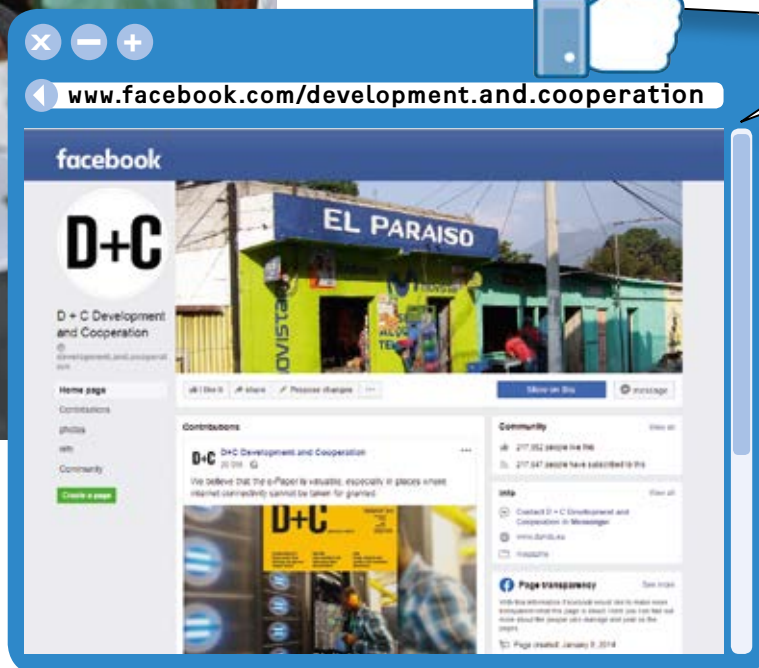


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Young people want to have an impact on politics: Fridays for Future rally in São Paulo.

DEMOCRACY

Let young people participate in politics

A number of low- and middle-income countries are making efforts to get children and young people more involved in politics. In Latin America, for instance, there is a trend to allow youngsters to vote at 16. There and elsewhere, research shows that it pays to involve young people in politics and decision making at an early age.

By Markus Kaltenborn, Heike Kuhn and Anna Pichl

The fact that young people engage in political activity is nothing new. Participation is

important to youths – as Fridays for Future protests have made evident in recent years. This global movement proves that adults are by no means the only ones who are able to address pertinent with competence and commitment. Youngsters want to be heard. They want to exert political influence.

Under international law, campaigns like Fridays for Future are protected by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which guarantees youngsters' freedom of expression and assembly. But the CRC goes even further. Its Article 12 states that the views of a child should be given

“due” weight in all matters affecting that child. Moreover, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child calls on governments to promote young people's participation in politics in order to foster active citizenship (CRC 2016).

If governments want young people to participate in politics, one obvious option is to lower the voting age. At present, however, few countries allow under-18s to vote in general elections. Latin America and the Caribbean are the world region with the most countries that embrace youth suffrage. How did that come about? And what can the rest of the world learn from their experience?

YOUTH SUFFRAGE IN LATIN AMERICA

The countries where political participation rights are conferred at 16 include Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Cuba – although voting rights are of only limited relevance in Cuba due to lack of democracy and judicial independence. Nicaragua,

Brazil and Cuba gave 16-year-olds the vote before 1989. That was the year in which the UN adopted the CRC. Argentina followed suit in 2012. In Bolivia, Chile, Venezuela and Uruguay, youth suffrage is being debated but has not yet been introduced (Sanhueza Petrarca 2020).

One reason for the exceptional developments in Latin America is, without doubt, that a number of right-wing populist dictatorships ended in the region in the past century. By lowering the voting age, the new governments expected not only to boost political participation by young people. They also hoped to gain votes. In Ecuador and Argentina, the introduction of voting rights was clearly inspired by the adoption of the CRC however.

Ecuador, which was the region's first country to sign the CRC in March 1990, made the right to vote at 16 a constitutional principle in 2008. Local press surveys show that around 60% of 16- to 17-year-old voters have since made use of this right.

In Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador and Nicaragua, young people consider the following issues politically important: the economy, unemployment, the political situation, corruption, crime and poverty. Like older people, youngsters obtain information from conventional media such as newspapers, radio and television. However, they also make extensive use of the internet and social media.

Any attempt to evaluate the opportunities and impacts of youth suffrage in Latin American countries needs to take account of demographic context. In countries where young people make up the majority of the people, setting the voting age at 16 gives greater electoral weight to the young generation. This is exactly what happened in Latin American countries: lowering the voting age generated considerable numbers of new voters.

At the same time, enlarging the electorate in this way means more participation and more attention for political education. Young people can contribute their views and interests; they can practise political exchange. And they find that their voices become relevant.

Another important finding for a number of Latin American countries was that the right to vote at 16 did not necessarily inspire greater trust in the government. What it did boost, however, was trust in national parliaments and political parties. Allowing young

voters to exercise this civic right ultimately reduces feelings of alienation and dissatisfaction. Extending voting rights thus presents an opportunity for promoting greater social cohesion and boosting the legitimacy of state action.

CHILDREN'S AND YOUTH PARLIAMENTS WORLDWIDE

Middle- and low-income countries that allow minors to vote in national parliamentary elections are still exceptions, not the norm. However, observers point to a whole range of other initiatives designed to enable young people to participate in political life.

For example, children's and youth parliaments have been set up at national or sub-national levels in a number of countries, including India, Pakistan, Nigeria, Rwanda, Zambia, Malawi, Burundi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Lesotho and South Africa. Such projects not only give young people an insight into parliamentary practice; they also bring them into contact with leading politicians.

In many instances, however, it is not obvious that the countries that have introduced institutions of this kind actually expanded opportunities for political participation. According to the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), children's parliaments are often just one-off, symbolic events. They tend to have rather little influence on policies or legislation (IPU/UNICEF 2011).

For a youth parliament to deliver real improvements in terms of young people's political participation, the following conditions need to be met:

- There must be regular and intensive exchange between legislators and children or young people.
- Legislative procedures must explicitly take into account the results of such consultations.

The bottom line is that it makes sense to involve young people in politics at an early age. Giving them the chance to practise democratic processes is good for the youngsters themselves and for society in general. Young people are "agents of change". They will shape the transition that humanity needs for successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. They will do so not only as climate campaigners, like Fridays for Future, but also

as advocates for social protection, inequality and poverty reduction, good governance and education.

Moreover, young people's views and their interest in sustainable development can open up new perspectives. There is scope for new approaches, and the young generation can contribute to taking them. The world should allow them to do so, especially since nearly every member nation of the international community has recognised CRD and the right of participation it confers on young persons.

LINKS

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LAWSUITS

Entitled to climate protection

Since Greta Thunberg initiated the climate movement “Fridays for Future” at the latest, it has become clear to everyone that climate protection is particularly important to children and young people. As adults, after all, they will have to cope with the worst consequences of global heating. Young activists and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) insist that climate protection is a guaranteed children's right.

By Martina Dase

In September 2020, six Portuguese children and young adults between the ages of 8 and 21 decided to submit a spectacular complaint to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. They accused 27 EU nations and six other countries of seriously flawed climate policies. This media-savvy initiative attracted much international attention.

Portugal has been experiencing extreme heatwaves and devastating wildfires in various regions in recent years. The young plaintiffs accused governments of not having taken appropriate measures to fight global warming despite having pledged to do so in the Paris Climate Agreement of 2015. Cláudia Duarte Agostinho, her two siblings and three other co-plaintiffs saw a threat not only to ancient pine forests, but also to their right to life and the respect for private and family life that are guaranteed by Articles 2 and 8 of the European Human Rights Convention.

NOT A MERELY SYMBOLIC ACT

Many may regard this submission primarily as a symbolic act on the big media stage. A couple of young people, some still underage, taking on 33 governments – it seemed like a hopeless undertaking. But such actions do have a media impact and they increasingly influence attitudes in society and politics.

Moreover, the initiative, which is supported by a group of not-for-profit lawyers, has actually yielded some initial results. In mid-November, the Court in Strasbourg

requested the defendant governments to respond, which is the typical procedure for every complaint filed. Moreover, the Court rejected a petition from the governments' legal representatives to deny the proceedings the status of a priority case, so the accused could not buy themselves additional time. Instead, they were given until May to officially respond to the accusations. These steps show that the complaint is being taken very seriously in Strasbourg.

Cláudia and her friends are not only receiving support from their experienced legal team. Civil-society organisations like the Climate Action Network Europe and Save the Children, the international NGO I work for, have joined the proceedings as so-called “third parties”. In this capacity, we provided expertise on the topic, illuminating the background of the complaint. For us, this was a welcome opportunity. It is easy to establish the causal links between the global climate crisis and the forest fires in the

Leiria region, which claimed 110 lives and caused hundreds of injuries, in the summer and fall of 2017. Furthermore, we spelled out what drastic impacts the global heating is having on children's rights.

During missions around the world, Save the Children employees frequently face the impacts of climate change. Droughts, extreme rainfall and heatwaves are occurring ever more often in some of the world's most disparate regions. The immediate consequences include crop failure, worsening poverty, hunger, homelessness and spontaneous migration. These phenomena, in turn, lead to shortages of food and safe drinking water. They also compound difficulties in accessing health care and education, with children suffering worst. Most affected are the 45 countries that are most vulnerable to climate disasters. They are home to some 710 million children.

The climate crisis is thus a children's rights crisis. It encroaches upon many of the basic rights that are protected in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, from the right to life and development (Art. 6) to the right to the “highest attainable standard of health” (Art. 24), to education (Art. 29.1), well-being (Art. 27) and appropriate living conditions (Art. 27). For that reason alone,



This baby girl from Zimbabwe is undernourished because her parents lack food.

law courts and public policy must prioritise the interests of children and adolescents. Save the Children calls on governments to actively involve the young generation in decision making and to take their proposals seriously.

When the most powerful governments in the world confer in Glasgow in November at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26), the young generation must cer-

tainly be heard. In our view, they are less compromising because their vision is clearer in this crisis. Their perspective cannot be shorter than their life expectancy. Their young age is therefore not a handicap, but actually reinforces their arguments.

Germany's Federal Constitutional Court, by the way, has taken a similar long-term approach. In a judgment in spring, it ordered the Federal Government to pass

more stringent climate legislation in order to ensure that the freedom of future generations will not become "comprehensively restricted" by climate change.



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Lawsuits brought by young activists worldwide

More and more often, children and young people are taking legal action to claim their right to a clean climate and a world worth living in. In 2015, in Oregon, 21 minors and young adults took the US government to a District Court with help from two non-governmental organisations (Our Children's Trust and Earth Guardians). They asserted that the government's unchecked exploitation of fossil fuels is exacerbating the climate crisis and therefore endangering their future. They appealed to a legal principle that applies in many states, namely the "public trust doctrine". It says that the government must protect all natural resources like water, air and soil for future generations.

For many years, representatives of the US Department of Justice argued that the courts have no jurisdiction. Accordingly, it wanted the case, which has become famous as "Juliana v. United States", to be dismissed. Julia Olson, the lead attorney for the plaintiffs, countered that it is very much the court's place to demand that the government take measures to remove the pollutants that are contributing

to global warming. "These children will live much longer than you," she appealed to the court, namely "until the end of the century, when the oceans will have risen ten feet". Ultimately the presiding judge declined to open proceedings and instead directed both parties to come to an agreement to the best of their abilities in a settlement conference.

In Colombia, 25 young people brought a sensational action against their government three years ago: because policymakers have done far too little, in their view, to stop the deforestation of the Amazon rainforest, they see a threat to their right to a healthy environment as guaranteed by the con-

stitution. In April, Colombia's Supreme Court ordered that the government must present an action plan to reduce deforestation within four months. What's more, the presidency as well as the Ministries of Environment and Agriculture were instructed to develop an "Intergenerational Pact for the Life of the Colombian Amazon" with help from the plaintiffs, affected communities and scientists.

"It is clear that the Colombian state has not efficiently addressed the problem of deforestation in the Amazon, despite numerous international agreements and jurisprudence", the judges explained in their decision. The attorney for the plaintiffs celebrated the judges' "historic verdict" because it recognizes that future generations have indisputable rights and also forces the government to develop an action plan.

In 2019, along with 15 other young people, "Fridays for Future" founder Greta Thunberg submitted a complaint to the International Court of Justice against five countries with high greenhouse-gas emissions. The charge is that Argentina, Brazil, France, Germany and Turkey are violating the plaintiffs' human rights as guaranteed by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The governments refused to have the matter argued before nation-state courts arguing that the climate crisis requires "international relief".

Regardless of the verdicts, a basic pattern is evident in all of these cases. Young people refuse to simply accept the sluggish pace of their nation's climate action. With support of attorneys and non-governmental organisations, they are going to court, becoming "children of the prosecution". It is exactly what activist Xiuhtezcatl Martinez, co-founder of Earth Guardians, predicted in an impressive speech that he delivered to the UN General Assembly when he was 15: "We are flooding the streets and we are now flooding the courts to show the world that a movement is rising and that our generation is leading that movement." The courts, for their part, are assuming increasingly more responsibility for protecting the climate. MD



Greta Thunberg before the US Congress in Washington.



A former child soldier is being taught to work as a cobbler in a Rebound Centre in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

WAR CRIMES

Children at arms

Child soldiers are deprived of all their basic rights. Even when conflicts are over, they typically cannot hope for justice in their home country. Projects like World Vision's "Rebound Centres" in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) at least help them return to normal life.

By Dirk Bathe

20 November 1989 was a momentous day in the history of the United Nations. It was the day on which the General Assembly adopted the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, an international treaty comprised of 54 articles designed to guarantee every child in the world a life in peace, freedom and security. Since then, the convention has been ratified by all UN member states with the exception of the USA. It forms the basis for what UNICEF has summarised as the "ten fundamental rights of the child".

As far as children who are forced to engage in armed combat are concerned, however, every single one of those fundamental rights is breached. The Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional proto-

cols stipulate that children must be protected in armed conflicts. They also prohibit the use of minors as combatants. In practice, however, many children have no option but to take up arms – either because they are forcibly recruited or because there is no other way to survive. Their fundamental rights to protection, support and participation in social life are thus formally guaranteed by law, but are not respected in reality.

It would be naive to expect a militia commander in DRC, South Sudan, Colombia or Myanmar, for example, to give even a moment's thought to children's rights and UN conventions. That task falls to others: lawyers, police officers, politicians, who enforce children's rights by prosecuting those who violate them. Sadly, successful prosecutions are rare at national level: in conflict-torn countries, formal institutions are generally too weak or too corrupt.

At the international level, there have recently been at least a few spectacular trials. In May 2021, the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague sentenced Ugandan rebel leader Dominic Ongwen to 25 years in prison for murder, sexual violence and the use of child soldiers.

A month and a half later, Liberian warlord Alieu Kosiah received a 20-year sentence from Switzerland's Federal Criminal Court. He was charged with committing numerous war crimes during the Liberian civil war from 1989 to 1996, including the use of child soldiers. The Kosiah case highlighted the problem of weak national institutions. While it was possible in Switzerland to take him to court and secure a verdict, no criminal proceedings were launched against Kosiah in Liberia itself.

Court rulings against militia leaders like Kosiah and Ongwen are important and send signals, but trials at international level are too few and far between. Much more must happen. Raising awareness of children's rights is necessary at the grassroots level and must not only reach out to officialdom. Educational campaigns in villages and communities will help, and so will cooperation with religious leaders and local authorities. Schools need appropriate curricula and teaching resources. Children's parliaments are also an option, giving children themselves a chance to participate in political decisions (also note contribution by M. Kaltenborn et al. on p. 30 of this e-Paper).

However, preventive measures like these do not have an immediate impact on the lives of people suffering today. Therefore, World Vision, our international non-governmental organisation, is doing its best to improve near-term prospects for at least some of those affected. Our so-called Rebound Centres in the DRC and South Sudan support hundreds of girls and boys who have been abused as child soldiers or forced prostitutes return to regular civilian life. They receive psychosocial care, attend school and can get vocational training. The Rebound Centres restore the minors' fundamental rights – for example to education, health care and protection from violence.

As reactive measures, Rebound Centres are only a small part of the solution. Ultimately, it is crucially important to strengthen democratic institutions, reduce poverty long term and eliminate the causes of conflict in fragile states.



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CHILD LABOUR

Childhood in a quarry

In the Global South, children still work in life-threatening conditions. Among other things, they make tombstones for Western cemeteries.

By Dagmar Wolf

Worldwide, more than 150 million children between the ages of five and 17 are forced to work, many in hazardous places such as quarries. Political scientist Walter Eberlei has edited a revealing book on such abuse, which the UN classifies as one of the worst forms of child labour.

The contributors highlight the fact that rich countries benefit from children working illegally for a pittance in quarries. In 2016, Germany alone imported nearly 20,000 tonnes of natural stone from China, India and Vietnam destined for use as paving stones, gravestones, kitchen worktops and garden design elements. Roughly a third of all German tombstones are estimated to come from India, where children make up around eight to ten percent of the workforce in the quarrying and mining sec-

tor. About a million children are believed to be involved.

Some kids start working as early as the age of five. They assist blasting crews, haul heavy loads or cut and polish rock. They use dangerous equipment and chemicals. They risk abrasions, broken bones and deformities as well as accidents that result in death or disability. Moreover, many suffer pulmonary diseases such as asthma or silicosis.

Most of the child labourers either skip school or have dropped out of education entirely. They have virtually no chance of escaping lifelong poverty. Their earnings may be meagre, but their families depend on their income to make ends meet. Their parents are underpaid and lack any social protection. Many cannot repay loans, and since children often inherit parents' debts, entire families are stuck in debt bondage for generations.

According to the book, India's deeply entrenched caste system is relevant too. The stone-cutter caste Vaddera is very low in the social hierarchy, and its members basically see no point in educating their children.

They do not consider upward mobility to be possible.

The book also casts a spotlight on China, the world's largest producer of natural stone and leading exporter of semi-finished and finished products to the US and Europe. Despite the limited data available, the report concludes that the low prices of Chinese stone suggest precarious working conditions and child labour. While child labour is something of a taboo subject in China, hard labour – in quarries and elsewhere – is regarded as acceptable punishment for young offenders. Moreover, schools sometimes improve their own finances by arranging for students to perform hard manual labour.

The book's message is sobering. While Brazil has made progress in the fight against the worst forms of child labour, countries such as India, China and Vietnam have failed to tap their potential in full. This is so in spite of their legislation that was designed to protect children. The book spells out the following reasons for the wide gap between legal aspirations and grassroots reality:

- lack of political will,
- widespread corruption,
- poor law enforcement and
- government agencies limiting the scope of investigative journalism.

Prohibiting and eliminating the worst forms of child labour is one of the most important goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Sustainable Development Goals – SDGs). A great deal still needs to be done to achieve it. First of all, the countries where child labour has been identified must shore up their act. They must consistently enforce the law, ensure fair wages for adult workers and establish effective social-protection systems. At the same time, stone importers like Germany should do their part, by following strict guidelines in public procurement, for example, or operating a transparent certification system.

BOOK

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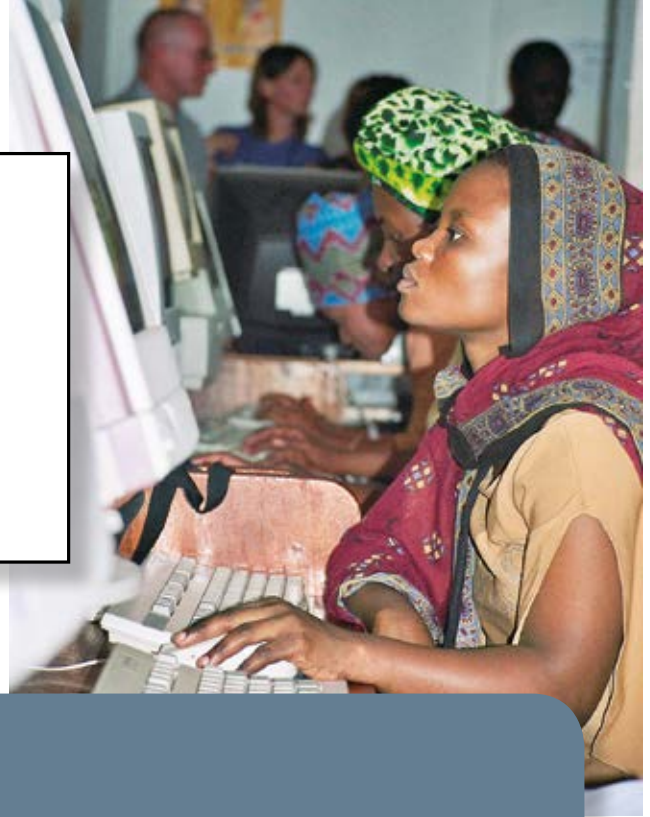
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Child labour for the European market: A girl in Rajasthan, India.

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