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FOCUS


Garments production

From 2000 to 2015, the number of clothing items sold around the world doubled from an annual 50 billion to more than 100 billion. This trend is unsustainable. To a very large extent, workers in garment factories are exploited. They are paid very low wages. Labour rights often do not exist or are not enforced. Moreover, the textiles industry uses thousands of toxic chemicals, and the risks are hardly controlled. On the other hand, industrialisation typically starts in this sector, which is why sub-Saharan countries are interested in copying the example of Bangladesh, which has become a global leader in governance production.

Title: Factory floor in Dhaka, Bangladesh
Photo: Sabine Balk





 **Ethiopian seamstress: Our focus section on garments production starts on page 20. It pertains to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) number 8 and 12. SDG 8 is decent work and economic growth. SDG 12 is sustainable consumption and production.**

Cooperation and Development launched its Green Button initiative to mark sustainably manufactured items. In the eyes of critics, however, its criteria are not stringent enough. For example, grievances in spinning mills or cotton fields are not taken into account.

Many people see the women who work in garments production merely as exploited victims. Things are more complex however. Masses of young women want to earn money in the hope of becoming more independent, but also in order to support their families. Those who work in Bangladesh's garment factories do not belong to their countries most marginalised poor, but rather to the lower middle classes. It also matters that, wherever industrialisation began, it generally did so in this sector – and that is one reason why several African governments aspire to copy Bangladesh's model.

The issues are complex in social, ethical and environmental terms. This industry deserves a lot of attention. It must become sustainable – both in regard to labour relations as well as the ecology.

End fashion's throw-away culture

Textiles and apparel industry attracts very much attention. Everybody needs clothing after all, and fashion is linked to strong emotions.

When the multi-storey production facility Rana Plaza collapsed in Bangladesh in 2013, more than 1100 people died – and masses of people in countries with high incomes became aware of the plight of workers who slave away in very harsh circumstances in developing countries.

Civil-society organisations are campaigning for labour rights as well as environmental sustainability in garments production. Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) is involved in related campaigning too. Action is indeed needed urgently. The ecological concerns include excessive resource use, increasing volumes of clothing waste and the massive application of chemicals – including on cotton fields and the production of synthetic fibers. The high plastic content makes textile waste very difficult to manage.

Consumer attitudes have become destructively fast-paced. The fashion industry's low-price segment is now launching

12 to 16 collections per year. A new T-shirt may sometimes cost less than a loaf of bread. This kind of merchandise is really not appreciated much. What we call “fast fashion”, is actually throw-away fashion. The phenomenon is particularly evident in high-income countries, but cheap imports from China are flooding sub-Saharan markets too.

In the past, the garments people bought were more expensive, but also lasted longer. From 2000 to 2015, the number of clothing items sold around the world doubled from an annual 50 billion or so to more than 100 billion. Experts expect the volume to double again by 2030. This is sheer madness.

Unfortunately, it is very difficult for consumers to tell goods that were produced in an ethically correct and environmentally safe manner from those that were not. Even the price is not an indicator of what happened in the supply chain. Only certification of standards set by various non-industry organisations guarantees compliance with some basic requirements. Unfortunately, this is only a niche market. In 2019, the German Federal Ministry for Economic



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In the past three decades, Bangladesh became a global leader in garments production. To assess the state of the industry in the country, we have interviewed a business leader and a labour-rights activist. M. A. Jabbar of DBL Group shares his views on page 21, and Nazma Akter of the trade union Sommilito Garments Sramik Federation discusses what workers experience on page 23.



► 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.

GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT

Running out of time

The climate crisis is escalating fast and dangerously. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warns that the critical 1.5 degree-Celsius limit will almost certainly be breached, at least temporarily. It calls for urgent action.

By Roli Mahajan

The IPCC is the international institution that monitors climate change on behalf of the world's governments, and it is currently publishing its sixth global Assessment Report (see box next page). The part on adaptation was released in February and the one on mitigation in April.

The scenario is bleak. António Guterres', the UN secretary general, comment was: "We are on a pathway to global warming of more than double the 1.5-degree Celsius limit." That limit was agreed at the Climate Summit in Paris in 2015.

ADAPTATION

The IPCC adaptation document of February states that climate change is causing irreversible damage, affecting nature and human societies. Hazards are inevitably increasing as average temperatures rise. The dangers include natural disasters due to extreme-weather events, but also the slow-onset loss of livelihoods, for example, when shifts in seasonal patterns disrupt agriculture. Experience shows that low-income countries are affected in particular, but high-income countries are increasingly feeling the pain as well.

According to the IPCC's adaptation paper, food and water security is deteriorating for marginalised communities in many developing countries. Moreover, diet diversity is decreasing and malnutrition becoming more common, especially among indigenous peoples, small-scale food producers and low-income households. Children, elderly people and pregnant women are said to be at risk in particular.

The publication also points out that cities are increasingly affected by heat

waves, which compound air pollution. Again, marginalised communities suffer in particular. Informal settlements are growing fast, not least due to migration from poor rural areas.

The scientists state that precious ecosystems are reaching "hard limits". In other words, some rainforests, coastal wetlands, coral reefs or mountain ranges can no longer adapt. Even some areas that are officially protected for nature conservation are no

tions with unhealthy lifestyles and exposure to pollution matter too.

The authors acknowledge that public awareness has been growing and that governments are increasingly taking action. However, they warn that climate impacts are increasing fast and outpacing the measures adopted. The scholars insist that "transformational" adaptation is needed in the long run. In other words, ways of life must be reconsidered. In regard to short-term solutions, the authors point out two things: They are likely to become less effective as temperatures keep rising and, so far, they are unequally distributed, with disadvantaged groups being protected least.

Avoiding "maladaptation" is important too, moreover. The IPCC uses this term



Devastating flood damage in Germany last summer.

longer considered to be safe. According to the IPCC, only 15% of the land and eight percent of the oceans are protected, and stewardship is often insufficient.

The scholars now also see negative impacts on human health. Hotter temperatures facilitate the spread of vector-borne diseases like dengue and malaria, for example. They also exacerbate cardiovascular and respiratory distress. Worrisome interac-

for measures that are supposed to cushion climate impacts, but actually increase climate risks elsewhere. Again, disadvantaged groups tend to be affected worst. The adaptation report thus recommends integrated, multi-sectoral solutions that address social inequities and are tailored to fit the local needs.

Action is urgent. The scholars state that they have "unequivocal" scientific evi-

dence of climate change threatening both “human well-being and planetary health”. At the same time, they only see a “brief and rapidly closing opportunity” for securing “a liveable and sustainable future for all”.

MITIGATION

The implication is that unless humanity reduces greenhouse-gas emissions dramatically, climate adaption will prove impossible. Unfortunately, the international community is not on track towards limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels. To stabilise the ecosystems on which human life depends, it is essential to stay within it.

According to the IPCC’s mitigation document, which was launched in early April, the world is currently on track for a temperature rise of more than three degree by the end of the century. The mitigation report states the 1.5 degree limit will almost certainly be breached, but expresses the hope that this may only happen temporarily. It assumes that carbon capture and storage will be necessary to reduce the concentration of carbon-dioxide in the atmosphere. Indeed, the IPCC now points out that this largely untested and potentially risky technology is necessary.

The IPCC publication spells out what else must be done to rise to the challenges.

The scientists state that global emissions must peak before 2025 and be reduced by 43% by 2030. Net-zero emissions must be reality by 2050. Coal must be phased out and additional fossil-fuel infrastructure must not be built, even though it is being planned. So far, investments in a low-carbon world are only one sixth of what is needed, the scientists estimate.

For the first time, this kind of IPCC publication includes a separate chapter on the social aspects of reducing emissions. Human behaviour, cultures and lifestyle choices matter. What we eat, how we travel and what we buy has an impact. Quite obviously, the impacts are greatest where emissions are highest. What happens in high-income countries is especially important therefore.

Not all news is bad. The scholars report that global greenhouse-gas emissions have been increasing more slowly in the years 2010 to 2019 than they did in the past. Moreover, renewables technology has become much cheaper. However, emissions have still not peaked and have reached the highest levels in history.

Given that the IPCC report is based on data collected from 2014 to 2019, the reality could be worse than described. Recent events are worrisome. In Antarctica, the Conger Ice Shelf collapsed this year – it was a large sheet of ice similar to an area of Los

Angeles. The war in Ukraine, of course, is causing massive emissions which obviously do not figure in the report. In the longer run, however, it “might conceivably speed up a green transition as western markets cut off Russian fossil fuels”, as the London-based Financial Times has argued in an editorial.

Germany’s centre-left newspaper Tageszeitung, however, warns that, once the 1.5 limit is breached, it may be impossible to return below it. The risk is that we will reach tipping points which accelerate global heating. For example, thawing permafrost could release methane, a powerful greenhouse-gas, into the atmosphere.

LINKS

IPCC: Climate change 2022 – Impacts, vulnerabilities and adaptation (summary for policymakers).

https://report.ipcc.ch/ar6wg2/pdf/IPCC_AR6_WGII_SummaryForPolicymakers.pdf

IPCC: Climate change 2022 – Mitigation of climate change (summary for policymakers).

https://report.ipcc.ch/ar6wg3/pdf/IPCC_AR6_WGIII_SummaryForPolicymakers.pdf



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What the IPCC does

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is a body of experts convened by the United Nations. Its task is to survey scientific research on global warming and provide assessment reports regularly.

The IPCC’s sixth Assessment Report is currently being published. Three components have already been released. The first dealt with the physical science of climate change, the second with adaptation and the third with mitigation (see main story). The final part will be

published in October, providing a synthesis ahead of this year’s UN climate summit COP27 in Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt.

The IPCC’s Assessment Reports are the most exhaustive scientific evaluations of the state of earth’s climate. In history, there have never been efforts of this scale to compile scientific knowledge. Before publication, documents have to be approved by the governments of 195 member states. The compilations thus reflect the scientific consensus as ap-

preciated by national governments.

Hundreds of scholars from many countries contribute to IPCC publications. For example, 270 researchers from 67 countries made inputs to



Hoesung Lee, IPCC chair.

the recent document written by the IPCC working group on adaptation. The document was launched in late February.

The IPCC was established in 1988, and its secretariat is based in Geneva. Together with Al Gore, the climate campaigner and former US vice president, it was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007. The previous Assessment Report was published eight years ago.

Hoesung Lee, a South Korean economist and the current IPCC chair says that human-induced climate change is “widespread, rapid and intensifying”, threatening the “health of our entire planet”. RM



Natural disasters like this flood in Sudan in 2020 contribute to countries' over-indebtedness.

NATIONAL DEBT

Can debt relief help countries achieve climate goals?

Sovereign debt crises and the climate crisis are coming to a head – and they are mutually reinforcing. In principle, debt swaps for climate financing are useful, with creditors forgiving debts under the condition that freed-up money is invested in climate action. However, debt swaps are no panacea.

By Malina Stutz

In the course of the coronavirus pandemic, critically indebted countries have to take additional loans. Experts now call for fast and comprehensive debt relief. Not all of them work for civil-society organisations. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund basically agree.

At the same time, the climate crisis requires responses. Debt swaps therefore look attractive. A debtor and creditor agree that outstanding loans will be forgiven if the

freed-up money is used for climate action. Since the early 1992, debt swaps with social or ecological dimensions have figured in international development affairs.

The so-called German Debt Swap Facility is an instrument the Federal Government can use. The Facility makes it possible to waive up to an annual €150 million in repayments provided that recipient countries commit to appropriate policies. In recent years, the German government has not even come close to exhausting these funds. It therefore could considerably increase climate financing for countries in the global south.

LIMITED IMPACT OF DEBT SWAPS

However, the impact of debt swaps is limited. To judge by past experience, debt swaps are generally too small, too slow and

their fiscal balance too unclear for resolving a debt crisis or mobilising meaningful sums for climate protection. If a debtor country is still able to service its debts on time, only creditors with an explicit development mandate can be expected to agree to debt swaps moreover. These creditors are mostly state agencies of western countries. However, they only hold a relatively small share of low- and middle-income countries' debts. Swapping those debts would thus only mobilise relatively modest funding for climate mitigation or adaptation. If, on the other hand, a sovereign state is unable to service its debts and facing default, it needs debt relief, not a swap.

It would often make sense to combine swaps with debt relief, and both debtor countries and international experts have spoken out in favour of this approach. A relevant part of a country's debts would thus be forgiven, and another part would be swapped for climate commitments.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS FOR DEBT RELIEF

Other suggestions focus on setting another kind of conditions for debt relief. In contrast to classic debt swaps, the idea is not to invest freed-up money in climate action

immediately, but to make debtor countries adopt responsible climate policies in the long run. In exchange for debt relief, for example, debtor countries might thus commit to ending the extraction of fossil fuels and building renewables infrastructure long term.

Given the enormous climate challenges humanity is facing, this approach looks plausible at first glance. However, it is important to stem neo-colonialist tendencies. Debtor countries should not be forced to expand renewables only so that western nations can satisfy their hunger for energy. Moreover, hydropower dams or similar large-scale projects must not have detrimental impacts on local communities.

When and if conditions for debt relief are defined, the impacts on vulnerable people must be taken into account. The circumstances they live in must improve, and no deterioration is acceptable.

MANDATORY PARTICIPATION

Coordination among donors is a particular challenge, both in regard to debt swaps and debt relief. When a private person or a private company default, laws ensure that there are procedures for restructuring outstanding debts. There are no such mechanisms for sovereign defaults however.

In its coalition agreement, Germany's new Federal Government has committed to supporting the creation of an international insolvency procedure for sovereign states. It should take advantage of its G7 presidency this year to initiate relevant reforms. That could really make a difference. After all, climate-induced disasters are increasing and they often undermine a nation's ability to service its debts.

RELATED LITERATURE

Kaiser, J., 2022: *Gestern Schulden, heute Entwicklungsfinanzierung. Sind*

Schuldenumwandlungen ein Weg aus der Krise? (In German only) In: *erlassjahr.de*, Misereor (Hrsg): *Schuldenreport 2022*. <https://erlassjahr.de/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/SR22-online-Artikel-5-Gestern-Schulden-heute-Entwicklungsfinanzierung.pdf>
 Kaiser, J., 2020: *Wenn der Klimawandel zur Schuldenfalle wird. Mit Schuldenerlass Schäden und Verluste bewältigen. (In German only)* In: *erlassjahr.de*, Misereor (Hrsg): *Schuldenreport 2020*. <https://erlassjahr.de/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/SR20-online-.pdf>
 Volz, U., et al., 2020: *Debt relief for a green and inclusive recovery. A proposal*. <https://drgr.org/files/2021/01/DRGR-report.pdf>



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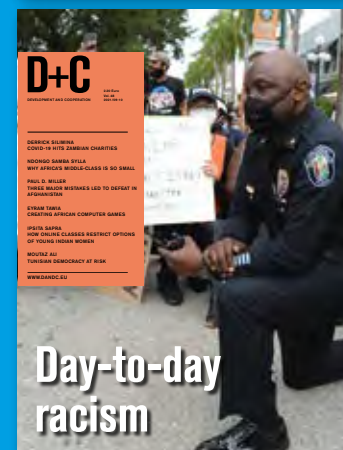


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MEDIA

Hearing every voice

As freedom of expression matters very much at the local level, it needs to be strengthened. Local radio stations are important, because they can put a check on fake news and respond to prejudice that is spread on social media, targeting immigrants and marginalised communities. DW Akademie supports pertinent media projects, for instance in Uganda and Pakistan.

By Sheila Mysorekar

South Sudan has been haunted by civil strife since 2016. Whenever violence re-erupts, people flee across the border to Uganda. This neighbouring country is indeed quite welcoming, and now hosts some 1.5 million refugees. The border is open, and people from South Sudan can choose to reside in Uganda wherever they want. However, Uganda's resources are limited, and Ugan-

dans are becoming less tolerant. The coronavirus pandemic has made both poverty and inequality worse.

In this difficult scenario, local media can play a helpful role by facilitating dialogue between different communities. Journalists can ensure that Ugandan society hears the voices of refugees. All too often, they fail to do so. Language barriers matter, and there are issues of access to the media. International support for local media outlets can make the difference. Media development organisations like DW Akademie provide support, in terms of funding as well as skills training.

The goal is to enable local partners to provide better reporting and involve more voices from more diverse backgrounds. Strengthening the freedom of expression this way results in more pluralism and, more generally speaking, a stronger civil society.

Consider the example of the community dialogue in Gulu, a small town in northern Uganda, where refugee families from South Sudan have been living for about five years. Most of them belong to the Dinka people. For the dialogue, refugees met with Ugandans, including officials from government agencies, local policymakers and representatives of relief organisations. The event took place between mud houses, with people from South Sudan sharing their experiences. The problems the refugees mentioned include the lack of valid documents and the scarcity of jobs. Young men face discrimination: Some Ugandans consider South Sudanese males as “aggressive” simply because they are from a country with a reputation for violence, due to the civil war.

The policymakers and officials listened carefully. They rarely have an opportunity to talk with refugees, even though their decisions have an impact on the refugees' fate. The people concerned have even fewer opportunities to tell others how they see things.

The community dialogue in Gulu was organised by Speak FM, a local radio station. The event was recorded and broadcast later. A prominent radio host chaired the meeting, encouraging everyone involved to speak their minds freely.

Jane Angom, Speak FM's editor-in-chief, spells out the event's message: “You belong here. Your views matter to us. Refugees too are entitled to the freedom of expression.”

The event in Gulu was one of a series of similar meetings that involved members of the refugee community and the host society. They were held in nine Ugandan locations and seven South Sudanese locations in October and November 2021. All were hosted by local radio stations with support by the German media development agency DW Akademie (see box next page).

FIGHTING STEREOTYPES IN PAKISTAN

Other projects run by DW Akademie are designed to change the partner country's debating culture in ways that boost free speech and a free press. In Pakistan, for example, efforts are being made to fight hate speech which targets minorities. The goal is to include marginalised groups in society better.

Pakistani media have a pattern of reinforcing stereotypes. About 7.5 million



Community dialogue in Gulu, northern Uganda.

people belong to non-Muslim religious minorities. They are largely ignored in political discourse. On social media, however, defamation is increasingly common.

How the media cover women tends to be rather one-dimensional too. “Women are portrayed as sexual objects and victims of abuse,” says Amber Rahim Shamsi, a prominent and popular news anchor, and points out that the implication is that the media are guilty of both. It also bothers her that advertising uses dominant and impressive images of men, but submissive images of women.

With an eye to promoting more diverse and less discriminating media coverage, DW Akademie has organised skills trainings as well as a networking conference in Pakistan. The focus was on four marginalised groups: women, faith communities, trans persons and the disabled. The positive impact is evident, as many of the participating journalists have tackled diversity topics. Many, moreover, relied on trainers’ sustained support when doing so.

Discussing gender identity and the concerns of trans people is not difficult in

Pakistan. By contrast, any mention of sexual orientation remains quite risky. In order to achieve structural changes regarding diversity-sensitive reporting, further projects are needed to raise awareness at the level of local media.



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Success in Mongolia

When it is strategically designed, media development can have a positive impact on a country’s political and legal environment. An example is Mongolia, where DW Akademie’s engagement has been very successful.

Mongolia started the peaceful transition to parliamentary democracy in 1990, as the Soviet bloc was disintegrating. An unprecedented media boom came next. Today, the nation of 3.2 million people has more than 450 broadcasting channels and print periodicals.

According to Reporters without Borders (RSF – Reporters sans Frontières), the international non-governmental journalists’ organisation, almost 75% of these media operations are controlled by politicians or people with close ties to politicians. Typically, the outlets serve a political agenda. The way they mix reporting and propaganda can be quite problematic.

DW Akademie is Germany’s biggest media development organisation. Its work is geared to promoting the human rights both to access information and express one’s views

freely. These rights are spelled out in Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. DW Akademie works on behalf of Germany’s Federal Ministry for economic cooperation and development (BMZ – Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Entwicklung und Zusammenarbeit), but also gets assignments from the German Foreign Office, the European Commission and other donor institutions. It runs projects in about 50 developing countries and emerging markets.

Editorial independence was the core topic of DW Akademie’s long-term project in Mongolia from 2013 on. In cooperation with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, which is close to Germany’s Social Democrats, the DW Akademie also helped to establish the Media Council of Mongolia (MCM) in 2015. The MCM is a private institution for the self-regulation of the media sector; it follows the European model. “A dream came true,” says Gunjidmaa Gongor. As co-founder of the MCM, she is currently its director. In her eyes, action had to be taken to safeguard professional

ethical standards and media work because too many journalists were willing to support PR campaigns or suppress news when bribed to do so.

The MCM adopted a national ethics code and established a complaint mechanism. It appointed journalists, owners of media houses and representatives of civil society to its ethics commission, which has dealt with 500 complaints since 2015. Its decisions are public – and well argued.

There have been unplanned side effects. In 2017, Mongolia’s parliament decided that insults and other so-called honour delinquencies are misdemeanours which the police should prosecute. The implication was that police officers were suddenly assessing journalists’ criticism of people with great influence. This was outra-

geous, says Gongor. She points out that police officers are not qualified to weigh the personal rights of powerful people against the fundamental freedom of speech.

The MCM expressed its opposition to this rule in very clear terms. Two years later, the law was changed again, which showed that the MCM had become an important player in the public arena.

In the course of the Covid-19 pandemic, there was some backsliding in regard to press freedom. The government made it illegal to rely on non-governmental sources in the coverage of the crisis. For the first time since 1990, something like censorship happened. The MCM documented cases and spoke out against them in a series of official statements.

The good news is that the MCM and the DW Akademie launched a project to resolve this conflict in early 2021. It relies on funding from the BMZ’s Global Crisis Initiative. Today, new “Crisis Communication Chapter” allow journalists, governmental experts and civil-society organisations to test new channels and formats of crisis communication. On this basis, free speech and press freedom can be safeguarded in future crisis.

SHMY



RULE OF LAW

The end of virginity testing

Sexual violence occurs in all nations. Most adult victims are female. Related crimes often go unpunished, and one reason is that taking a perpetrator to court tends to become a traumatising and invasive experience in itself. That is true in Pakistan too, but things are improving.

By Marva Khan

In January 2022, Ayesha Malik became the first female justice of Pakistan's Supreme Court. Her appointment shows that gender justice is making progress. However, even before rising to the top court, she had already done a lot to improve women's access to justice.

As a judge of the Lahore High Court, Justice Malik passed a ground-breaking judgement in 2021. The case was Sadaf Aziz versus Federation of Pakistan. The ruling made the prospect of filing cases against perpetrators of sexual violence less frightening. It declared that virginity testing violated a victim's fundamental rights of life, equality, dignity and privacy, which are protected by Pakistan's Constitution. Consequently, this judgment made a rape victim's prior sexual history inconsequential in the prosecution of the crime.

Virginity tests were previously the norm in rape cases affecting unmarried women and girls. They were deeply humiliating. A doctor inserted two fingers into the vaginal cavity and assessed how easy and pain-free that was. If he concluded that the hymen had been torn before the reported offence, the victim would be labelled as "accustomed to having intercourse", "immoral" or "unchaste". Lack of bruises further corroborated the biased assessment. All too often, courts accepted such information and dismissed rape cases entirely. Even when perpetrators were punished, sentences would be reduced if the victim's reputation seemed dubious. Typically, her reputation would suffer long term.

Justice Malik's judgement spelled out that no scientific evidence justifies the practice of virginity tests. In male-domi-

nated Pakistan, the vast majority of judges are men. Last year, she was one of only six women among the 115 judges of Pakistan's five High Courts. The Lahore High Court has jurisdiction over Punjab, but the judgement argued that virginity testing should be abolished across the nation.

The message resonated. The Supreme Court later (in Atif Zaheef v The State) followed the example, holding that virginity

delays in reporting a crime to the police. The general assumption is that victims immediately go to the police unless they have something to hide. This assumption must be questioned. Any hesitation to file an official first information report is often read as a sign of prior friendship and even consent to the sexual act. In one case, the Sindh High Court decided that a paralysed woman had consented to her aggressor's action because she did not inform her family and the police immediately.

The real reason why rape victims often stay silent is completely different, of course. Sexual violence deeply hurts a victim's mental health. The experience of utter helplessness and vulnerability is traumatising.



Ayesha Malik's swearing in as Supreme Court Justice on 24 January 2022.

testing has no relevance in cases of sexual violence and that referring to a victim's sexual history violates her rights to life, liberty, privacy and dignity. Soon after, the provincial governments of Punjab and Sindh ordered health departments to stop virginity tests. With Justice Malik's appointment at the Supreme Court, we hope that the courts will treat victims of sexual violence with more respect in other ways too. For example, there are often legitimate reasons behind

Moreover, the violation of personal privacy causes shame. Victims are often unable to tell others what has happened to them. They even struggle to share it with people who are close to them. Things are especially difficult where sex education is poor, because teenagers, for example, struggle to understand what has happened to them. Moreover, many were never told that they have a right to say "no", even when someone of high standing makes sexual advances they

do not welcome. The prospect of having to inform strangers – including police officers, lawyers and judges – is in itself frightening. The full truth is that legal procedures all too often reinforce the trauma, especially when victims once more feel exposed, shamed and abused. For these reasons, rape is underreported around the world.

Where judicial proceedings exacerbate suffering, impunity is likely. Where crimes regularly go unpunished, people do not feel safe. If a society is to escape the vicious cycle, sexual violence must be prosecuted and victims must trust the judicial system. Justice Malik's High Court ruling has allowed Pakistan to take important steps towards building such trust.

This is not the first step towards improving access to justice for victims of sexual violence. In 2016, the government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif passed legislation that improved the situation for rape victims. Important aspects included:

- a prohibition to disclose a victim's identity to protect her from humiliation,

- more protection of female witnesses and
- heavier sentences for perpetrators who abused minors and disabled persons as well as those who misused positions of authority to commit rape.

More generally speaking, the rule of law has been becoming stronger since 2008 in Pakistan in many ways, though there is backsliding too. It matters, however, that Pakistan now has its third consecutive elected government and saw peaceful transfers of power in 2013 and 2018.

Last month, the Supreme Court ensured that Prime Minister Imran Khan did not unconstitutionally dissolve the National Assembly. He then lost office in a vote of no confidence (see my comment on p. 18).

Several new laws offer protections against gender-based crimes and also support to the vulnerable communities. Moreover, citizens are becoming more organised and mobilised. The annual Aurat March (Women's March) which takes place across Pakistan on the International Women's Day

is an example. More must surely happen – including improving judicial responses to sexual violence. As in many other countries, the morality and chastity of victims still tends to get substantial attention.

For example, Pakistani judges take interest in what clothes a victim was wearing. Donning bright colours, or wearing “revealing” clothes are read as signs of immorality. Being in a public space without a chaperone is seen as provoking trouble, especially after dusk. Depressingly, courts often focus more on a victim's supposed character than the violence perpetrated against her.

Problems like this exist everywhere. In Pakistan, things are improving, making daily life a little bit safer for women and girls.



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A brief history of rape law in Pakistan

In Pakistan, many laws go back to the colonial era. The current penal code was originally established in 1860 by the British Empire. It contains over 500 provisions, including concerning what rape means and how it is punished.

The rape laws have been amended several times, and especially harsh amendments were passed under the rule of general Zia-ul-Haq, the military dictator from 1977 to 1988. In the past 15 years, however, things have been improving (see main story).

In South Asian cultures, the Hijras historically constitute a third gender. Hijras are men who identify and dress as women. Many engage in what

western culture calls homosexual activities. The British colonial power outlawed this community in 1871. It also made homosexuality illegal. Punishments for “sodomy”, “unnatural offences” and “carnal intercourse” could be harsh. These terms covered sexual activities apart from penovaginal penetration, whether they were consensual or forced upon a person. Rape, however, was exclusively defined as penovaginal penetration committed by a man against the woman. It was considered impossible within a marriage, as the wife's consent was taken for granted.

British law was explicitly meant to enforce Victorian morals. In reality, however, it

gave licence to powerful men to do what they pleased. They knew no one would take them to court, not least because everything was shrouded in shame.

Sticking to the colonial norms for decades, Pakistan only recognized male and female genders. That changed when a High Court judgment accepted Hijra's fundamental rights in 2009. In 2017, legislation was passed to protect this community. Sadly, the Hijras still are a marginalised and ex-

ploited community. Nonetheless, the legal changes show that Pakistan is making progress.

Not all problems can be blamed on the former colonial power. From the late 1970s to the late 1980s, General Zia claimed to promote “Islamisation” (Maryam Khan assessed Islamist tendencies in Pakistan in D+C/E+Z 2015/05). His “Haddood” ordinance of 1979 made rape victims even less likely to file charges. To find a rapist guilty, four adult male witnesses were needed. If a victim acknowledged there had been sexualised contact, but did not come up with those four witnesses, she was implicitly guilty of adultery, which was also a crime according to Haddood rules. The pattern of blaming victims of sexualised violence was probably never more pronounced than it was by Zia's ordinance. MK



CLIMATE JUSTICE

Market incentives will not do

There is an international trend to draft green deals. Unfortunately, they do not rise to the huge challenges before us.

By Praveen Jha

The science is absolutely clear. The escalating climate crisis means that humanity is heading for disaster. One after another, the assessment reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) have pointed this out. The outlook is becoming ever more frightening. In number six, the picture remained bleak even in the most optimistic scenarios. It is truly amazing that these reports, which are based on historically unprecedented efforts to compile all relevant studies internationally, have not triggered credible and effective responses.

Policymakers clearly know what is at stake, not least due to the annual UN climate summits. The recent Glasgow summit, delayed by one year because of Covid-19, was attended by almost 200 countries. Mass media reported what risks we face and what needs to be done. Nonetheless, we still lack credible and effective responses. “Our fragile planet is hanging by a thread,” said UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in his closing remarks and added: “It is time to go into emergency mode – or our chance of reaching net zero will itself be zero.”

Extremely powerful forces are at work. Those who benefit from fossil capitalism are pushing humanity towards the abyss. Corporate investors prioritise profits, not the common good, while market-orthodox ideology disparages state action. Governments in the global north and south, whether elected or not, seem enthralled by a kind of occultist cult that praises the private sector.

The real challenge is to steer economic activity onto an environmentally sustainable trajectory. This will require decisive action, and setting market incentives will simply not be enough. Nonetheless, multilateral debate largely sticks to economic paradigms that confront or question corporate power and shy away from regulating it stringently.

At the same time, corporate rhetoric has been changing. For example, the finance-sector giant Black Rock has been demanding more government spending on climate protection. Moreover, many multinationals have adopted some kind of sustainability programme. None of this means much because we lack criteria to detect green washing.



New Delhi, September 2021: participant in global climate strike.

What we need is a transformation of the global economy, but what companies offer is well-designed PR plus new business models, some of which may actually do some good, some of which are designed to attract subsidies and some of which may even prove harmful. To only mention one snag: Many companies promise to offset greenhouse-gas emissions by planting trees. That may work out for a single enterprise, but not all can do so. There simply is not enough land for the large-scale global afforestation that would be required.

More must happen than is currently on policymakers' agenda. There is a trend to draft green deals, and documents of this

kind are proliferating. The bad news is that they are not up to task.

The general idea is to follow the example of US President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal. It relied on massive government spending to generate employment, create infrastructure and offer new opportunities to masses of people, ending the Great Depression of the 1930. Today's green-deal proposals often link escaping the Covid-19 slump to environmentally needed investments and greater social justice.

Unfortunately, the green deals tend to stay unconvincing. US President Joe Biden's Green New Deal is stuck in the Senate (see Katie Cashman in D+C/E+Z Digital Monthly

2022/02), and even if it were implemented, it would not suffice to make the US environmentally sustainable. The EU, in the context of its European Green Deal, has recently accepted nuclear energy and natural gas as “sustainable” options, even though the first causes unmanageable radioactive waste and the latter is a fossil fuel. Observers from less fortunate world regions notice that those who claim to be global leaders struggle to wean their own nations off excessive resource consumption.

It is disturbing, moreover, that green deals tend to be embedded in orthodox economics. They fail to question the accumulative greed of capitalism, which is the biggest

cause of environmental destruction. Too many authors do not take into account that unlimited growth is impossible on a planet with limited resources. Instead, green deals rely on green bonds, carbon credits and similar tools to create new options for capital accumulation. Infantile faith in market mechanisms is de-politicising and de-historicising global discourse.

Not all green-deals proposals are the same. Some include progressive ideas for promoting social justice and reducing inequality. Sensible visions of democratic eco-socialism are geared to tackling environmental and socio-economic challenges at once. Authors such as Max Aji (2021a, 2021b), John Bellamy Foster (2020) and Tom Perez (2021) have done good work in terms of assessing things.

GLARING INEQUALITY, WORSENER BY GROWING ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

It cannot be disputed that humanity needs global policies in response both to glaring inequality and worsening environmental hazards. A serious global green deal in pursuit of social and ecological justice would be good. Unfortunately, we lack the kind of global-governance system that might conceive, adopt and implement it. What we have are many different multilateral institutions with different agendas and different shareholding patterns. Most of them fail to deliver the results we need.

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change is a striking example. The international community adopted it unanimously three decades ago. The annual climate summits are supposed to improve and implement it. Yes, we have undeniably seen some incremental progress, but the big picture is that the climate crisis has kept escalating. It will soon spin out of control. In spite of the UNFCCC, we are heading towards eco-cide and bio-cide.

Climate justice is needed at the global level. So far, low-income countries – and especially the poor communities who live there – have felt the worst impacts of global heating. By contrast, the high-income countries, which have emitted by far the most greenhouse gases since the industrial revolution, are better placed to adapt to a changing environment. Compounding global justice problems, high-income countries wield disproportionate power in multilateral settings, but regularly fail to fulfil their promises (see Saleemul Huq in D+C/E+Z Digital Monthly 2022/02).

To keep average temperature increases below 1.5°Celsius, humanity must accept a finite carbon budget. Approximately 70% of it has been gobbled up by a handful of countries in the global north. China has recently joined the list of big guzzlers. What about the 70% of the world population who live in other countries – most in the global south – and are largely deprived of material progress?

The insistence of India's government to keep on using coal must be seen in this context. This step has attracted considerable criticism because it made sure that the final statement in Glasgow only called for "phasing down" coal rather than phasing it "out". There is much to dislike about Prime Minister Narendra Modi who is not a champion of social justice. At the domestic level, his policies tend to serve Hindu majoritarianism and exclude minorities. Nonetheless, his government's stance in Glasgow regarding coal made sense. Low and lower-middle income countries must not be made to bear the main brunt of mitigating the climate crisis. If the EU thinks it still needs gas, India will certainly still need coal.

The challenges are complex and huge. It is impossible to fully assess them in a short essay as this one. It is obvious, however, that we need decisive action and that technocratic market interventions cannot suffice. Harmful patterns of production and consumption must be banned. At the same time, disadvantaged communities must not be left even further behind. We need ecological and social justice.

People around the world are indeed rising up in big and small movements. They want to fight for social justice and against environmental destruction. The climate strikes that were initiated by Greta Thunberg, the Swedish teenager, proved that climate worries resonate all over the world. Such activism inspires hope. Doomsday fatalism will not help us. At the same time, eco-activism has not brought about the change needed. Thunberg had a point when she summed up the Glasgow climate summit as yet more "blah blah blah".

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Poor communities suffer most: cyclone damage in West Bengal in May 2021.

Love or money

Love is in the air in Libya's marriage market – and so is a lot of money.

In 2021, 25,000 Libyan couples who tied the knot received the equivalent of €8,000 each from the government as a wedding gift. That added up to an expenditure of €200 million by the government in an effort to encourage marriages. In 2022, the government intends to hand out a further €200 million to another 25,000 marrying couples.

The Sports Ministry disburses the funds, and aims to make the application process quick and easy. "The administrative and financial procedures [should be] completed within 24 hours," Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibeh said when the programme was launched.

While the programme seems benign at first glance – who could be against supporting young love? – it has attracted strong criticism. For one thing, social commentators and women's advocates worry that the hand-out will cause thousands of essentially fake marriages, or marriages built on shaky foundations, leading soon to a wave of divorces.

Indeed, the first signs of this are already visible. "We have noted many divorce cases filed by grant beneficiaries after very short marriages, which suggests that some marriages were agreed just to collect the grant," says Fathia

Jadidy, a senior editor for the Libyan newspaper Sabbah.

Moreover, critics worry that poor families wishing to cash in will push under-age daughters into unwanted marriages. "There are serious risks that very young girls will marry just to get the grant," says Arwa Alghoul, a psychologist. She adds that couples in this category might forge documents to show that under-age brides are 18 years old, the legal minimum for marrying.

In addition, critics say the programme wastes public money, because many couples who receive the grant would have married anyway.

For example, one couple in their twenties, who prefer to remain anonymous, say they decided to marry before they had even heard of the grant. But they are not complaining. "We can use the money to build our new life together, such as starting a small business and paying down some debts," they say.

On the plus side, the grant can be useful to young couples in a country with high housing costs and high unemployment. "Despite the drawbacks, the grant programme has helped many serious couples to build their homes," says journalist Jadidy.



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INFLATION

Feeling the pinch

Prices of basic commodities are rising fast. Uganda is one of many developing countries affected by this global trend. The main reasons are the Ukraine war and supply-chain disruption due to Covid-19.

By Ronald Ssegujja Ssekandi

According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics, the price of cooking oil increased by 21% between December 2021 and February 2022, and the annual rise was 77.6%. In February, a laundry-soap bar cost 20% more than in December and almost 50% more than one year earlier. The petrol price surged by 15.3% in three months and by 34% in 12 months.

Matia Kasaija, Uganda's minister of finance, says the trend is driven by forces beyond the country's borders. First, Covid-19 restrictions across the world disrupted supply chains, leading to higher transport costs and shortages of much-used commodities. Then Russia's attack on Ukraine added to the problems. Both countries normally provide great volumes of staple foods to the world market, and Russia is an important exporter of fossil fuels.

According to the finance ministry, Uganda's annual headline inflation rate was 3.7% in March, which is moderate compared with other countries. Kenya recorded five percent, and the USA even 8.5% in March. Inflation is indeed a global phenomenon.

"The main causes of the recent increase in commodity prices are external and thus beyond the ability of policymakers in any country to deal with directly," Kasaija said. He sees no reason to panic and expects the temporary situation to subside "sooner or later".

Like many African countries, Uganda has so far maintained a neutral stance on the Russia-Ukraine conflict. In the UN General Assembly, it abstained in all recent votes regarding Russia – both in regard to the resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the removal of Russia from the Human Rights Council. The background is that many Africans feel uncom-

fortable about siding with "the west". It is a wide-spread impression that G7 nations all too often do not live up to their promises and never accounted for a brutal colonial history.

To some extent, Russia is benefiting from such sentiments even though it has clearly broken international law and its war is causing hardship. Indeed, Russian propaganda wants Africans to believe that the EU and the USA have exacerbated inflationary pressures by imposing economic sanctions.



Fewer people can afford "boda boda" rides on commercial motorcycles.

The daily lives of many Ugandans are becoming harder because of inflation. Small businesses are feeling the pinch. Nanyonga Shamim, who owns a grocery store in Kampala, says that she had to increase the prices of tomatoes and onions because of higher transport costs. The onions are imported from Kenya where fuel prices have risen too. At the same time, she has seen demand for her goods fall because many customers can no longer afford them.

Issa Bogere, who operates a commercial motorcycle taxi (boda boda) says that he now must charge his clients more for rides because petrol prices have been rising since

2021. He reports that "many previous customers are choosing to walk instead of taking an expensive boda-boda ride". He would like the government to do something to stop inflation.

Amidst common public dissatisfaction, however, the Ugandan government has consistently stated it does not want to adopt subsidies, price controls or tax cuts to address exogenous shocks. Things may yet get worse, however. The International Monetary Fund warns that growth is slowing down and that higher interest rates in prosperous nations are set to make it harder for developing countries to service debts. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the former Nigerian finance minister who now heads the World Trade Organization (WTO), has warned that shortages caused by the Ukraine war may trigger

food riots. It matters, moreover, that poverty and inequality have generally become worse in the pandemic.

The full truth is that African governments must cope with sudden problems they did not cause. And that compounds long-term challenges like global heating, which they did not bring about either.



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German soldiers deployed on UN mission in Gao, Mali in 2019.

EU POLICY

Do not neglect African security

The Ukraine war has important implications for the EU's cooperation with African countries regarding security and peace. Policy-makers must pay attention.

By Julian Bergmann and Niels Keijzer

The EU decided to use the European Peace Facility (EPF) to provide lethal military equipment to Ukraine. The Union had never before bought and provided weapons to another country. EU foreign ministers agreed to make the first €500 million available on 28 February. By the end of April, they had added another €1 billion.

African leaders took note. Shortly before Russian troops invaded Ukraine on 24 February, the EU-AU summit had taken place in Brussels. It confirmed that security and peace remain on the shared agenda for future cooperation. In particular, commitments were made:

- to build military capacities in terms of both training and equipment,
- to support African-led peace-support operations and
- to cooperate on cybersecurity.

There was also a commitment to civilian crisis prevention, but military-related issues got more attention.

Support for peace and security in Africa has been a key priority of the EU's foreign

and security policy since the first Africa-EU summit in 2000. The EU is currently running 11 related military operations and civilian missions in several African countries. From 2004 to 2021, the African Peace Facility (APF) spent nearly €3 billion of EU money to support African-led peace support operations and to strengthen the capacities of the African Peace and Security Architecture.

The APF was the predecessor of the EPF, which EU foreign ministers created in March last year. Though similar in name, it differs from the APF. Its spending is not limited to Africa, does not depend on an AU-mandate, and can serve the provision of lethal military equipment.

In other words, the new facility is more powerful, but African leaders' influence on it is much smaller. The EPF is not part of the EU budget, but an intergovernmental instrument at the flexible disposal of EU governments. Its spending ceiling this year was supposed to be €540 million, but €1.5 billion has been allotted to Ukraine alone.

EU members will thus have to renegotiate their annual contributions as well as the spending limits. Strategic goals must be re-considered too. How will assistance to Ukraine affect EPF engagement elsewhere? What does it mean for the implementation of what was agreed at the AU-EU summit? To discuss these issues, the EU must reach out to the AU.

European foreign and security policy will obviously focus on eastern Europe in the short- to medium-term future. Top priorities include support for Ukraine and a stronger NATO presence in its Baltic and eastern European member countries. At least a partial winding down of the EU's military presence in Africa looks likely. At very least, the EU must seriously engage with African partners and consider their concerns.

Trust matters very much. Indeed, the EU has serious credibility problems, some of which Vladimir Antwi-Danso of the Ghana Armed Forces Command & Staff College spelled out in D+C/E+Z (see Digital Monthly 2022/04). Among other things, he stated that the western-led intervention in Libya did not go well, with the result of the security situation worsening in many countries. Mali in particular is caught in a downward spiral. In the course of this crisis, the elected government was replaced by a military regime. Antwi-Danso speaks of a "systemic coup" by officers who see statehood disintegrating, while the western donors only supported ceremonial, not substantial democracy.

In view of mounting difficulties, France has decided to withdraw from Mali and the EU will stop military-training efforts. It must decide how to compensate and what future strategy it wants to adopt vis-à-vis the Malian military junta. That debate now looks more difficult than ever.

The Ukraine war is dreadful and unprecedented. A nuclear-armed power has attacked a sovereign UN member. Europe's policymakers obviously have to respond. They must not forget, however, that this terrible war does not erase any of the many difficult issues that predate it. It would be a huge mistake to neglect Africa.



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RULE OF LAW

Difficult restart

With swift and decisive action, Pakistan's Supreme Court has ended a constitutional crisis and reaffirmed democratic checks and balances. However, the country's political crisis is not over.

By Marva Khan

Twelve minutes after midnight on Sunday 10 April 2022, Imran Khan lost his office as prime minister. He lost a vote of no confidence in the National Assembly. His party, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) tried to prevent this democratic procedure, but the Supreme Court ensured the constitutional order prevailed. Khan became the first prime minister of Pakistan to be ousted this way.

Khan's tenure as prime minister was marred in controversy. The former cricket star was accused of vengeful politics against opposition members and their families as well as corruption, including because of undisclosed foreign funding. Moreover, he had a pattern of attacking independent state institutions, including the judiciary and the election commission. He had risen to power as an outsider in the election of 2018 because people were frustrated with the long-established major parties.

In recent months, however, a coalition of opposition parties cooperated to oust Khan and it became clear that they had enough votes in the National Assembly. Khan started agitating in public and claimed he had proof that the USA was trying to topple his government. However, the National Security Council, which includes cabinet members as well as military leaders, did not confirm any such evidence.

The PTI relied on parliamentary machinations too. The vote of no confidence was scheduled for Sunday 2 April, but the deputy speaker of the National Assembly unconstitutionally took it off the agenda and ended the procedure. Shortly after, Khan announced the dissolution of the National Assembly in a pre-recorded telecast.

In normal circumstances, a prime minister has this power, and the president

must confirm the decision within 48 hours. However, the vote-of-no-confidence procedures had already begun. According to Pakistan's constitution, that means that the head of government loses this particular power. Nonetheless, President Arif Alvi accepted the dissolution within a few hours. Things had obviously been pre-planned.

On its own motion, the Supreme Court took notice, and several parties filed petitions the same day. After a five-day hearing, the Supreme Court decided on Thursday 7 April that cancelling the vote of no confidence was unconstitutional. In a unanimous judgment, the Court restored the National Assembly and insisted that the vote of no confidence had to take place before Sunday 10 April.

The National Assembly convened on 9 April at 10 am, but PTI legislators once again acted obstructively. Apparently, Khan had instructed his party members to delay things. They held hours-long speeches, while opposition members demanded that voting begin.

The Supreme Court stepped in again. Around 11 pm, journalists reported it would start hearing a contempt-of-court case against the National Assembly's speaker if the vote was not conducted as ordered. Next, the speaker, a PTI member, resigned

and asked an opposition politician to take over. The vote of no confidence began three minutes after midnight, and eight minutes later, Khan was no longer prime minister.

The Supreme Court deserves praise for insisting on democratic checks and balances and reinforcing the rule of law (see my essay on rape-victims' access to the judiciary on page 10). It resolved the constitutional crisis, but the political crisis lingers on. The National Assembly has elected Shehbaz Sharif as the new prime minister. The strength of the coalition of eleven parties remains to be seen.

Khan has lost his parliamentary majority, but has rallied masses of elite supporters in the cities. Indeed, Sharif belongs to the kind of political dynasty that Khan always agitated against. Sharif's elder brother, Nawaz, served as prime minister three times, but was never able to complete his term.

The situation is indeed very difficult. Pakistan's debt burden is huge. The Ukraine war is compounding inflation, with food and fuel prices rising fast. The crisis in neighbouring Afghanistan has considerable impacts on Pakistan. On the upside, Shehbaz Sharif, as a former chief minister of Punjab, is generally considered to be a competent administrator.



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Shehbaz Sharif
(white hair) is sworn in as prime minister.

DEMOCRACY

Plutocrat populism

The term “plutocrat populism” may feel counterintuitive, but it is helpful. It even has a bearing on the Ukraine war.

By Hans Dembowski

Super-rich people have political priorities. They feel entitled to do whatever they can financially afford, and resent all kinds of government regulations that might block them. Many adhere to a libertarian worldview and want states to be as “small” as possible. They resent taxes, depending neither on governmental social-protection schemes nor on state-run schools. Ordinary people need such services, but plutocrats do not. They abhor environmental legislation and labour laws which, for the sake of the public good, limit entrepreneurial freedom.

In market-radical eyes, state action is always a problem. As Paul Krugman, the Nobel-Prize-winning economist and New York Times columnist, has often argued, this is why Republicans in the USA have done what they could to make Obama’s Affordable Care Act look bad.

Right-wing populism is generally considered to be something different, appealing not to prosperous beneficiaries of tax havens, but to frustrated, left-behind people. However, populist parties typically rely on anti-democratic propaganda that actually serves plutocrats’ small stage agenda. All sorts of government interventions are considered oppressive and dictatorial. In the Covid-19 crisis, public-health requirements were falsely, but systematically likened to totalitarianism, for example.

In the 1990s, globalisation basically meant the opening of markets. Today, it is increasingly about establishing global regimes for collecting taxes, protecting the environment and reducing inequality. Plutocrats, oligarchs and kleptocrats now tend to endorse a dishonest nationalism of the Brexit variety, claiming to boost the authority of a national government, but actually undermining its ability to regulate. In our interconnected world huge entities like the EU, the US or China can still pass and en-

force laws in a meaningful way, but smaller entities are likely to be pitted against one another by powerful economic interests.

That is why populist parties often get generous funding from super-rich supporters. Some leaders – consider Donald Trump – are billionaires themselves.

It matters that social-media platforms, which have become very important in public discourse, are typically owned by super-rich investors. Algorithms determine what people see on their screens. Whom they follow, is only part of the equation. Advertising matters too. To keep people glued to the screen, moreover, algorithms feed rage and radicalisation. This is not just a profit-maximising strategy, there are ideological dimensions. Does anyone really believe Silicon Valley plutocrats give the same scope to policymakers, who want to break up online monopolies as they give to populists who equate freedom with the absence of government?

The Russian invasion of Ukraine shows just how deadly populist propaganda can become. It is tempting, but wrong, to see this devastating crisis in the light of western democracy versus Russian autocracy. Populist forces have been undermining west-

ern democracies for a long time. Without murky funding and dubious social-media campaigns, Brexit might never have happened and Trump might never have become US president. If western countries are serious about promoting democracy internationally, they must first control dangerous subversion at home.

This reasoning is not a conspiracy theory. I am not suggesting there is central command or evil parties meet in secret to plot the ruin of democracy. However, it is obvious that populist parties indeed serve the interests of plutocrats, oligarchs and kleptocrats, and of course they grasp opportunities for manipulation. If right-wing populism helps to weaken democratic governance in the EU and elsewhere, they appreciate that, but divisive left-wing radicalism does not bother them either.

That is precisely why Russia is known to have funded both kinds of radicalism in recent years. Obviously, trolls and bots did their part online. Non-Russian plutocrats, however, are known to support the right-wing version. Three examples are Silicon Valley investor Peter Thiel, media titan Rupert Murdoch and British business man Arron Banks.




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Right-wing protesters in Berlin in August 2020.



Ethiopian
seamstress.

FOCUS

Garments production

“Companies must live up to the sustainability pledges international brands make to final consumers.”

M. A. JABBAR, P. 21

“It is very hard for workers to survive on 8000 taka. Everything is so expensive.”

NAZMA AKTER, P. 23

“Kenya’s garment exports amounted to \$ 420 million in 2020.”

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“Statements reveal typical tensions between investors and employees in Ethiopian garments production.”

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“The women do not even know what chemicals they are exposed to.”

OLGA SPERANSKAYA, P. 29

“In Germany, the volume of secondhand clothes is larger than the demand.”

THOMAS FISCHER, P. 31

“The huge social-audit industry has not brought significant improvements.”

GISELA BURCKHARDT, P. 32

Insights into Bangladesh's textile industry: two experts share views

The textile and garments industry has grown fast in Bangladesh in the past three decades. Long considered a hopeless basket case, Bangladesh has become synonymous with rapid change. On the one hand, industrialisation means progress. On the other hand, it goes along with social hardships. The collapse of the multi-storey Rana Plaza production complex made headlines around the world in 2013. More than 1,100 died in this disaster. Most of them were garment workers.

The event reinforced western consumers' perception of brutally exploited women. The general impression is that textile workers are the wretched of the earth. To



disadvantaged rural communities in Bangladesh things look a bit different. Many young village women would like to get a job, which will enable them to support extended families. Indeed, by Bangladeshi standards, those who work in garments production belong to the lower middle-class and not to the socially-excluded poor. The full truth is that governments of African countries are quite keen on copying the example of Bangladesh.

The garments sector has been diversifying, moreover,

with some companies focusing on higher quality and others still trying to rely mostly on cheap labour. Trade-union activism has begun to make a difference, moreover. Most obviously, security concerns have attracted more attention since Rana Plaza. To get a clearer idea of what is happening, we interviewed a business leader and a Labour activist. M.A. Jabbar of DBL Group shares his views below, and Nazma Akter of Sommilito Garments Sramik Federation, a labour union, shares hers on page 23.

DBL GROUP

“We are growing dynamically”

DBL Group is a knit garments producer based in Bangladesh. Its customers include global brands such as H&M, Walmart, C&A, M&S, Esprit and Hugo Boss. DBL has over 42,000 employees of whom 14,700 are female. In our interview, managing director M.A. Jabbar assesses what impacts the Covid-19 pandemic has had on the industry and what changes technology will bring.

M. A. Jabbar interviewed by Sabine Balk

How did Coronavirus affect your business and have you recovered from it yet?

The COVID-19 pandemic was as difficult for us as it was for the rest of the world. The initial months of lockdown hit us hard. However, our resilience shone through as we were able to successfully continue with our expansions in different operations. We were also able to receive support from the

government of Bangladesh which provided a stimulus package to organisations across the country in response to the pandemic. Despite Bangladesh's total exports falling by more than 18% in the fiscal year 2019-20, DBL Group was able to increase exports by more than six percent. In 2020-21, the trend was even better, with our exports increasing by almost 55%. Our revenue achieved an all-time high in 2020-21. Not only have we been able to survive, but we are growing dynamically.

How has textile production changed in Bangladesh in the past decades?

There were significant changes in the past. The big priority in the first half was health and safety. Next came commitments to various social and environmental sustainability initiatives. Our industry depends on buyers. To stay in business, companies

must live up to the sustainability pledges international brands make to final consumers. On the social side, decent work in the supply chain has become more important. It includes fair wages, skills development and even community engagement. On the environmental side, focus areas include reducing carbon emissions and improving waste management. Responsible consumerism is attracting increasing attention, and we have seen the demand for recycled products increase significantly in the past two years.

Is automation increasing?

Well, we are using some automation in our own supply chain. For example, the machines of DBL Group's spinning mill have programmable logic control, which automatically adjusts the revolutions per minute. In our fabric-dyeing plant, automatic temperature-adjustment controls are embedded in the machinery. We also use laser technologies in our washing plant. These technologies optimise both energy and water usage. More generally speaking, the sweater and heavy knit industry has been fully automated in Bangladesh.

How much manual work is still needed – and how much will be needed in the future?

The processing of raw materials – spinning, dyeing and printing – does not require very much human intervention, but apparel manufacturing is very labour intensive. Cutting, sewing, finishing and packaging are mostly done by hand. There has been some automation in these areas, but change has not been as significant as in other countries so far. There certainly is scope for further automation in manufacturing. Industry 4.0 means moving on from handwork to automation. Furthermore, there will be less wastage in manufacturing as rejection rates are being lowered.

Does that mean you will need fewer workers?

Perhaps we might need fewer workers in the future, but new opportunities are arising too. We will need additional skilled workers who can handle the advanced machines. Upskilling is necessary, both to avoid mass unemployment and to ensure a smooth transition. Industry-based training centres are running related courses, and we are engaging with them. Initiatives of this kind help workers to adapt to future technologies and reduce unemployment. Moreover, many women who took part in our company's female leadership programme now work as supervisors, so their job opportunities have improved. One of them left to join a non-governmental organisation that is providing skills training and making other efforts to boost women's employment opportunities.

What implications will automation have for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

There will be multiple implications. On the social side, better training will result in people having advanced skills so their opportunities improve – not just in the textile industry, but other industries as well. This will address SDG 4: Quality Education. On the environment side, production processes will be more efficient, optimising resource use and reducing wastage, which is directly linked to SDG 12: Responsible Consumption & Production. However, there may be a negative impact of unemployment during the transition towards further automation. So SDG1 – No Poverty – may see a setback.

How is international competition changing?



DBL Group in Dhaka: "We will need additional skilled workers who can handle the advanced machines."

China is still the largest exporter of apparel, and some countries are making fast progress. Vietnam is now neck-and-neck with Bangladesh. Producers there are good at technological adaptation.

Are you involved in African production lines?

Well, we did indeed invest in Ethiopia, in Mekelle, the capital of the Tigray Region. However, the operation had to be suspended in the current conflict.

How do you assess the situation for your industry in next decades?

The potential for improvement is great. Prudent investments are required, especially in

regard to automation. Skills development is essential, and related investment will not just benefit manufacturers, so it should be done in collaboration with multiple stakeholders. The World Economic Forum has suggested that upskilling should happen in a collaborative approach that involves brands, agencies and technology providers apart from manufacturers.



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Work-place safety has improved: Nazma Akter (second from right) taking part in a rally in Dhaka in 2019, commemorating the Rana Plaza disaster of 2013.

BANGLADESH

The price workers paid for Covid-19

Nazma Akter is a veteran of the labour movement in Bangladesh's readymade garment (RMG) industry. She told D+C/E+Z about how things have been developing in recent years.

Nazma Akter interviewed by Marianne Scholte

What is the Covid-19 situation in Bangladesh at the moment?

We don't bother with Covid. We have to work to survive. If a garment worker has a cold, a mild fever, or other flu symptoms, she keeps it to herself, takes paracetamol and goes to work. What else should she do? There is no sick leave, she needs the money and really does not have a choice.

How many garment workers got Covid? How many were hospitalised? How many died?

Those are good questions, but I have no answer. Some people were sick. But in general, if workers get Covid, it is hidden. I was also sick, but I did not go for a test. If the result

is positive, what can I do? If it is negative, what difference does it make? That said, I do not know of any garment workers who died of Covid. You know, most garment workers are young, so their immunity is strong. Most people who died of Covid had asthma, heart problems or other chronic diseases.

Let's go back to the beginning of the pandemic in early 2020. What were those first few months like?

Starting in March 2020, around \$ 3 billion of garment orders were cancelled or paused. Payments were delayed. A countrywide lockdown began on 27 March, but the factories were excluded. This angered a lot of workers who insisted that they were human beings, too, and needed protection. There was a lot of confusion. The factories closed for a few days and then reopened. But many garment workers had returned to their families' villages and could not come back to work because there was no public transportation. Many walked back to Dhaka over long distances. Prime Minister Sheikh

Hasina Wajed announced a financial stimulus package worth the equivalent of almost € 52 million for export-oriented industries, 85% of which went to the readymade garment sector. Nonetheless, employers did not pay March salaries on time. 300,000 people lost their jobs – including pregnant women and single mothers. There were protests, workers were beaten, arrested, and falsely charged. In April 2020, most people were back at work, but the manufacturers did not want to pay full salaries. In the end, most paid only 65%. By May, huge orders had come in and production was back to 100%. However, the international brands pushed hard for lower prices. Everybody was back at work, including overtime, and they were paid full salaries. But many people who had lost their jobs earned less when they came back. If they had earned 10,000 taka (the equivalent of slightly above € 100) a month before the crisis, they were offered the same job back at 9500 taka.

Your AWAJ Foundation is a labour organisation that operates at the grassroots level. It is running Women's Cafés, not least to inform workers about their rights and options. Did those efforts continue?

Actually, we were closed for a few days when the factories were closed. But I and a few other people went to the office to help people who had been laid off, who had various problems. When the factories reopened, we were open again, too, in order to help people. Also, we did a lot of demonstrations, protests and interviews, globally and locally. There were meetings with the ministry, the garment manufacturers, different law enforcement agencies. The work continues.

How many garment workers have been vaccinated?

The vaccination rates are increasing day by day. In early February, around 40% of garment workers were doubly vaccinated – like the population in general.

How are the safety protocols in the factories?

The workers wear masks. Actually, that was the case even before the pandemic, because of the dust in the factories. The factories followed some safety guidelines at the beginning, but once 100% of the workforce was back there was no social distancing. In the factories, space is quite limited.

The monthly minimum wage in the RMG sector was raised from 5300 taka to 8000 taka at the end of 2018 after a long period of labour unrest, firing of workers and arrests. When do you expect wages to rise again?

According to the law, the government has to convene a new minimum wage board every five years. It can be done earlier than that, but the manufacturers do not want it to happen, even though they are running huge orders at the moment. It is very hard for workers to survive on 8000 taka. Everything is so expensive. One kilo of rice costs 70 taka; one kilo of beef is 620 taka. Housing eats up a large part of their salary. Then there is education and everything else. Many garment workers are supporting rural relatives who are even poorer. In countries that lack good social protection, extended families have to look after all members of the family, and garment workers play their part.

Sommilito Garments Sramik Federation, the labour union you founded and continue to head, has had impressive success in organising since 2013. Is that continuing today?

Oh yes. We now have over 70 affiliated unions in separate companies and thirteen collective bargaining agreements. Seven are pending. That is over 70,000 members. There are still a lot of issues, but we keep

fighting to organise. We have many women leaders who are very strong.

In the past three decades, the industry has been diversifying. Some companies focus entirely on low prices, while others pay more attention to quality. Do these things make a difference in terms of working conditions? And what about managers' willingness to cooperate with a labour union?

No, it makes no difference. Some of the modern firms have a better work environment in terms of drinking water, better ventilation, et cetera. But whether a factory is high tech or low tech, they all pay the same wages. And whether they allow freedom of association and collective bargaining depends very much on the individuals running the firm and on their human resources-department.

The Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh and the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety were formed after the Rana Plaza disaster in 2013 that killed more than 1100 people, mostly female garment workers. These initiatives worked in Bangladesh from 2013 to 2018, inspected over 2500 factories, demanded safety improvements from most, and listed over 300 factories as unsafe – most of which subsequently shut down. How do you evaluate the work of these two initiatives?

I did not work with the Alliance, they did not support unions, but the Accord was legally binding and saved a lot of people's lives. At least the factories now have fire and earthquake safety. Our workers are protected. That is important. Moreover, I got support from the Accord when a company's management did not accept our unionisation efforts and with respect to forming safety committees and safety issues.

The Accord and the Alliance were replaced in 2018 by the RMG Sustainability Council. How do you evaluate the work of that Council since 2018?

This was a local initiative of local unions, manufacturers, and the brands, who took over the work of factory inspections. There was a question of accountability, so after 2019, we did a campaign for something more binding. We were scared that the achievements of the Accord would be lost. So we were very happy when the International Accord for Health and Safety in the Textile and Garment Industry was signed in 2021. It was signed by the brands as well as the trade-union associations UNI Global Union and IndustriALL Global Union. It is like the original Accord, but also extends to other countries. This is very good. It is legally binding, and the brands are being held accountable.

So workers are benefitting from international efforts to hold brand companies accountable for what happens at production sites?

That is a complicated question. But it is important to keep in mind that these important changes in worker safety did not happen until after Rana Plaza collapsed, after over a thousand people died, and thousands more were injured. The improvements were not the result of the decades of international efforts to hold brands accountable. It was the widespread international outrage over Rana Plaza that finally made significant change possible. Our workers paid for those changes with their lives.



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Dyed cloths drying in a field.



Inaugural freight train on Nairobi-Naivasha line in 2019: Kenyan transport links are excellent by African standards.

EAST AFRICA

The key to industrial growth

Kenya's textile and apparel sector is struggling with various bottlenecks. The government wants to improve matters.

By Alphonse Shiundu

Kenya's garment industry is expected to drive the country's manufacturing over the next decade. That is one message of a recent report published by Standard Chartered Bank. The authors argue that investors from Asia and the Middle East are driving growth in Kenya's garment industry. In particular, they focus on export processing zones (EPZs), which the government has set up.

Kenya's garment exports amounted to \$420 million in 2020 even though the Covid-19 pandemic compounded supply-chain problems. The industry is currently employing 50,000 people in Kenya. The industry is labour-intensive and employs many women. In developmental terms, growth in this sector is very valuable because it can contribute to many families' livelihoods.

According to Abel Kamau of the Kenya Association of Manufacturers (KAM), the potential is great. He reckons that "a fully

developed value chain" in the garment industry might employ up to 10% of the country's population, given that both cotton farming and apparels manufacturing are very labour intensive. Kamau is in charge of textile industries at the KAM.

International competition is tough however. The Standard Chartered report states that China is not only the world's "largest producer and exporter of both raw textiles and garments," but also "investing in modern manufacturing machinery, technology and 'greener' products." Clearly, the Chinese want to maintain their competitive edge. For Kenya to catch up, business leaders and policymakers must pay attention.

Improving physical infrastructures is a core challenge. Kenyan manufacturers need more reliable electricity, better roads, continuous water supply et cetera. According to the national government, "road transport costs are four times the globally competitive rate". That is a serious hurdle, constraining shipping times and limiting companies' international competitiveness. It also means that supply-chains are unreli-

able. On the upside, things tend to be worse in most other African countries.

Financial services matter too. The different players of the apparel industry lack easy access to credit, according to Standard Chartered. High interest rates and complex regulations are cited as major problems. In particular, there is multiple taxation by different authorities at the county and national level.

In regard to skilled labour, the picture is mixed. In cooperation with the World Bank, Kenya's government examined the textile and apparel sector. Their joint report states that the country has a skilled and educated workforce, but more needs to be done to develop its potential. One recommendation is more on-the-job training. The experts warn that it would be more expensive to run skills audits and design targeted programmes on that basis. They point out that wages in Kenya are high by African standards and that non-commodity industries must meet high quality requirements. In this setting, they appreciate Kenyan efforts to boost productivity by improving skills at managerial, technical and factory-floor levels.

Yet another concern is the supply and quality of cotton produced in Kenya. The industry must choose between buying cotton from local farmers and processing it to the quality needed for production, or importing fabrics of consistently better quality at higher costs. Corruption at ports and lax customs

enforcement permit the infiltration of counterfeiters as well as poor quality fabric.

To some extent, the international trade in secondhand clothes is a problem too. Discarded garments from high-income countries are imported to African markets, where they are sold to end consumers (see Thomas Fischer on page 31). In particular people with low incomes buy these items, limiting the sales of domestic producers. However, the Institute of Economic Affairs in Kenya has studied the matter and found out that used imported clothing and locally-made clothing serve different customers and “do not necessarily compete with each other”.

WHAT KENYA CAN DO

For the industry to gain greater market shares abroad, business leaders and policymakers must rise to the challenges listed above. It can be done, argues KAM expert Kamau: “Kenya can borrow best practices from Bangladesh, a rising giant exporter of textiles and apparels.” (For employers’ perspective, see M.A. Jabbar on page 21 and for workers’ perspective, Nazma Akter on page 23) In Kamau’s eyes, it is promising that Kenya “has been able to attract a substantial number of world buyers”.

The industry consensus is that Kenya has to be strategic. The first step is to attract more investors. Reasons to set up garments-manufacturing facilities in Kenya include

the comparatively competent labour force and Nairobi’s role as an East African transport hub. Cargo flights are available, for example, and facilitate marketing logistics. By African standards, moreover, Kenyan rail and road links are excellent too. Transport from and to the port of Mombasa is comparatively easy.

Another positive aspect is that new investments can rely on energy-efficient technology. Lower energy costs are an important competitive advantage. A strong performance on this front, moreover, will help manufacturers get ecological certifications, enabling them to charge higher prices. In view of the climate crisis, the number of consumers who care about environmental issues is growing in global markets.

Trade agreements are helpful too. Kenya belongs to the seven-country East African Community with a population of over 280 million people and the 21-member Common Market for East and Southern Africa with a market of about 600 million people. The Africa Continental Free Trade Area is expected to make it even easier to market Kenyan-made goods to consumers across the continent.

In February, moreover, Kenya and the EU agreed to negotiating an interim economic partnership agreement. According to the European Commission, it will give duty-free quota-free access to the EU market for all Kenyan exports, while Kenya must commit to the partial and gradual opening of its market.

As the Standard Chartered report noted, moreover, Kenyan exports benefit from duty-free access to the American market according to the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). This regulation will continue until 2025. It has contributed to facilitating industrial development in African countries.

Kenya’s government sees opportunities in specialisation and diversification, moreover. It wants to develop “Kenya’s image as Africa’s hub for innovation and green production”. The guiding idea is that companies should produce high-quality goods in order to benefit from the higher prices charged for small batches and eco-friendly ware.

To help firms improve quality, moreover, the government strategy includes public-sector procurement in Kenya. In other words, police uniforms and medical gowns for public health institutions will most likely be sourced domestically. School uniforms might matter too. “Analysis at the household level shows the majority of households buy new clothes when required such as school or workplace uniforms,” the Kenyan Institute of Economic Affairs has noted.



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Kenyan manufacturers’ manifesto

Kenya is heading for general elections in August 2022. The Kenya Association of Manufacturers (KAM) has published a manifesto to make politicians aware of its concerns.

The lobby organisation wants the future government to prioritise the creation of new quality jobs, reduce regulation, boost exports and attract investors. It also calls for a tax policy that serves these goals. The KAM argues that fixing

these things will solve most of Kenya’s economic problems. It is no coincidence, of course, that a report prepared on behalf of Kenya’s current government and the World Bank addressed the same challenges that the KAM is highlighting (see main story).

Mucaï Kuniyihā, the KAM chairperson, says that there is plenty of evidence to show that manufacturing has the ability to “grow incomes, reduce pov-

erty and change the trajectory of nations”. Phyllis Wakiaga, the KAM chief executive adds: “The manifesto shall guide our engagements with aspiring po-

litical leaders, with a focus on economic policy challenges and the need to create a competitive manufacturing sector in Kenya.” AS



ETHIOPIA

Differing assessments

The textile industry in Ethiopia is a beacon of hope: it has grown fast in recent years and created new jobs. Over 50,000 jobs were provided by the Bole Lemi textile complex in Addis Ababa and the Hawassa industrial park alone. But now growth is experiencing setbacks: first the coronavirus crisis led foreign investors to cancel orders, and then a civil war broke out in November 2020. Researchers examined how employees in the textile industry are faring.

By Michaela Fink and Reimer Gronemeyer

In the past, low wages, cheap electricity and existing infrastructure drew in investors from many countries. But now the pandemic and the civil war have taken a serious toll on Ethiopia's textile industry. Buyers have cancelled orders, factories have been forced to reduce personnel, and some employees have not returned to work for fear of catching the coronavirus. As a result, production decreased considerably in the garments and apparel sector. According to the Ethiopian Investment Commission (EIC), the value of exports from public and private industrial parks declined by 45% in the first nine months of Ethiopia's 2020 tax year (June 2020 – July 2021).

Observers believe that the civil war could have an even more devastating impact on the textile industry. It might even lead to a collapse of the state, though the central government has regained much territory in recent months, and fighting was limited to the Tigray region in early April. However, consequences for the entire Horn of Africa are hard to predict. In light of the tense situation, many textile parks worry that foreign investors will withdraw. Some (especially from Asia) have already pulled out, or have announced their intention to do so.

MANY PROBLEMS

The industrial park in Hawassa is one example. Though it lies in southern Ethiopia, which has so far not been a disputed area, people worry about the consequences of the

destabilisation of the country caused by the Tigray conflict (see Markus Rudolf in the D+C/E+Z Digital Monthly 2021/09).

Another problem is the extremely high turnover and frequent absenteeism of the workers. A three-year (2020-22) research project, funded by Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), is assessing reasons. Re-

Everyone agreed, however, that wages are extremely low. One respondent said that the good thing was that anyone in need of work could find a job there. However, the pay would probably not be high enough to cover daily expenses. The fact that this is typically not the case is probably one of the primary reasons for the high turnover in the industry.

Employees also experience poor living and working conditions. Workers have to put in night shifts and their lodgings are often a room that they share with four or more people.

The war has exacerbated the financial distress of textile workers because inflation



Workers at a textile factory produce for Lidl in Addis Ababa.

searchers conducted interviews with textile workers about their situation.

Five women and four men were surveyed in Tula, a small village 20 kilometres away from Hawassa. The participants reflected the country's religious diversity: Protestants, Orthodox Christians and a Muslim were included. According to the group of textile workers, former textile workers and rural observers of the industry, there are advantages and disadvantages to working in the industrial park. One woman said: "It's good to have a job and a better life. It's better to enjoy some independence than to sit at home and do nothing."

has steadily risen. According to data from the Central Statistical Agency in September of 2021, the inflation rate in Addis Ababa was about 35% and food inflation was as high as 42%. It has become increasingly difficult to survive in the city.

SURVIVAL IN THE SLUM

The latter fact was confirmed by survey respondents in Tafo, an informal settlement on the outskirts of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's metropolis. One man whose wife works in the textile industry told the researchers that the wages are far too low and that the wom-

en suffer hardships. According to him, their rights are not respected. For example, they are immediately fired if they dare to oppose instructions given by supervisors. When women quit, he continued, they are often denied a certificate attesting to their knowledge and skills. This is how employers force them to stay on for two or three months until a replacement is found. "When you think about it, the job resembles slavery," the man summed up. A textile worker from Tafo added that if someone gets sick at work, employers do not allow that person to go home, but instead "wait until the worker passes out".

These statements reveal typical tensions between investors and employees in Ethiopian garments production. From the perspective of foreign companies, wages are attractively low. Some are pulling out of low-wage Bangladesh because labour is even cheaper in Ethiopia. However, managers complain about the high turnover and lack of work ethic among employees. One foreign manager stated that productivity is so low that he believes the future of the Ethiopian textile industry is in danger.

For workers, the situation looks completely different. They have to sit or stand on the factory floor six days a week for starvation wages. Many also have to take a long bus trip to get there. Those who live near their workplace and do not take the bus have to squeeze with other women into a small rented room that also eats up a significant portion of their meagre earnings. Therefore those who can, start looking for another job as quickly as possible.

Poverty is very pronounced in rural Ethiopia, but the situation varies from region to region. Land scarcity, soil erosion and climate change are making traditional agriculture increasingly difficult. Nonetheless, the livelihoods of many people still depend on subsistence farming. They have no safety net apart from their extended families. Textile workers return to farming when they do not want to work in the factories anymore.

In Germany, the Ethiopian textile industry is a controversial issue. Some see it as an important step in Ethiopia's development: the industry creates jobs, promotes industrialisation and reduces extreme pov-

erty. Others see wages below the minimum subsistence level and intolerable working conditions; in short, exploitation. Some say: this is progress. Others say: this is modern slavery.

The opinions of the surveyed Ethiopians reflect the German debate. Pro-industry advocates are pointing out the creation of jobs and women's financial independence. Sceptics bemoan the women's low wages and difficult working conditions.



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Worker in a polyester sewing production line in China's Guizhou Province.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

Toxic substances

Many women who work in textile and garments manufacturing are exposed to health risks they do not understand. A multitude of chemicals are applied in production processes, and some of them are poisonous. They can harm consumers too.

By Olga Speranskaya

The textile and fashion industry is one of the biggest industries in the world. It is known for the intensive use of pesticides, water, energy and toxic chemicals. Poisonous emissions contaminate water, soil and air. The impact on our planet is enormous and results from the entire life cycle of textile products. Relevant issues include raw-material supply, production, delivery, retailing and disposal. Indeed, textile waste problems abound – especially in poorer world regions.

Clothing consumption has increased in recent years. That has not only led to more production, but also to a dramatic increase in textile waste worldwide. According to Value Village, a global reuse chain, almost twelve million metric tons of clothing and textiles accumulate in landfills each year, of which 95% could be reused or recycled. Many

countries do not have the required capacities, however, so poor inappropriate waste management results in the emission of pollutants from the burning of textile waste or toxic substances leaking from disintegrating garbage in landfills. Textile-waste problems are most acute in disadvantaged regions, as used clothing exported from high-income countries to low-income countries accumulates in the developing world.

On the other hand, up to 90% of clothing is produced in developing countries, where labour and safety standards are often not respected or even do not exist at all. Environmental legislation tends to be similarly dysfunctional. Social problems are well known, and they persist even though many companies claim to adhere to high standards. Most of the workers are women who did not get a good education and fear losing their jobs. Some of the many serious grievances are:

- low wages,
- long working hours,
- unpaid over-time work,
- no paid leave,
- exploitation of children,
- lack of career opportunities and
- sexual harassment at work.

Moreover, occupational safety typically does not get adequate attention in the textile and garment sector. Health hazards in the sector affect both men and women, but some are gender-specific, including breast cancer, spontaneously aborted pregnancies and hypertensive disorders during pregnancy.

Adding to the problems, the women often do not associate their health issues with toxic chemical exposure. They do not even know what chemicals they are exposed to and why they could cause them harm. More often than not, employers leave their staff in the dark, and many do not run in-house health services that might be of help when needed.

Indeed, up to 40,000 synthetic chemicals are applied in the entire supply chain, starting with raw-material production. Some are carcinogenic, mutagenic and endocrine-disrupting. Hardly a stage in textile and garments production does not rely on chemicals. The sheer multitude makes safe and environmentally sound management a huge challenge.

For every kilogramme of fabric, an estimated 580 grammes of various substances is used on average. Dyeing alone usually involves more than 1600 different chemicals, including toxic ones such as formaldehyde, phthalates and perfluorinated substances. They are used because they make materials resistant to stains, oil and water. Other chemicals provide clothing with other features, such as wrinkle-resistance.

Some of them are dangerous – for example carbon disulphide. It is used to spin cellulose into viscose fibres, although it causes significant health risks. It can lead to coronary heart disease, psychophysiological and central nervous system effects or retinal angiopathy, for instance. Studies have shown that women who are chronically exposed to carbon disulphide may suffer menstrual irregularities, early menopause and other conditions linked to hormonal disruption.

In his book “Fake Silk” (2016), Paul Blanc of the University of California, assessed a “lethal history” and noted that multinational corporations are aware of the dangers. Nonetheless, huge profits prevailed over common sense and safety requirements. Blanc wrote that viscose fabric continued to be “greenwashed” as an eco-friendly product, even though it cannot be

produced without using toxic substances. To ensure the health of workers in the viscose industry, rigorous environmental and social standards must be developed.

Another material common in the textile industry is polyester. It is made from plastic that contains various toxic additives which give the material the desired properties. It is the most used fibre worldwide and makes up about 60% of clothing composition. There are different types, and the most common one is PET (polyethylene terephthalate). It is used in clothing and packages.

Various toxic chemicals are used in the production of polyester. For example, antimony trioxide, a catalyst in producing polyester fibres, is a carcinogen. It potentially harms the health of workers who are exposed to it in the production process. However, antimony pollution can affect other persons as well. For example, waste water from textile factories regularly contains this substance and contaminates ground water as well as local sources. Even consumers are at risk to some extent. Research has shown that polyester textile samples designed for contact with human skin release antimony.

Another serious problem with polyester and many other plastic-derived fibres is the release of microplastics. Microplastics have been found in drinking water, beer and various foods, including salt, honey and sugar. One source of pollution is the discharge from washing machines. Oceans, glaciers and even arctic ice are polluted with microplastics.

MAKE THE INDUSTRY SUSTAINABLE

Making the textiles and garment industry sustainable is a huge challenge. The industry must minimise and ultimately eliminate toxic substances – both from the supply chain and its products. Human health and environmental safety matter more than profits. Responsible manufacturers pay special attention to these issues.

There actually are economic incentives for doing so too. One example is the Blue Angel label. The requirements for using it are based on EU and German chemicals legislation, which stringently restricts the use of heavy metals and prohibits the application of entire groups of toxic substances, such as chloroalkanes and perfluorinated chemicals or alkylphenol ethoxylates. Moreover, it rules out the use of



Dyed sheets spread out to dry in Narayanganj, Bangladesh.

nanomaterial in the production of leather and leather materials.

Another incentive is the IVN Leather Standard. It was introduced by the Berlin-based International Association of Natural Textile Industry (IVN – Internationaler Verband der Naturtextilwirtschaft). To get certification, a manufacturer must meet requirements throughout the production processes. The Standard contains a detailed list of banned substances such as endocrine disruptors, heavy metals and biocides. It also bans substances which are considered worrisome but have not yet been banned in the context of REACH, the EU legislation regarding the “registration, evaluation, authorisation and restriction of chemicals”.

Of course, workers and consumers must be protected better around the world, and not only in Europe. No doubt, the textile and garments industry needs strict environmental standards everywhere. Occupational health and safety must be ensured at all levels – from raw-material supply to waste management.

The insufficient flow of information along the supply chain compounds the problems. Brands know what companies they source their goods from, but often have

only a vague idea of who figures at what stage in the entire supply chains.

“Sustainable textiles” means that the whole process, from fibre production (including the growing of the cotton) to the ready-made process, must be done in environmentally sound and socially equitable circumstances. One implication is that up-to-date technology must be used.

Clearly, the textile industry has many reasons to focus on sustainability, including environmental protection, social justice, economic stability and related processes such as textile waste recycling. Chemical hazards deserve more attention than they have attracted so far.

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USED CLOTHING

Nobody gains from cheap clothing

Western consumers buy – and discard – more and more clothes. Most of the clothing they throw away ends up in a used-clothes container, and much of that is sold second-hand to Africa and Latin America. Textile-recycling expert Thomas Fischer explains why.

Thomas Fischer interviewed by Sabine Balk

You are an association of around 100 mostly commercial companies making money by selling old clothes. You set up used-clothes containers and rely on people donating garments for free. What is the basic business model?

The companies' revenues result entirely from the sale of top-quality used clothes – so-called cream clothing. To be economically viable, they must be able to sell about 60% of the clothing they collect and sort. Everything else costs our members money, because every step of the sorting process is manual and time-consuming. Old clothes that cannot be sold need to be properly disposed of, which also costs money. The same is true of non-garment textiles, which often end up in containers too. Only pure cotton

can be recycled currently. It can be used to make cleaning rags. Everything else ends up in garbage incinerators as a secondary fuel. Most of the residual non-recyclables are cheap synthetic fibres and blended fabrics.

How much clothing is disposed of in Germany annually?

In 2013, it was around a million tons; in 2018 1.3 million. The trend is rising. But since the Covid-19 pandemic began, we have had no reliable data. Our statistics are based on the sales of retail shops. In the past two years, nothing was normal.

Most of the secondhand clothes are sold to developing countries. The exports to Africa draw criticism. It is argued that the used clothing from the west is destroying local textile industries. How do you respond to that claim?

Well, charities like the Red Cross or Caritas sell used clothing for exports to developing countries too. In Germany, the volume of secondhand clothes is larger than the demand of needy people who live here. We sell most of our goods to wholesalers in Poland and the Netherlands, from where they

are shipped to the target markets in Africa and Latin America. As for the argument that used-clothing exports are destroying local textile industries, let me say two things. There is no such industry in many countries and, if there is, its traditional products are not what many consumers want. They are keen on affordable and fashionable clothing from Europe.

A number of years ago, countries like Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and Tanzania tried to ban the import of used clothing. Except in Rwanda, that attempt failed. Why?

One reason is that the secondhand markets in Africa were established decades ago and many livelihoods there depend on the trade. Moreover, people want the clothing. The real problem is not secondhand garments from Europe, but the cheap synthetic clothes from Asia, which are flooding African markets. Garments made in China have become increasingly important, and that is a big problem. Fashion is now so fast that manufacturers launch 12 to 16 collections a year. The clothing is very poor quality. After being washed a couple of times, the items either lose shape or are simply ruined. Typically, it is impossible to resell or recycle them. That said, current demand for clothing could no longer be met with cotton alone.

What would you like to see happen in that respect?

There is an increasing awareness of the downsides of fast fashion. It is my hope that more consumers will buy fewer clothes, but of better quality, so manufacturers will respond by returning to manufacturing longer-lasting goods. It may seem ironic, but less consumption would not harm our business. Cheap garments are no good to us. If more high-quality clothing were bought, more of it would be dumped into our containers. Only high-quality used clothes can be sold on the secondhand market – and the sales ensure that people can use our containers to make their used clothing available to others.



Used-clothes container in Germany.



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HUMAN RIGHTS

Tougher criteria needed

The Green Button label of Germany's Federal Government serves to mark garments manufactured in a socially and environmentally sound manner. The basic idea is good, but the certification criteria should be more stringent.

By Gisela Burckhardt

The garments industry has long faced criticism for human-rights violations and harmful impacts on the environment. In Germany, several initiatives are striving to improve manufacturing conditions internationally. One of them is the Textiles Partnership (see box next page). Moreover, numerous labels on retail garments are meant to help consumers make choices that are more socially responsible and ecologically sustainable. In September 2019, Germany introduced the first government-run sustainability label for garments. It is called "Grüner Knopf" ("Green Button") – and is the brainchild of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

According to the BMZ, 78 companies have been certified in the two years since the label was launched, and around 150 million garments bearing the label were sold. Major customers include the faith-based

charities Caritas and Diakonie, which purchase supplies for hospitals and old people's homes, as well as retail discounters Aldi and Lidl. Moreover, the major railway company Deutsche Bahn has equipped tens of thousands of employees with Green Button clothing. However, major international fashion brands such as C&A, H&M and Zara are not on board so far.

NEW LEGISLATION ON SUPPLY-CHAIN MANAGEMENT

Unlike other certification systems, the Green Button audit does not only assess the textile product in question, but also the company itself as well as the supply chain. This approach makes very good sense.

However, the new supply-chain legislation, which the Bundestag (Germany's federal parliament) adopted in 2021, will oblige large companies to handle matters more responsibly from 2023 on. It uses similar criteria. Given that voluntary initiatives like the Green Button and the Textiles Partnership only really add value if they significantly exceed legal requirements, the Green Button should toughen up its criteria. The current ones are not rigorous enough.

In particular, Green Button certification still fails to cover the entire manufacturing supply chain. It only takes account of the final processing stages, including cutting, sewing, bleaching and dyeing. It thus neglects the appalling working conditions in spinning mills as well as child labour during the cotton harvest. Moreover, certification so far only requires that employees get a minimum wage, not a living wage. The difference between the two is huge. In most countries, the statutory minimum wage would have to rise by a factor of two or even three to be enough to live on.

Certified companies do not do sufficient public reporting moreover, as the civil-society organisations FEMNET and Public Eye revealed in a review of 31 companies' public disclosures. Most of the companies reported only superficially on risks in their supply chain and failed to identify any tangible action for preventing widespread human-rights violations such as gender-based violence in factories or the repression of trade-union activity.

There is also a need for improvement at the product level. Green Button certification accepts other "credible sustainability labels" such as the Fairtrade label or the Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) as proof of compliance with social and environmental criteria. However, certification for those labels is based on audits that private, profit-driven companies conduct in factories. Their audits are unfit to detect all labour-rights violations, such as discrimination against women, for example.

The huge social-audit industry that has emerged in the past two decades has not brought significant improvements so far. It is equally worrisome that some of the certification systems have gaping holes. GOTS, for example, may have some credibility in regard to environmental compliance, but not human rights.

GREEN BUTTON 2.0

The BMZ has upgraded the approach to "Green Button 2.0". The final version will be published shortly after the completion of this article. One of the positive changes revealed so far is that companies will need to understand their supply chain better. For example, audits will henceforth consider the origin of fibres and materials too. In ad-



Bags bearing the Green Button label.

dition, companies will have to document gaps between their current wage and the living wages and present a strategy for pay increases. Nonetheless, the Green Button 2.0 criteria are still too soft:

- At the product level, Green Button 2.0 continues to rely on other sustainability labels and thus reinforces their weaknesses.
- Living wages are still not made mandatory, nor is progress on successive pay increases. A mere strategy for increasing wages is all that is required.
- Companies are still not forced to publish their list of suppliers – although many already volunteer this information on their websites.
- Companies are allowed to set their own priorities when assessing supply-chain risks; so they are likely to sidestep critical issues.

The Green Button is advertised as being “socially sound – environmentally sound – government-run – independently certified”. Nonetheless, it neither requires living wages in the supply chain nor guarantees that products are manufactured without gender discrimination or other violations of labour rights. Even the updated version thus fails to guarantee significant supply-chain improvements.

The bottom line is that the Green Button sets the bar too low. To prevent government-certified greenwashing, the bar must be raised. For good reason, the Green Button advisory council has stated: “In cases of doubt, the Green Button 2.0 should prioritise a high level of ambition and deep penetration of the supply chain over attracting as many companies as possible.”

LINKS

Green Button:

<https://www.gruener-knopf.de/en>

Factsheet: Does the “Grüner Knopf” deliver on its promise? FEMNET and Public Eye, 2021:

https://www.publiceye.ch/fileadmin/doc/Mode/2021_PublicEye_Femnet_GruenerKnopf_Factsheet_EN.pdf

The government’s response: BMZ statement on the FEMNET/Public Eye research report:

<https://www.gruener-knopf.de/en/press/bmz-statement-report-femnet-and-public-eye>



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Textiles Partnership

After the collapse of the Rana Plaza building in Bangladesh in 2013, Gerd Müller, then Germany’s federal minister for economic cooperation and development, launched the “Partnership for Sustainable Textiles” in 2014. For short, it is called “Textiles Partnership”. The guiding idea is that policymakers, business and civil society should cooperate on improving the social, environmental and economic conditions in garments production internationally. Today, this German multi-stakeholder initiative has 120 members, including over 70 clothing companies, various lobby groups, three federal ministries and civil-society organisations such as FEMNET.

Every two years, the individual companies that belong to the Textiles Partnership must currently demonstrate in a comprehensive review process how they fulfil

their due-diligence obligations throughout the entire supply chain. They must publish this information in a report, the so-called Roadmap. FEMNET has assessed companies’ Roadmaps, and the result was that the efforts to tackle issues such as gender-based violence at

work generally still have very much room for improvement. Seven years of Textiles Partnership have not led to the widespread implementation of measures that might effectively eliminate related risks.

The Partnership is also spawning a range of social and environmental initiatives in production countries. For example, FEMNET has launched a project in the Indian state

of Tamil Nadu to tackle the slave-like working conditions endured by girls and young women in spinning mills. The private-sector companies Tchibo, Otto, KiK and Hugo Boss are involved, and so is Germany’s Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

Despite some minor successes, the overall progress made by the Textiles Partnership remains meagre. Nothing close to a living wage is paid in any production country. A mere 13 member companies have signed up to an initiative for higher wages. Only 25 currently disclose their supply chain. Even an attempt to evaluate how well the Partnership is working has failed due to lack of participation. For the Textile Partnership to make sense in the long run, it needs more impact on workers’ lives. GB



Retail shoppers in Frankfurt (and elsewhere) deserve more information.

LINK

Review Reports on companies in the Textiles Partnership:

<https://www.textilbuendnis.com/en/berichte>



www.linkedin.com/company/d-c-development-and-cooperation



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