INDIA
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middle-class kids
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Chamber of commerce
conducts useful
business-climate survey

JOURNALISM
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quality media and
post-truth society

Disasters and aid

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Both language versions
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Title: Examination of a malnourished child at the Al Sabbah Children's
Hospital in Juba, South Sudan
Photo: UNICEF/AP Photo

FOCUS

Disasters and aid

Dangerous work

Philip Aruna knows what personal risks humanitarian aid workers run. He is from Sierra Leone, has worked for Doctors without borders in many countries and is currently managing this international NGO's efforts in Nigeria. He shared his experience in a D+C/E+Z interview. **PAGE 23**

The future of humanitarian aid

Among aid agencies, opinions diverge on what emergency relief can and should achieve. While Sid Johann Peruvemba of Malteser International insists that saving lives is the only thing that matters, Hendrik Slusarenka of medico international wants aid to drive long-term change. Mark Lowcock, the emergency relief coordinator of the United Nations, argues that agencies must consider long-term impacts of their engagement and contribute to boosting resilience. **PAGE 25 – 30**

Grassroots action

The Catholic Health Association of India sees people affected by disaster as agents of change rather than merely as victims. Father Mathew Abraham and Ramu Karra elaborate the approach of their faith-based network. **PAGE 31**

Where helpers are helpless

In Syria, 60 to 70 % of the people need humanitarian aid, but agencies lack access to them. Moreover, the agencies and their facilities have themselves come under attack. As journalist Mona Naggar reports, some organisations have discontinued operations. **PAGE 33**

Local ownership

Haiti is heavily aid dependant, but the reputation of international agencies is not good. Cooperation must be redesigned with an emphasis on Haitians' self-determination, argues Leon Schettler, a social scientist. **PAGE 35**

Building resilience is common sense

Simple measures can boost the resilience of communities who are at risk of disasters. They should be taken, argues development consultant Glenn Brigaldino. **PAGE 37**

More respect

Times have become rough for humanitarian workers. The number of crises is increasing, and ever more aid is urgently needed. At the same time, humanitarian action is becoming more dangerous. All too often, aid workers themselves come under attack. Parties to a violent conflict increasingly do not respect humanitarian agencies' neutrality anymore or they intentionally sabotage relief workers for strategic reasons. That has happened in Syria or South Sudan, for example, where perpetrators of violence targeted humanitarian convoys, centres and clinics.

Matters are especially bad in Syria these days. In February, Doctors without Borders (MSF – Medecins sans Frontieres), which tends to be among the organisations that work in the most difficult circumstances, reported that more than a dozen of its facilities were attacked and damaged or even destroyed in a town in eastern Ghouta.

A recent event in South Sudan was similarly representative of what is happening in war zones. A group of armed men blocked an MSF convoy in the remote Mundri area and robbed team members' medical supplies, other MSF goods and team members' personal items. This attack forced the agency to discontinue the operation of mobile clinics in the region. This work will only resume once all conflict parties promise MSF safe access once again. The sad truth is that people in many regions are cut off from health care because working there has become too dangerous even for impartial doctors.

Respect for humanitarian principles must be restored. All parties involved in conflicts must commit to the protection of wounded and sick people. Moreover, they must appreciate that humanitarian agencies operate in a spirit of impartiality, neutrality and independence.

Relief organisations claim to live up to these principles and they insist that they must be perceived to be doing so. Their workers help those in need, whoever they may be. Beyond doing that, humanitarian agencies do not pursue a specific agenda.

At the same time, expectations and aspirations have been growing. In developmental discourse, it has become common to link humanitarian aid to goals such as peace and long-term development in order to achieve sustainable results. Whether that makes sense – and if so, to what extent it is feasible – must be assessed diligently case by case.

In scenarios of war and crisis, the obvious priority number one is to save human lives. Aid workers' security matters too, of course. The mere impression that they are implementing an agenda of their own may imperil them. In places where everyone is at risk, humanitarian agencies must decide for themselves what goals to strive for and what means to use.

To the extent possible, they should adhere to the norms adopted by development policymakers. All UN member countries have approved the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), so this agenda is universally valid. Local ownership, moreover, has long been considered to be essential. Accordingly, humanitarian agencies should pay attention to local actors who can make a difference long term rather than circumventing them.

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

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Debate

Mexican power struggle

Andrés Manuel López Obrador, known by the acronym AMLO, is currently the front runner to win Mexico's presidential elections on 1 July. He is considered a polarising leftist leader. Virginia Mercado of the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México (UAEM) assesses the situation.
PAGE 11

Tribune

Surveys with potential

Germany's chambers of commerce regularly publish business-cycle reports based on surveys of their member companies. These reports provide important information to businesses and policymakers. According to Michael Konow of Hamburg's Chamber of Commerce, chambers in developing countries should follow that example – and Ghana proves that it is feasible.
PAGE 17

Indispensable quality journalism

Democracy cannot survive in a post-truth environment. To protect a fact-based political culture, measures must be taken in several areas. The standards of quality journalism matter, and the public should be aware of what they are, argues D+C/E+Z's Hans Dembowski.
PAGE 19

Photos: Delgado/picture-alliance/dpa; STCCI Ghana

SEF CONFERENCE

Strengthening African safety nets

Development experts agree that social-protection policies are feasible in Africa. They could help to reduce poverty and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Some developing countries have fully operational social-protection schemes, but so far, only about 18% of the people living in Africa are covered. Experts are working on increasing these numbers.

By Sabine Balk

Social safety nets protect people from the consequences of risks like illness, unemployment, poverty and accidents. They also provide pensions in old age. In the eyes of Ebenezer Adjetey-Sorsey, the executive director of HelpAge Ghana, social protection is a crucial development issue. He points out that protecting everyone from poverty, risks and vulnerability is a question of social justice – and a tool for empowerment.

According to Adjetey-Sorsey, Africans are eager to improve standards of living. He appreciates various initiatives to establish and expand safety nets. Examples include the 2011 Tripartite Social Dialogue Forum that was started by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and various charters that target social protection in other regional economic communities.

Unfortunately, data on poverty tend to be in short supply and unreliable. Adjetey-Sorsey recommends redoubling efforts to build social protection. He also suggests handing social-protection payments (cash transfers) over to women instead of men, as experience shows that women are more likely to spend the money on family exigencies, including education and health care. "It is going to take a lot of awareness-raising to change the traditionally patriarchal mindset and cultural norms in Africa," he says.

Implementing social-protection systems is a huge undertaking, according to Adjetey-Sorsey, and many stakeholders must be involved – from the government to NGOs, various institutions and the private sector. He is confident that change is feasible, though serious efforts are needed: "We have to work even harder and must be backed by more decisive political will." He says social protection is still a low priority for many African governments, and that is evident in their budgeting. Without donor money, normally not much happens in regard to social protection.

At a recent conference hosted by the Development and Peace Foundation (SEF – Stiftung Entwicklung und Frieden) in Potsdam, Adjetey-Sorsey said that donor governments generally pursue interests of their own – which he considers one reason why African governments do not assume sufficient policy ownership. "When social protection is the topic, everyone points out the lack of funding. I am convinced that we could achieve a lot through restructuring budgets and re-assigning resources."

Traditionally, the family provides social protection in African countries: neighbours in a village in Tanzania.

Photo: Sean Sprague/Lineair

Simeon Uulenga from the Namibian embassy disagrees. He reports that Namibia's government is keen on fighting poverty and inequality by improving social protection systems. Apart from Namibia, only few African nations have systems in place, he says. Mauritius and South Africa are examples, but Uulenga adds that – with the exception of Mauritius – most systems are fragmented and do not serve all people. Health insurance and pension systems typically only serve people in formal employment, Uulenga says, leaving people in the informal sector to fend for themselves. To change matters, Namibia's government is working on introducing an unconditional basic income grant (BIG) for the ultra-poor. The scheme, Uulenga says, could be funded by taxing prosperous citizens.

Nkateko Chauke from the Open Society Foundation for South Africa (OSF-SA) appreciates the idea. She says an unconditional basic income should be funded by levying taxes on extractive industries. She notes that mining rights in South Africa are largely unregulated and not linked to obligations to promote the public good or protect the environment. Mining therefore does not benefit the public much, according to Chauke, whereas a BIG could complement the social systems already in place in South Africa.

FINANCING MODELS

Francesca Bastagli of the London-based Overseas Development Institute (ODI) does research on possible models for social-protection funding. She sees a range of options, in which payroll taxes and other taxes feature prominently (see box below). Bastagli explains that systems that depend on all kinds of government revenues have the advantage of reaching masses of people and do not only serve the people who pay payroll taxes because they work in the formal sector. She is in favour of setting off virtuous cycles. "Cash transfers," she says, "are an effective instrument that usually has an immediate effect."

Anja Hornig from the GFA Consulting Group agrees, pointing out that an Indonesian conditional cash transfer programme was very successful in terms of reducing poverty. With World Bank funding, the Indonesian government gave money to 300,000 people during the pilot phase and later expanded the programme to reach 3 million and ultimately 10 million people, Hornig says.

ESCAPING EXTREME POVERTY

Social protection is closely linked to poverty reduction. BRAC, an independent development agency from Bangladesh, has taken a pioneering approach to helping people find their way out of extreme poverty. BRAC ties cash transfers to a range of additional forms of assistance, including skills training (vocational as well as relating to daily life) and the provision of micro credits. Since 2002, BRAC has greatly improved food security for the ultra-poor in Bangladesh, reports Raania Rizvi from the BRAC Ultra Poor Graduation Programme. She laments that the government is not showing sufficient commitment to the cause. "Surely reducing poverty is in the government's interest too."

Bessie Msusa, chief economist at Malawi's Ministry of Finance, reports that social protection is high on her country's national agenda. She points out several support programmes initiated by the government and implemented with the help of donor institutions such as Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). One is a conditional cash transfer programme that pays beneficiaries the equivalent of $ 60 dollars per month, obliging them to attend a job training course. Another one is an unconditional cash transfer scheme to support the ultra-poor. "We've learned from BRAC's experience," Msusa says.

Regine Kopplow of Concern Worldwide claims that her organisation has also learned from BRAC, adapting its concept for alleviating extreme poverty in African countries. "We have to give ultra-poor households both money and training. We also support village savings programmes and savings groups."

Kopplow emphasises the need for sufficient groundwork. She says it is necessary to assess diligently, "what resources will really help the needy: loans, livestock, vocational skills?"

Hans-Peter Baur from the BMZ highlights that German development policy supports social protection systems and is cooperating with many partners, including Malawi's government. Moreover, the BMZ supports the African Risk Capacity, a multilateral insurance scheme. It promotes disaster preparedness and indemnifies African nations against the consequences of draught and other climate risks. The African Risk Capacity wants 500 million Africans to be covered by climate-related insurance policies by 2020. Crop insurance is obviously not a classical tool of social-protection policymaking – but it certainly serves the purpose.

Social protection for all

Social protection is a basic human right set out in the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Moreover, many countries – including Kenya, Zimbabwe and South Africa, for example – have enshrined it in their constitutions, as Markus Kaltenborn, a law professor at Ruhr University Bochum, recently pointed out during a conference hosted by the Development and Peace Foundation (Stiftung Entwicklung und Frieden – SEF) in Potsdam.

There are various models for social protection. Government-run health and unemployment insurances are typically based on compulsory contributions ("payroll taxes") that are paid per formally employed person. Systems of this kind obviously depend on a company being registered and paying takes. Private-sector insurance policies are an option too, but they are normally prohibitively expensive. In some cases, according to Kaltenborn, government authorities step in to pay payroll taxes for people who work in the informal sector so they are covered by government-run insurances. (sb)

SYRIAN REFUGEE CHILDREN

Urgent need for action

The war in Syria is now in its eighth year, and children are permanently threatened by violence. Many of them had to flee their homes and are now living in southern Syria, Jordan or Lebanon. The conditions tend to be precarious.

By Dagmar Wolf

More than 5 million Syrians have fled their homeland, and half of them are children. According to UN figures, another 6 million people are on the run within Syria (also see article by Mona Naggar, p. 33). In February 2018, employees of the international aid organisation World Vision had the opportunity to interview over 1,200 Syrian refugee children aged 11 to 17 in southern Syria, Lebanon and Jordan about their current situation. The result is documented in the recently published study "Beyond survival".

The displaced children who are still in Syria have the most immediate fear of war, the report states. However, the conflict has dramatically changed all children's family circumstances and social environment. They tend to live in difficult conditions of poverty. They miss family members and friends who were previously part of their lives. Their future is uncertain.

A major problem for all the children surveyed was the cramped living situation. More than 70 % of children in southern Syria and Lebanon said they lived in the same room with at least three people, in Jordan even 80 % said so. Tense housing often leads to domestic violence. In both southern Syria and Lebanon, over 60 % of the children reported they were living in unsafe dwellings – for example without access to water or electricity or in damaged buildings. According to the report, more than half of all children had no access to health care. Every fifth refugee child in Lebanon and southern Syria does not get enough to eat.

Many of the children surveyed stated that they had to work in order to increase their family's income. Three out of five children interviewed in Lebanon did not go to school at all. According to the report, the situation was somewhat better in southern Syria and Jordan, where eight and 11 % respectively did not attend school.

In southern Syria, 99 % of the surveyed children suffered educational stress factors – be it violence at school or problems with teaching materials. In Lebanon the respective share was 86 %, in Jordan 52 %. Many of the children said they could not focus on homework because of the crowded housing situation. The children did not only complain about problems with the teaching materials. Especially in the southern regions of the country they reported physical punishment and severe verbal abuse at school. World Vision points out that the teachers are under considerable pressure themselves, and that also affects the classroom situation.

The children's stories in "Beyond Survival" describe the struggle they are exposed to. Such stress can lead to long-term mental problems such as post-traumatic stress syndrome, depression and anxiety. The stress factors must be addressed, World Vision demands. Otherwise, children will face long-term health problems such as heart disease, strokes, low resistance. Social concerns arise as well, including violence and lifelong poverty .

According to Wynn Flaten, head of Syria aid at World Vision, the goal is not only to ensure the bare survival of girls and boys, but rather to protect their childhood as such so that they can grow up to be physically and mentally healthy persons. World Vision appeals to everyone involved: the violence must end, the families must be supported and reunited. Psychosocial support programmes are urgently needed to enable children to develop the capacity for reconciliation and to build a better future for their country.

Syrian refugee children in the Awde refugee camp in Lebanon's eastern Bekaa province.

Photo: picture-alliance/dpa

EU

Managing African migration

How do authoritarian regimes respond to EU initiatives to stem migration? A recent publication by the German Institute for International and Security Affaires (SWP – Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik) demands that Europe adopt clear principles on funding and enforce red lines in regard to human rights.

By Monika Hellstern

Migration management has been high on European policymakers' agenda since 2015, as David Kipp and Anne Koch write in their introduction. The idea is increasingly to control and stem the flow of migrants outside the EU in order to ensure that refugees do not even arrive at European borders. According to Kipp and Koch, this trend towards "externalisation" is the lowest common denominator of EU migration policy.

The EU is forming so-called migration partnerships with countries of transit as well as origin. The partnerships involve cooperation on issues such as trade, security and development. The EU is not fulfilling old promises of facilitating legal migration options, but is increasingly using financial incentives, including in relations with authoritarian regimes. The authors point out that development cooperation is thus being subordinated to "fighting the causes of flight" and keeping migrants away. The EU

is ever more willing to cooperate with undemocratic governments, especially when it comes to security issues on European borders, the study states.

Authoritarian African governments respond in different ways to EU initiatives. The SWP team assessed matters in Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Niger, Sudan and Eritrea. The degree to which these countries are under dictatorial rule varies. In their conclusion, the SWP editors Anne Koch, Annette Weber and Isabelle Werenfels point out that some governments are proactive and want to shape migration policy, whereas others only respond to European proposals.

According to the study, an African government's stance depends on five distinct issues:

- state capacities and the quality of statehood in general,
- the relationship with European countries, which is typically marked by colonial history and liberation struggles,
- existing migration patterns,
- regional contexts, including conflicts, and
- prior experience of cooperation with the EU.

All countries considered have in common that their response to EU proposals is driven by concerns to stay in power and enhance the government's legitimacy, accord-

ing to the SWP. Typically, governments are more interested in international acknowledgement and the loosening of sanctions than in development funds. The editorial team concludes that European policymakers should heed their advice in five areas:

- Migration should be considered a complex international phenomenon, so European policies should take regional dynamics into account
- Mobility within world regions deserves support and must not be disrupted by restrictive border management.
- The EU needs a clear policy on funding to prevent that government misuse payments for repressive purposes.
- The governments of countries that depend on migrants' remittances are – and will continue to be – interested in legal options for migration.
- In regard to human rights, the EU should define and enforce red lines.

According to the publication, Morocco's government is pursuing a migration policy of its own and is interested in raising its international profile, whereas Egypt's is mostly reacting to European proposals and focusing on entrenching its power domestically. In contrast, the way Algeria and Eritrea respond to European initiatives is marked by scepticism towards cooperation. The editors argue that this is the result of anti-colonial struggles.

In the eyes of the SWP team, the response of Niger is neither strategic nor sceptical. As the regime is interested in both money and a better reputation, the EU is basically able to remote-control its policymaking. The scholars warn, however, that the measures promoted by the EU are disruptive and may trigger conflict. The reason is that, after migration boosted the regional economy, especially in the area around Agadez in Niger's north, border controls have more recently limited migration. As discontent grows, the mood may turn violent.

Migrants after departure from Agadez, Niger.

LINK
Koch, A., Weber, A., Werenfels, I., 2018: Migrationsprofiteure? Autoritäre Staaten in Afrika und das europäische Migrationsmanagement. (Profiting from migration? Authoritarian regimes in Africa and European migration management – only available in German)
https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/studien/2018S03_koc_web_wrf.pdf

Photo: picture alliance

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Preliminary evidence-gathering

The task of the International Criminal Court (ICC) is to prosecute serious crimes when national judicial systems fail to do so, for example, because of civil wars, dictatorships or similar reasons. Other international tribunals serve the same purpose. Success hinges on many issues.

By Timo Al-Farooq

The South African jurist Navanethem Pillay shields the ICC against criticism from prominent African leaders who accuse the court of being a tool of rich nations and focusing disproportionately on the African continent. Typically, the personal motives of these men are obvious: They have reason to fear the ICC (see D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2018/02, p. 15).

"Navi" Pillay – as she is affectionately known – vehemently rejects accusations of bias. She points out that the court has strong African backing and that most cases handled by the ICC were referred to it by African governments. Having served as a judge of the ICC as well as the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), Pillay has extensive personal experience with international criminal justice. She is best known for her tenure as UN High Commissioner for Human Rights from 2008 to 2014.

Many Africans are tired of impunity that autocrats and warlords enjoy, Pillay says. She emphasises that Africa has taken international judicial approaches, even without relying on the ICC. She cites the case of Hissène Habré, the former Chadian dictator. A special tribunal of the African Union tried him. In May 2016, he was sentenced to life imprisonment for rape and ordering the killings of ten thousands of people.

At the same time, Pillay regrets that the ICC's jurisdiction is limited. If a perpetrator is not from one of the Court's member states, or the crime was not committed in one of them, the ICC can only start proceedings under two conditions: either the UN Security Council gives it the mandate to do so, or the country in question accepts its jurisdiction without being a member. As Pillay explains, this is why the ICC is unable to respond to the war in Syria or Israel's actions in the Palestinian Gaza Strip.

Despite discord in the Security Council, the UN is not completely paralysed in regard to Syria however. In 2016, the General Assembly created the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism on Syria (IIIM), which collects evidence like a prosecutor. The evidence can eventually be used in legal proceedings.

The public is hardly aware of the IIIM, but its relevance must not be underestimated, says Michelle Jarvis, its deputy head.

Navi Pillay as High Commissioner for Human Rights during an official trip to South Sudan in 2014.

According to her, history proves that "preparatory work" is crucial. Collecting evidence after the fact was painstakingly difficult when international tribunals took up cases. According to Jarvis, preliminary documentation can make a difference.

During a panel discussion at Germany's Foreign Office in Berlin in May, Jarvis highlighted the relevance of international institutions working hand in hand with national authorities. In her eyes, the UN International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) is a case in point. Its evidence gathering would have been less successful without the help of local-level prosecutors who significantly contributed to the collection of over 9 million pages of documents.

David Tolbert is the former head of the non-governmental International Center for Transitional Justice in New York. He knows that international criminal justice is difficult to bring about. In order to successfully prosecute high-ranking military officers, one needs an enormous amount of evidence, he says. Further exacerbating the difficulties are "immense organisational challenges", including issues of security, funding and language.

In order to achieve reconciliation and lasting peace within society, other things matter beyond the prosecution of crimes, Tolbert says. In Colombia, for example, Tolbert considers peace a "long-term, intergenerational process" after decades of civil war. The peace treaty agreed by the government and the left-wing rebel group FARC is just a starting point.

Navi Pillay similarly sees a need for action beyond ensuring an end to impunity. "No developing country produces arms," she says, so without arms exports to crisis countries, conflicts could not escalate the way they do.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Perceptions of "the west"

Germans tend to think that their Federal Government's spending on official development assistance (ODA) is an expression of international solidarity and most generous, and some even argue it is overly generous. The situation is similar in other European countries. Citizens of developing countries and emerging markets, however, tend to see things in a rather different light.

By Hans Dembowski

When Emma Leonard, a scholar from the University of Namibia, is asked what she thinks of "the west", her country's special relationship to Germany comes to her mind. It is not an easy relationship. Leonard reports that Namibia gets substantial German ODA, but that this is a consequence of co-

Copper mine in the DR Congo.

lonial history. Leonard points out that German troops committed genocide in the early 20th century, killing "50 % of the Nama people and 80 % of the Herero people". Today, Namibia's government decides what is done with German ODA, while the descendants of the two ethnic communities' survivors have not been compensated.

For the years 2016 and 2017, Germany earmarked € 72 million of ODA for Namibia, according to the BMZ (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development). The Namibian government appreciates the relationship with Germany, according to Leonard, but members of the Nama and Herero are suing Germany in the USA, demanding compensations (see D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2017/11, p. 28). Making matters even more complicated, most black Namibians are poor and landless, whereas major landholdings belong to people of German descent (see D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2017/07, p. 29). Leonard explains that today's Nama and Herero need money to buy back land.

Khadija Mounia of Femmes du Sud, a Moroccan non-governmental organisation, says that women in her country are exploited by what she calls "economic colonialism". Investors from countries like Germany, Italy and Britain have bought big farms and employ workers seasonally, she reports. Many women and even underage girls of 14 or 15 years earn less than €6 per day, Mounia says. According to her, they live in make-

shift camps without proper shelter near the farms, lacking any kind of social protection and being denied their rights. All too often, there are no written contracts. Some are forced to earn additional money as sex workers, the women's rights activist states.

Many of the farm workers suffer asthma because they use agricultural chemicals without proper protection, and sometimes their babies are affected too. As Mounia elaborates, the employers do not inform the ignorant women of the risks, so they breast-feed their children without changing clothes. "Morocco does not benefit from the investments," is Mounia's conclusion, "the profits go to Europe."

Speaking at Frankfurt's University of Applied Sciences (UAS) in mid-May, Juliet Were, a Ugandan social-justice activist, told students that people in her country think that Germans "are very ignorant". She admonished them to "read widely" and become "knowledgeable of global affairs".

Were leads an organisation called Isis-WICCE which studies issues of gender, security and governance in countries like Burundi, South Sudan and Nepal. In her eyes, it is necessary "to question and challenge the manufacture and sales of arms" or, for example, "mining deals in the Democratic Republic of the Congo". Issues of migration and displacement are linked to unemployment and political instability, she warns. In her eyes, students movements and women's rights movements should unite to fight for justice and human rights everywhere.

Abha Bhaiya's stance is similar. She heads the non-governmental organisation Jagrigrameen in a mountain region of northern India. She says: "Our voices are not being heard by the northern power blocks." Mass poverty results from how land, resources and labour are appropriated, she argues.

The Ethiopian sociologist Sewnet Mekonnen Yineso teaches at the UAS in Frankfurt. He was surprised by the students' approach to studying corruption. They did not look in their own country for documented cases of graft that they might assess – they looked for cases in India. Indeed, many Germans believe business is clean and adheres to laws in their country, even though the international reputation of big corporations such as VW, Deutsche Bank or Siemens has suffered dramatically because of major international scandals.

Local seeds resist climate change better

In the late 1990s, scientists told farmers in Malawi to abandon their traditional crop varieties. The experts argued that the yield was too low. Moreover, up-to-date hybrid seeds were supposed to be more resistant to pests and diseases. Today, however, the same researchers are telling farmers to restore traditional crops. These landraces are better adapted to the increasingly volatile climate.

Norway is funding the "Local Seed Restoration Project" of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in Malawi. Hanne Blafjelldal, a high-ranking Norwegian government officer says: "The goal is to use local seeds, which are important in mitigating the effects of climate change." According to Kent Nnadozie of the FAO, "local seeds are more tolerant of weather shocks and the invasion of new pests". The traditional plant varieties also have nutritional advantages.

Malawi's Ministry of Agriculture supports the approach. It used to campaign against farmers growing local varieties. Accordingly, FAO officer Nnadozie now calls on those implementing the project "to respect the farmers by taking their views into consideration".

Ned Kapira is a local farmer from Karonga District in northern Malawi. He claims he "never believed in the hybrid seed". However, he adopted the new methods because everyone seemed to be abandoning the landraces. "Today we are being advised to plant local seeds because they withstand varying weather conditions," he wonders.

Karonga District is hard-hit by drought and other impacts of climate change. In the 2017/18 growing season, drought and pests like armyworms have devastated about 600,000 hectares of farmland. Entire harvests have been lost. Hybrid varieties were destroyed in particular.

Now researchers propose a more climate-change resilient kind of agriculture. They tell farmers to grow several different kinds of crops in one field, using local manure such as cow dung and crop residues as fertilisers. The purpose is to ensure that the field has enough moisture and does not dry up fast in drought conditions. Moreover, pests normally thrive on one particular plant variety and spread more slowly when cultivation is diversified.

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MALAWI

● Lilongwe

STEPMAP

ELECTIONS

Mexican power struggle

Andrés Manuel López Obrador, known by the acronym AMLO, is currently the front runner to win Mexico's presidential elections on 1 July. He is considered a polarising leftist leader.

By Virginia Mercado

This is the 3rd time that AMLO is running for president. The candidate of the party Morena (Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional) is 64 years old and his hair has long greyed. In all these years, he has not managed to become a good orator. He is prone to long breaks and suddenly raising his voice to emphasise one of his well-known catchphrases, which mostly bemoan "the Mafia of power" or express well-founded doubts about Mexico's electoral process.

His supporters are a colourful coalition. Some of them, including leftist intellectuals, artists and scholars, have always seen him as an advocate of the low- and medium-income masses. In recent times, his message has also been resonating among those who are disappointed in the current president and his predecessor, worrying that the country is stuck in a downward spiral of violence. Finally, there are the opportunists who always want to be on the side of the winner.

According to opinion polls, AMLO is currently more than 10 percentage points ahead of his closest rival Ricardo Anaya, the candidate of the right-wing party PAN. José Antonio Meade, whose party PRI is currently in power, is weighed down by President Enrique Peña Nieto's bad reputation which has suffered because of violence and corruption.

Critics argue that AMLO is a populist who does not deserve trust. It is true that he does not spell out how exactly he wants to deliver on his vast campaign in pledges in practical terms. In contrast to right-wing populists, like US President Donald Trump for example, however, he does not agitate against minorities. Moreover, he does not only attack elites rhetorically, but actually questions their privileged position.

This is not the first time that AMLO is leading in the polls. In 2006, he was the frontrunner too. Back then, the PAN promoted its candidate Felipe Calderón with advertising that likened the leftist leader to Hugo Chávez, then Venezuela's president. The Calderón campaign warned of potentially authoritarian and socialist governance which would hurt the economy. AMLO was declared to be "a danger for Mexico".

In the end, Calderón won the election, though how it was administered remained controversial. Huge rallies demanded a recount, but that didn't happen. AMLO himself was among the protesters. Once in office, Calderón deployed the military rather than only the police in the fight against drug gangs, and violence escalated terribly.

Twelve years and 234,000 violent deaths later, the people will vote again. This time it is mainly the PRI which is attacking López Obrador. However, the rhetoric of a "danger for Mexico" has become less credible in view of the violence that marks many people's daily lives, the growing number of disappeared persons and the shrinking space for civic engagement. The PRI is relying on other means too, linking social-protection programmes to conditions, for example, or buying votes, as allegedly happened in previous elections.

Perhaps the attacks on AMLO will succeed, but so far that is not evident – neither in opinion polls, nor on social media, nor in general public support. The Morena candidate has proven his strength several times. The most impressive example was perhaps the successful Twitter campaign #UniversitariosconAMLO (University people with AMLO) and recently #AMLOmania, where people are openly showing their support.

One of his most controversial proposals is an amnesty for certain groups of offenders – but many see it as an alternative approach to start rebuilding peace and tackling social degradation.

The established political forces are currently asking AMLO a highly relevant question: will he accept the election results if he loses? The way things look today, this is what Mexican voters may soon ask the establishment.

Disputed election results: protesters demanding a recount in Mexico City in 2006.

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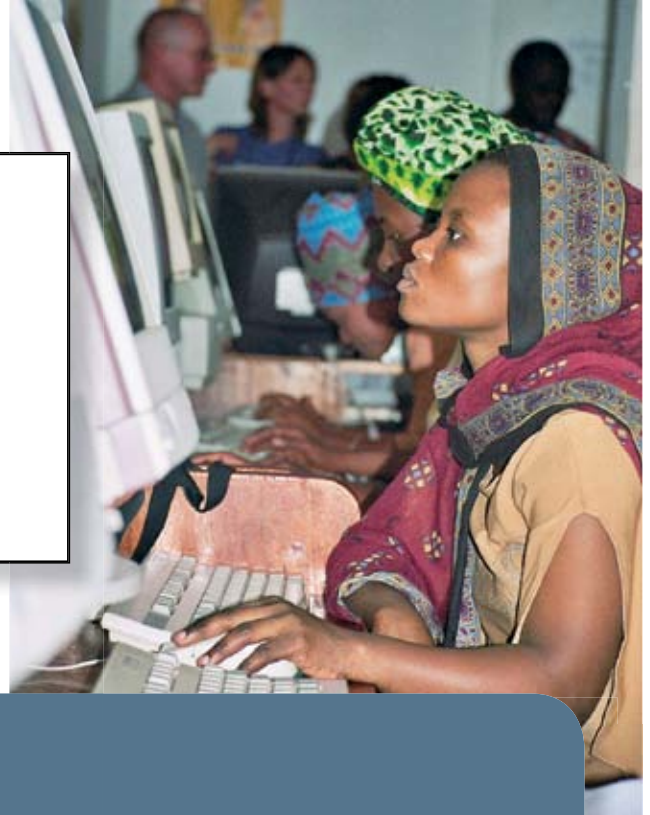*virmercado@yahoo.com.mx*
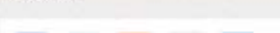
WAR REPORTING

Confidential contacts

War reporting is particularly challenging in terms of collecting and verifying information. Trustworthy sources are hard to come by and tend to be biased, so cross-checking is crucial.

By Gloria Laker Aciro

In Uganda, the military and the media have a good relationship. That has historical reasons. After failed peace talks to end the conflict with the rebel lord's resistance army (LRA), the military decided to work closely

War reporting tends to be one-sided. Soldiers of the Ugandan army in 2012.

with the media. It founded the radio station "Freedom Fm" and used it to broadcast messages to rebels and internally displaced people.

As a war reporter in those years, I relied to a great extent on information provided by soldiers. Journalists had no access to the rebels, and rebel collaborators tended to be contradictory and diversionary, so they could not be trusted. As a result, most reports were one-sided, reflecting only the army's point of view.

In order to be as fair and independent in my reports as possible, I developed confidential contacts with foot soldiers. They were the most credible news sources.

There is always reason to suspect that the information provided by the headquarters is manipulated for strategic reasons. Other relevant sources include internally displaced refugees and local leaders, including from churches or mosques, and community workers. Aid agencies were helpful too.

Sometimes, injured rebels in hospitals gave me information, and so did doctors who treated them. As a female war reporter, I had a special relationship with child soldiers: they saw a mother in me and trusted me with sensitive information. Being a woman helped me to interview victims of rape. With the spreading of radio and mobile phones, the rebels began to communicate through their spokespersons – but it was still difficult to verify their information.

Even with trustworthy contacts, it is crucial to cross-check facts before filing stories. Instead of hunting breaking news, war reporters must collaborate with other journalists to broaden coverage and balance news. In the LRA war, the media network provided factual counter-narratives. It helped to control bias, exaggeration and misreporting.

Good journalism reduces conflicts and promotes peace. By adhering to the princi-

ples of peace journalism and avoiding inflammatory language, for instance, war reporters can help to prevent media-induced violence. One should not reinforce stereotypes of "evil" enemies, but report reconciliation efforts and any attempts to stop violence and protect people. Despite the good relationship with the military, journalists in the Ugandan crisis faced intimidation and threats. Some were called "rebel collaborators". However, we stood our ground and reported independently. With time, the media became an important tool for stakeholders. I found out that, by including peace journalism in my work, I gained the trust of a growing audience.

Doing independent research in a war zone is dangerous, so personal safety needs consideration. One thing I did was to carry several copies of my identification card with me. I placed one copy in my bag, another one in my pocket and a third one in my inner-wear pocket. In case my bag was confiscated I still had the other copies – that may be a guarantee against torture in situations like night curfews. To protect my military informers I used nicknames.

In addition to that, my recommendations are:
- Never go for war stories alone. I made it a point to move with two or more journalists. We watched each others' back.
- Do not take photos of military installations and big bridges without authorisation.
- Share travel information with editors.
- Avoid wearing bright colours to the field – in case of an ambush you will be the first target.
- Lobby your media organisation for a bulletproof press jacket. If the military gives you one, wear a civilian shirt on top.
- Do your best to know several routes in and out of the places you go and be in touch with local leaders.

As a war reporter, I wore jeans and flat shoes to make running and climbing any means of transport easier. And I always carried my own water bottle to prevent people from offering me drinks.

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FORMATIVE YEARS

Privileged, yet stressed out

India's fast growing middle class is characterised by upwardly-mobile masses who live in urban settings or are moving there. Their aspirations are great – especially for their children.

By Roli Mahajan

Indian middle-class families are typically small. Both parents are busy with their careers, and the children often spend a lot of time with grandparents, if they live in the same city, or with hired help. Of course, creches are an option too.

"The early years are among the toughest," says Aarti Chibber who runs a creche in Delhi. "If a child comes to me at about 18 months they will stay with me till about five years of age when they start going to school full time." Many parents are a bit uncomfortable with this arrangement. One mother whose three-year-old daughter goes to Chibber's creche admits: "I feel guilty. In the evening, my husband and I try to keep up with her, but sometimes I know I give in to her demands because we are just too tired." She says she works up to 11 hours daily at an advertising agency and that her family needs the money, not least to invest in the child's future.

In India, the average number of children born to a woman over her lifetime has fallen to 2.2. There is a social divide however. Women from the lowest income groups have 3.2 children on average, and the figure for the richest is a mere 1.5.

"Where would one get the resources – time, money, energy – to bring up more than one child in today's world?", asks Ritu Singh, a Delhi-based designer and a mother of one. Her thinking is reflected in a random survey of 1,500 working mothers with single children. It was conducted in 10 cities by the Associated Chambers of Commerce in India. It states: "Job pressures and cost of raising children are key reasons why many mothers want to stop after their first child and decide not to add to their family."

Sonalde Desai, a researcher at the University of Maryland, says that this choice makes sense. Many women want a professional career, and earning money will allow them to spend more on their child's education. The kids are more likely to be enrolled in private schools – and more likely to do basic arithmetic by the time they turn 11.

Nonetheless, single-child households are a small subset of India's population. Most middle class families seem to want two children, preferably a boy and a girl. "Two children can be a handful," says Divya Gupta, a mother of two who runs a small bakery business from home.

"In today's context, when we don't even know our neighbours, a sibling helps fight boredom and loneliness."

Fast-paced lives, hectic schedules and the need to "make up" through consumer goods is typical of India's middle-class parents. The lives of their children, in turn, are marked by electronic gadgets, eating out with friends and minimal outdoor or physical activity. Private tuition matters as well, as the pressure to get good grades is great. Two problems haunt India's middle-class children: obesity and school stress. They are certainly privileged in many ways, but that does not mean their lives are easy.

According to a paper published in The New England Journal of Medicine, 14.4 million Indian children are overweight. Doctors say that the easy availability of calorie-dense food is a cause, but pedantic lifestyles and little outdoor activity matter too. Blistering heat and air pollution add to the problem (see my comment in D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2018/04, p. 12). Middle-class children tend to stay indoors in air-conditioned rooms. In the time they don't need for studying, they are entertained by TV, video games and smartphones.

There are not enough good schools for India's huge population. Middle-class children are generally conditioned to study hard and excel in class from a very young age. Parents want their kids to succeed in life and they know that a good education is essential. College admissions depend on class XII scores. Accordingly, 16 to 18 year old students face particular parental pressure.

When they fail to succeed, suicide may seem to be a way out. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), one student commits suicide in India every hour. Moreover, India is notorious for having one of the highest suicide rates in the world for youth aged 15 to 29, accounting for about one third of all suicides in the country.

Two-child families have become the norm in India.

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Photo: Philippe Lissac/GODONG/Lineair Fotoarchief

ELECTIONS

Fighting disinformation

Every day, social media spread so-called fake news, which include plain misinformation, misleading propaganda and brazen lies. In election times, online disinformation is especially destructive because it can trigger violent riots. Penplusbytes, an independent media organisation in Ghana, has found a way to detect and deflect disinformation on election night.

By Kwami Ahiabenu II

Journalists are often not well prepared to deal with the challenges of social media. This applies especially to propaganda which is disguised as news. Since elections have all too often sparked mass violence in African countries, disinformation is especially dangerous immediately before, during and after elections.

To stem the danger, Penplusbytes established the African Elections Project in 2008. Penplusbytes is a civil-society organisation (see box next page). It has so far been involved in election coverage in Cote d'Ivoire, Niger, Ghana, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Mauritania, Botswana, Togo, Guinea and Liberia. The African Elections Project helps to consolidate democracy by using the web and social media and spreading reliable information concerning elections.

The building blocks for this project include:
- training for senior editors, journalists and reporters,
- use of text messaging in coverage and monitoring,
- an election guide for the media,
- establishment of trustworthy online portals,
- promotion of knowledge management (with approaches like lessons learned, challenges, key success factors et cetera) and
- media monitoring.

Media monitoring is particularly important. Relevant methods include:
- the mapping of electoral incidents,
- early warning in case of dangerous developments and
- real-time monitoring by use of up-to-date applications.

THE SOCIAL MEDIA TRACKING CENTRE

The monitoring of mainstream media (TV, radio, newspapers) has become the general norm in Africa. However, social media trends are harder to track and must be taken into account too. Penplusbytes therefore developed what it calls the Social Media Tracking Centre (SMTC).

The first SMTC was deployed during Ghana's 2012 elections. The idea is to identify electoral malpractices in real time, using such information to warn the relevant institutions. In Ghana, Penplusbytes passed relevant information on to the National Elections Security Task Force (NESTF) – and this body acted on it.

SMTC teams monitor platforms like Twitter, Facebook et cetera. They use the Aggie social media tracking software, which was developed at the Georgia Institute of Technology in the USA. Aggie software allows the assessment of trends grouped around topics like voting logistics, violence, political parties et cetera. All social media content that comes in is subjected to keywords categorising accordingly. For example, "fighting at polling station" is categorised as "violence".

The SMTC approach requires three teams. The first is the "tracking team" which monitors what is going on. It passes all relevant items on to the "verification team", which must check whether the information is correct or not. Once that is done, the "escalation team" informs stakeholders. It is not only important to warn of real events; informing them of news being fake matters too, since authorities can also be misled.

The fact-checking process is quite challenging. First of all, the verification teams check what "trusted sources" are saying about the content concerned. These sources have been followed for quite some time, and their reliability has thus been tested. Moreover, the team typically is in regular contact with these sources.

Other issues are considered as well. They include the authority of content generators, their possible motives as well as who – and how many others – are sharing the content. These things give fact-checkers important clues. If a post comes from someone with an obvious bias this will raise a red flag, of course. The source, moreover, will be considered less trustworthy henceforth.

In Ghana, the SMTC relied on tech-savvy youths from the country's institutions of higher learning. Once relevant content was confirmed to be either true or false, a rapid electoral incident report was shared with various stakeholders, including the NESTF.

The Social Media Tracking Centre received 297,660 incoming reports from Facebook, RSS Feeds, Twitter, SMS and WhatsApp. On average, there were 70 reports per minute. Thirty-nine per cent of verified incidents related to polling logistics like delayed voting, missing ballot papers or failures in biometric verification devices. On the other hand, 18 allegations of misconduct, violence and fraud turned out to be misinformation.

In Ghana, the SMTC effort was supported by Deutsche Welle Akademie from Germany and the National Endowment from Democracy from the USA. Apart from the NESTF, the National Electoral Commission, the Coalition of Domestic Electoral
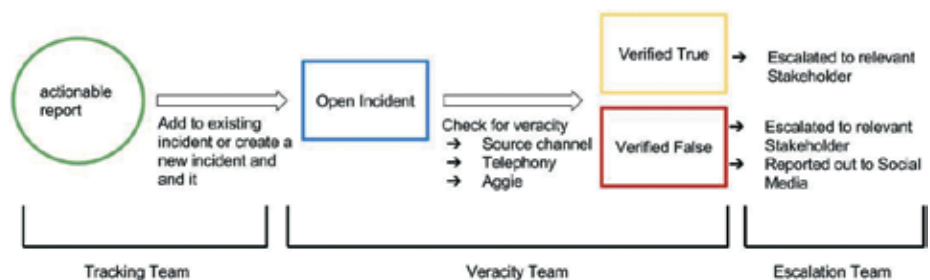
Work flow of Social Media Tracking Centre (SMTC).

Observers and the security forces were informed by the SMTC in real time. SMTC team members were embedded at such stakeholders' control centres moreover.

According to all sides involved, the approach proved useful. James Afedo, communications manager at the Ghana Electoral Commission, said: "We are elated that we worked with Penplusbytes in the elections. The Social Media Tracking Centre enabled us to use the citizens as our eyes on the ground in monitoring the electoral process. We used the reports as a way of resolving issues that cropped up during voting which were reported by citizens on social media." Kingston Tagoe, an IT entrepreneur and SMTC supervisor, said: "The SMTC ensures transparent and peaceful elections, and we are excited to play a role to make this possible."

In order for the team members and selected journalists to acquire more knowledge and skills about how to deal with fake news, Penplusbytes organised a series of trainings both in Accra, the national capital, and Kumasi, the regional capital of the Ashanti region. Moreover, Penplusbytes cooperated with the EIB network, which runs radio and TV stations as well as websites.

CONCLUSION

Combating fake news is tricky, since one is confronted with challenges of time, must decipher a huge volume of data and should detect the original source of an issue. Penplusbytes deployed SMTC to help in detect-

Social Media Tracking Centre team members in Accra, Ghana.

ing incidents of fake news online surrounding the elections.

There are strong indications that the rise of fake news, online propaganda and misinformation is not going to stop over night. The prediction is that this challenge is growing in size and complexity, fuelled not only by humans but by online bots (computer programmes that perform automatic tasks). It is a race against time to develop strategies both at the technology and human systems level, coupled with greater media and information literacy education that can help stem its flow. The SMTC is an approach that helps to safe-

guard election processes in this challenging context.

LINKS
Penplusbytes:
http://penplusbytes.org/
African Elections Project:
http://www.africanelections.org/

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Photo: Penplusbytes

Democratic empowerment

In order to help African media houses to cope with digital technologies, Penplusbytes was established 17 years ago. It is a non-governmental organisation (NGO). Among other things, it provides skills training for journalists and other media practitioners.

Currently, Penplusbytes is promoting better governance in Africa by using information

technology (IT) in three thematic areas:
• new media and innovations,
• use of new digital technologies in pursuit of citizens' empowerment,
• ensuring greater oversight over the extractive sector (mining, oil and gas).

Penplusbytes' core mission is to enable citizens to

participate in public affairs. IT should serve this purpose. This NGO has worked in more than 15 African countries so far. The database of alumni has more than 1,500 reporters and media practitioners from 24 countries across Africa. The head office is in Accra, Ghana, and there are branch offices in Lagos, Nigeria, and Cotonou, Benin.

Internationally, disinformation has become a common phenomenon that reduces public confidence in the media and augments civic apathy. At

the same time, digital technology is eroding the revenues and influence of traditional media. Conventional business models are collapsing.

To stay well informed, citizens need to understand digitised media and their business model. In other words, media literacy requires ever more knowledge. Any attempt to fight fake news is welcome, especially if it helps citizens navigate this complex environment with critical analytical skills. (ka)

BUSINESS ACTIVITY

Surveys with potential

German Chambers of Commerce and Industry regularly publish assessments of the business climate. These reports are based on representative surveys of member companies and serve as an important source of information for businesses, policymakers and government agencies. In developing countries, where many businesses are informal, however, the situation is completely different. Chambers typically have far fewer members and limited resources. Nonetheless, meaningful business reporting can be introduced, as the example of Ghana shows.

By Michael Konow

In the fourth quarter of 2017, 40 % of the businesses that were surveyed in Ghana's Western Region reported that their current business situation was "good", and 39.5 % considered it "satisfactory". Over 70 % expected business conditions to improve for their own enterprise in the next six months. These are results of the business-condition survey conducted by the Sekondi-Takoradi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (STCCI).

Sekondi-Takoradi is the capital of the Western Region. With around 340,000 residents, it is also the third-largest city in Ghana. The business-condition report was based on the responses of about 150 entrepreneurs. It mirrored positive expectations expressed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which had predicted that Ghana's gross domestic product will grow by 8.9 % in 2018. That would be the world's second-highest growth rate.

"Our quarterly Business Condition Survey is meant to provide our member firms and other businesses with relevant, reliable and easy to understand data so they can plan and forecast," says Ato Van Ess, the president of the STCCI. In particular, the target group is the region's small and medium-sized enterprises. According to Van Ess, the surveys help companies to understand how they compare to their competitors. "They enable businesses to draw a pattern of economic factors so they can build shock

STCCI employees Abigail Asante (r.) and Aidoo Atta Panyin collect data for the business-condition report in the Western Region of Ghana.

Photo: STCCI Ghana

absorbers to cope with negative trends or take advantage of positive ones," Van Ess explains. The surveys also offer investors and entrepreneurs insights into whether it makes sense to enter the Sekondi-Takoradi market.

The STCCI currently represents about 320 members. Its business-climate surveys have become its unique selling point in Ghana. Policymakers, government agencies, the media and civil society increasingly consider the chamber a reliable representative of the business community. "The survey is fast becoming a reference document for many institutions in the Western Region," says Vincent Annan, the chamber's chief executive officer. He reports that the STCCI uses the survey results to advocate for a better economic environment, for example, in terms of better access to loans. Indeed, every fourth company still considers limited access to borrowed capital the biggest risk to its future. The first international companies with a local presence in Western Ghana have recently joined the chamber, and STCCI officials reckon that the business-climate report was one of the reasons.

MANY CHALLENGES

It is challenging to compile the quarterly reports. Collecting and evaluating the raw data is particularly difficult because, so far, every participating enterprise has to be contacted in person. This is the only way to ensure that the questionnaires are filled out

and returned. Moreover, the STCCI would like to survey entrepreneurs in Western Ghana's more remote areas, but it lacks the necessary time and money. It also cannot reach out to entrepreneurs who only speak one of the many local languages. The surveys are written in English, Ghana's official language.

Even though the interviewers present their business cards and have chamber-of-commerce credentials, some entrepreneurs are unwilling to participate in the survey. They are afraid of sharing company data with a stranger. Some businesspeople would also prefer to freeload than actually take part: why should they voluntarily participate in the survey and waste precious time when other companies have already done so and the report can be downloaded for free from the STCCI website?

Nonetheless, positive experiences outweigh the negative ones, say Abigail Asante and Aidoo Atta Panyin, who are responsible for data collection. According to them, "most entrepreneurs are encouraged to take part in the survey because they see the relevance for their companies".

The growing appreciation of the STCCI business-climate reports increases the likelihood that the surveys will be completed online and automatically evaluated with the help of software solutions at some point in the future. That would allow more companies to be reached and the results would thus become even more reliable. One day, the STCCI may even be able to

make money with the reports. Where official databases are weak, business-climate data might be sold to ministries, local administrations and central banks, or to international organisations and larger companies.

An interesting question is whether all chambers of commerce and similar business associations in developing countries can run business-climate surveys of this kind. Torsten König, who heads the Business Activity and Statistics department at the Hamburg Chamber of Commerce, helped the STCCI to introduce the reports. He is convinced that business-climate surveys work in every country in the world: "Almost every entrepreneur, from the CEO of an international corporation to a market woman in Takoradi, can answer at least the first question: 'Is the business situation of your company good, satisfactory or bad?'" That is a good starting point.

LINK
Sekondi-Takoradi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (STCCI):
http://www.sekonditakoradichamber.org

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Support for chambers and business associations

The Chambers and Associations Partnership Programme (KVP) of Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) mobilises the experience and expertise of German entrepreneurs for development cooperation. It promotes direct cooperation of non-state

actors in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity. The programme is managed by sequa, a private-sector agency. After carrying out KVP projects in Madagascar and Tunisia, the Hamburg Chamber of Commerce started cooperating with the Sekondi-Takoradi Chamber of Commerce and

Industry (STCCI) in Western Ghana in the summer of 2015. The goal of the project is to improve the regional business climate.

The STCCI organisation will be improved so it can function well in the long run, with members and other companies enjoying the support of attrac-

tive services. There are several examples for such services, including:

● the annual organisation of the Ghana Extractive Industry Safety Conference,

● dispute resolution and mediation services,

● a learning centre for occupational health and safety and

● the quarterly business climate report (see main story). (mk)

PUBLIC DISCOURSE

Indispensable quality journalism

Democracy cannot survive in a post-truth environment. To protect a fact-based political culture, measures must be taken in several areas. The standards of quality journalism matter, and the public should be aware of what they are.

By Hans Dembowski

In March, a high-level expert group (HLEG) on fake news and online disinformation published sensible and well-considered recommendations on behalf of the European Commission. Its report deserves international attention.

The HLEG rejects the popular term "fake news" because leaders with authoritarian leanings use it to discredit any news they dislike. In the experts' eyes, the term "disinformation" is better to designate "all forms of false, inaccurate or misleading information designed, presented and promoted to intentionally cause public harm or for profit".

Disinformation causes damage, but it is not necessarily illegal. The challenge is to restrict it without curtailing the fundamental freedom of expression. For this to happen, the HLEG proposes a multi-dimensional approach which would rest on the following "five pillars":
- enhanced transparency of how – and to whom – online news is distributed,
- the promotion of media literacy, so users better understand the media environment,
- innovative tools to empower users and journalists to use fast-evolving information technology competently,
- safeguarding the diversity and sustainability of Europe's media ecosystem and
- systematic research on the impacts of disinformation and effective responses.

As the HLEG convincingly elaborates, keeping disinformation in check concerns society as a whole. The job must not be left to government institutions. As the HLEG points out, "not all European politicians and public authorities share the same level of respect for media freedom" and some political actors are "purveyors of disinformation". Foreign actors, moreover, may want to interfere in European politics.

An important first step, in the experts' eyes, is to get media stakeholders – ranging from the press and broadcasters to fact checkers and the advertising industry – to draft and adopt a European code of practices that would define roles and responsibilities. The HLEG wants digital media to provide all information users need to understand who is disseminating the news. Sponsored content should be identifiable, and users deserve information on advertising policies. According to the HLEG, they should be told about funding, algorithms and robots. Finally, platforms should facilitate fact-checking, offering links to trust-worthy fact-checking sites and flagging dubious content.

According to the HLEG, it is essential to boost media literacy. To detect disinformation, users must be aware of how media operate. They should understand what constitutes best practices and why errors may occur nonetheless. At the same time, independent, fact-based journalism must be encouraged, especially if it challenges

Supporters of Russian President Vladimir Putin before re-election in March – he was the only viable candidate.

Photo: Korotayev Artyom/picture-alliance/dpa

well-established powers. Schools and other institutions should promote media literacy. On top of all this, the HLEG demands that professional journalists get advanced training so they stay abreast of digital developments.

The EU experts acknowledge that the conventional media – in particular the press – are in crisis because the internet has made news freely available and thus undermined long-established business models. The HLEG is in favour of public funding for projects that support quality journalism. One option is tax breaks for quality media.

Finally, the expert group wants the EU and its member states to establish a network of independent academic research centres that focus on disinformation. Among other things, it would:

● monitor the scale, techniques and tools of disinformation as they evolve,
● identify sources of disinformation and
● share knowledge with all stakeholders.

The proposals are coherent and indicate a way in which Europe can stem the tide of disinformation. The snag is that this approach depends on a sufficient number of stakeholders cooperating. Unfortunately, some media outlets support irresponsible populists and spread disinformation accordingly. They must be named and shamed.

In principle, the approach proposed by the experts should work everywhere. As the authors acknowledge, however, it matters that the EU is a highly developed world region with strong infrastructure, good education and vibrant civil societies. It is probably harder to promote media literacy in places where literacy itself cannot be taken for granted. Encouraging independent fact-checking in places where freedom of speech is not a long-accepted norm is probably more difficult too.

POST-TRUTH SOCIETY

How disturbing life in a post-truth setting can become, is the topic of Peter Pomerantsev's book "Nothing is true and everything is possible". The stories he tells seem so crude they seem like fiction, but if one googles the names of persons and places it turns out that there is some substance to them. Pomerantsev is a British TV journalist of Russian descent. He spent a decade working in Moscow.

His book is a personal memoir. As a reporter, he dealt with a great variety of people, including gangsters, business people, public servants, civil-society activists and fashion models. Sometimes, such roles blend into one another. Pomerantsev paints the picture of a society in which might makes right. Connections matter, the truth does not. News is always manipulated some way or another.

Pomerantsev makes it quite clear that the government does not necessarily want people to believe its propaganda. The point is that "if they can lie so much and get away with it", it means "that they have real power, the power to define what is true and what isn't". One of Pomerantev's conclusions is: "If all motives are corrupt and no one is to be trusted, doesn't that mean that some dark hand must be behind everything?"

NOBODY IS SAFE

A particularly striking episode is about Yana Yakovleva, a businesswoman who is arrested one day, taken to jail and accused of selling illegal drugs. The charge is absurd, but her case drags on and she stays behind bars. It becomes clear that she is a victim of a feud within the secret service. One leader wants to set an intimidating example by getting her sentenced, while another one feels such a development would hurt his interests. In the end, the women comes free because the latter turns out to be closer to the president. Her example shows that even successful business leaders cannot rely on the rule of law. Nobody is safe. Those who enjoy protection today, may fall out of favour tomorrow.

The final chapter describes a society in which patriotism is becoming increasingly aggressive. The government promotes a sense of paranoia, whilst promising to restore national greatness. The military is celebrated and violence is considered normal. Anyone who dissents can fast be cast as an enemy.

In the foreword to the 2017 edition, Pomerantsev worries that the Russian example may prove paradigmatic. It worries him that "a reality-show star has captured the presidency" in the USA, substituting "politics with entertainment".

The situation might be less worrisome had the established media in the USA

done a better job. Donald Trump benefited from what observers now call "false equivalence": American journalists' propensity to give "both sides" in a political controversy equal credit. As early as 2001, Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, published a book that challenged this attitude. In "The elements of journalism" they outline an agenda to shore up professional standards. They point out that the purpose of journalism is "to provide people with the information they need to be free and self-governing". Accordingly, they argue:

1. Journalism's first obligation is to the truth.

2. Its first loyalty is to citizens.

3. Its essence is a discipline of verification.

4. Its practitioners must maintain independence from those they cover.

5. It must serve as an independent monitor of power.

6. It must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise.

7. It must strive to make the significant interesting and relevant.

8. It must keep the news comprehensive and in proportion.

9. Its practitioners have an obligation to exercise their personal conscience.

10. Citizens too have rights and responsibilities when it comes to the news.

What these principles imply, is spelled out chapter by chapter. Media workers who want to do their job in a spirit of responsibility are well advised to consider the demands that Kovach and Rosenstiel raise. Their book is of lasting relevance. It is probably even more important today than when it was first published in 2001. Disinformation has increased all over the world – to the benefit of irresponsible politicians.

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Skills training for volunteers run
by medico international in Nepal.

Humanitarian aid

Natural disasters and war put people in danger.
Humanitarian agencies' mission is to save lives.
They operate in challenging conditions, and their
staff members run serious personal risks. In many
cases, their action can contribute to bringing
about long-term development. Experts disagree
on whether – and to what extent – driving change
belongs to an agency's duties or whether that only
distracts from the top priority of rescuing people.
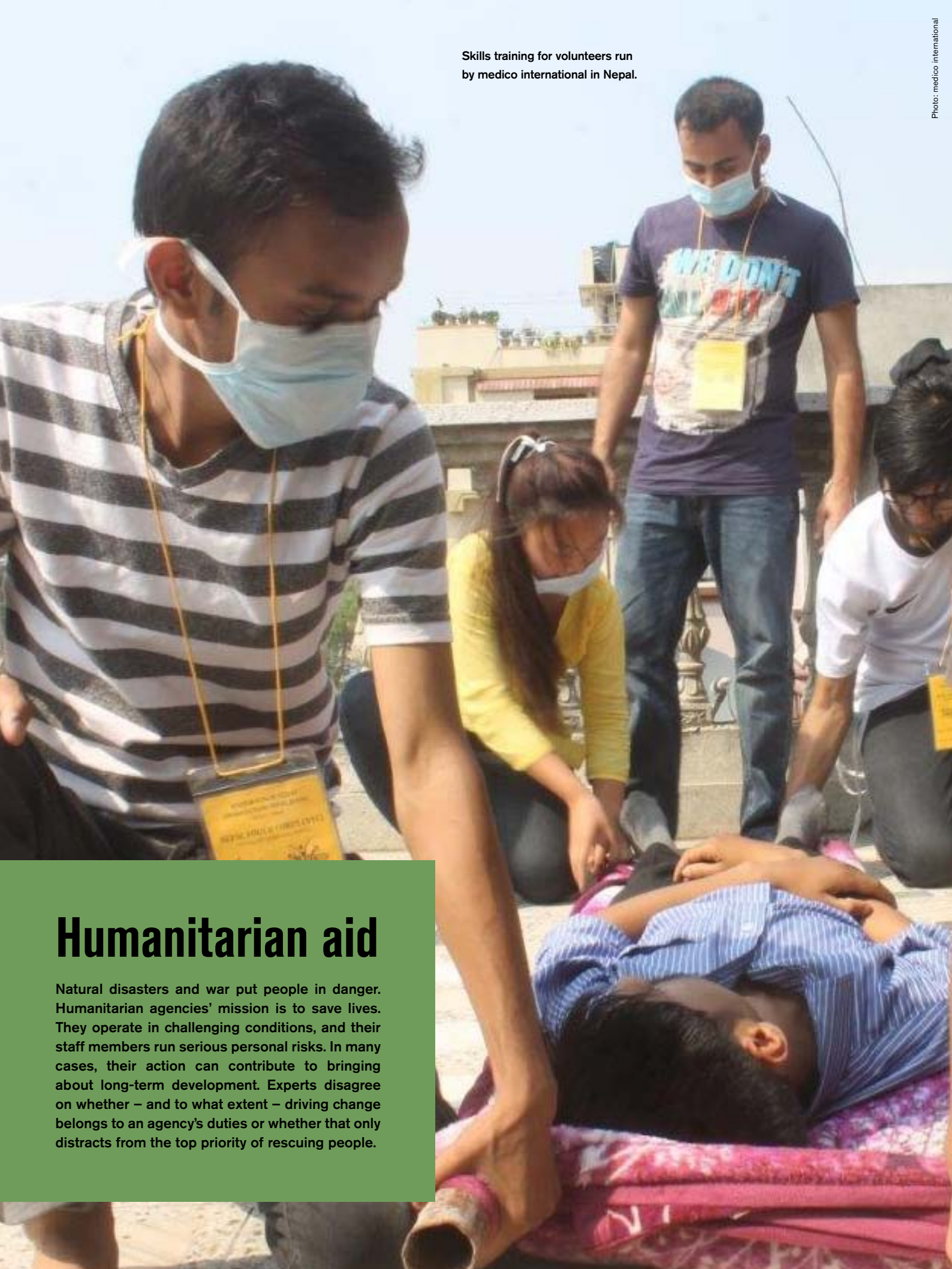
"I am passionate about humanitarian work"

Philip Aruna joined the humanitarian organisation Doctors without Borders (Médecins sans Frontières – MSF) in 1996. He has worked in his home country Sierra Leone and many other places. As Aruna can tell from his own experience, humanitarian work is risky for the helpers.

Philip Aruna interviewed by Katja Dombrowski

You have worked in many crisis regions. Does your work involve personal risks?
Oh yes. I joined MSF in 1996 when there was civil war in Sierra Leone. We often experienced crossfire. I was directly attacked several times and had to hide myself not to get killed. My posting as head of mission in Kabul, Afghanistan, in 2015 was also very challenging. And in the Somali region of Ethiopia, I have been confronted with many attempts of kidnapping along the Somalia border. Sometimes, we were kept for hours at checkpoints without knowing why and what was going to happen. The situation in 2013 in South Sudan after the political crisis between President Salva Kiir and Vice President Riek Machar was very concerning too. So the risks are part of the job.

How do cope with these experiences?
Well, when you are in the situation, you don't realise the danger immediately. Only when you are out, you do. Sometimes you have to get away to survive. At MSF, we have different mechanisms in place. First there is training. We learn what to do in case of different emergency situations – such as gun fire, kidnapping et cetera. That is crucial because if you do the wrong thing, it can be very dangerous. After any critical incident, we withdraw affected staff. Our social units take care of them, offer counselling and try to find out what they need. There are always several options. Some people get evacuated after a critical incident, some get treated at the headquarters or somewhere else, others just need some time to rest. Anyway, who-ever doesn't feel confident anymore is free to go back home.

As a matter of principle, humanitarian agencies do not take sides, but do their best to help suffering persons. Do you always manage to be seen as neutral?
The humanitarian landscape is becoming more and more blurry. Today, even perpetrators pretend to be humanitarian helpers. Access to crisis regions is granted at different fronts, for instance through the government or local authorities, by people with arms or ordinary local people. In some cases, local authorities are party to a conflict, and they might present you as a partner. So we try to clearly communicate our mandate. That is sometimes very difficult, especially in times of social media. People tend to see you as biased. Previously, it was easy, but it is getting ever more difficult.

What do you do to keep people aware of your neutrality?
It's a continuous process of communication with all parties to the conflict, all persons involved in our work, all stakeholders. We tell them why we are here, what we are doing and why we are doing it. Medical action is based on medical needs. It is not politically controlled, and we don't want to be linked to any group that is party to the conflict. Everybody must know: MSF is neutral and independent. We really do our best to stick to that mandate.

We have talked about political dimensions and violence – but how about health risks for humanitarian workers? How big are they?
We are always confronted with challenges of that kind. There is a constant risk you might be exposed to deadly diseases like Ebola or Lassa fever. Malaria is endemic in many places, so people do get exposed to it. Some people end up going home due to infections. However, at MSF we try to do as much as we can for prevention and to know the health situation in places we work. But sometimes it's difficult. People go from one place to the other, and an infectious disease may manifest itself in a new location where it hasn't been before. So we are constantly monitoring such scenarios.

It seems like your staff must be prepared to take a whole range of risks. Do you know of any people who quit working for MSF because of bad experiences?
Of course I do. For example, in 2013, two female MSF workers were kidnapped in Kenya and held in Somalia for 21 months. When they were released, it was too much for them. We often have that kind of discussion: can we go on or not? I myself had a friend who was shot dead in Somalia. So for me it would be very difficult to work there again. I'm not saying I wouldn't go there at all. But it's obviously not my first choice. Not because of the danger. But because my friend's killing will always come back to me, like a reflection.

What is you personal motivation to keep working in dangerous environments to help other people?
That's a good question. When I go home after being exposed to a critical situation my first reaction is: "I have to stop!" But then I realise that my input is really positive, that I am saving lives. I joined MSF when I was very young. I passed through many bad situations. But you know, we are providing life-saving intervention on the spot, and I am part of this. That's a big reward. People come to me and say "thank you for being here, thank you for helping". That gives me motivation. I am passionate about the humanitarian part of my work.

After postings for MSF in many countries, you now head the mission in Nigeria. What are you doing there?
In Nigeria, we have been active in the north-western part of the country for the past ten years. For instance, we respond to outbreaks of diseases such as measles, meningitis or cholera. In Sokoto State, we support a public hospital for Noma patients. Noma is an infection that leads to severe disfigurement of the face. We bring in expatriates to do surgery four times a year, and we support the Ministry of Health to raise awareness for the disease. In a general hospital in Zafara State we have a paediatric ward where we provide

medical care for children up to the age of 12. Another project concerns lead poisoning which occurs due to very rudimentary local mining methods in the States of Zamfara and Niger. We are also active in central Nigeria, where land conflicts frequently cause displacement, and we are supporting five camps for internally displaces persons (IDPs) in Benue State. Because of the conflict in Cameroon, Nigeria gets refugees from there too. And then there is irregular migration from Nigeria to Europe. Most of these people come from Edo State, and we are now looking into the reasons for them to leave and what their needs are. MSF has different sections, by the way, and our mission in Nigeria reports to the Operational Centre Amsterdam. It provides emergency medical assistance to people in danger in more than 60 countries.

That sounds like a wide range of projects. How big is the team?

The number of staff varies. Currently our team has about 300 national employees and 35 expatriates.

Do the local people appreciate your intervention?

We have to distinguish between the different parties that are concerned. The direct beneficiaries really appreciate what we do. The needs are so acute, and we are more or less the only ones in certain areas that have the capacities to tackle the people's health problems. The authorities also generally appreciate our work. But each time there are changes in our projects, we have to inform the stakeholders. Communication is crucial, but it's not always easy to do, so there might be some deficits.

Does terrorism by Boko Haram affect your projects in northern Nigeria?

In the northwest, terrorism is not an issue. But in 2016 and 2017 we were working in the north-eastern part of the country, and there has been a lot of terrorism activity that affected the population. There is no frontline. But the local people have been put into a sort of enclave where they are protected by the military. That is the only area where aid workers are allowed to work. Outside, you always have to be aware of landmines or road attacks. It can be very serious. We withdrew from there – but not because of the dangers involved but because many actors are present in that region. So we decided to hand our projects over to other organisations such as International Medical Corps and Oxfam.

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http://www.msf.org/en/where-we-work/nigeria

MSF doctors operate a six-year-old child to reconstruct a hole in his jaw and damage to his eye, caused by Noma, at the Children's Hospital in Sokoto State, northwest Nigeria.

Why the nexus is dangerous

Humanitarian discourse is moving further and further away from reality. Integrating humanitarian aid, development and peace does not work. Humanitarian aid must focus on the principle mission of saving lives.

By Sid Johann Peruvemba

Over 80 % of humanitarian aid is delivered during wars and conflicts. These situations are politically complex. There tends to be too much of almost everything: too many parties involved, too many conflict dynamics and too much external interference. Syria is an example. Thanks to Russian and Iranian support, the Assad regime has basically won the war militarily after more than seven years. Nonetheless, the conflict has not been politically resolved, and deathly silence goes along with a lasting humanitarian crisis. Similarly complex situations mark a number of other countries, including Yemen, South Sudan or the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

From a humanitarian perspective, the situation is easier to assess: too many people are dying and too many are underserved. It is part of the humanitarian routine to ponder how aid can be improved.

The World Humanitarian Summit of 2016 provided several answers. One was improved cooperation between the actors involved in matters of humanitarian aid, development and peace. In one word, this approach is called the "nexus". It sounds good, but humanitarian agencies should be on guard.

WHAT DOES HUMANITARIAN AID MEAN TODAY?

Up to the end of the 20th century, humanitarian aid was shaped by the logic of charitableness and giving. Interfaith charity was a guiding theme. Aid programmes addressed symptoms, not causes. They saved lives. No more, no less.

However, the logic of compassion changed at the beginning of the 21st century. The shift was prompted not only by frustration with the recurring need for aid and with the same one-year programmes carried out twenty times in a row in the same countries. A new way of thinking emerged. In the future, humanitarian aid would be more rights-based. "Victims" would be considered "rights holders". Humanitarian aid would take on additional issues like

Malteser International supports health clinics in refugee camps for Rohingya in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

Photo: Malteser International

strengthening local groups, enforcing rights and pursuing a general agenda of solidarity.

The effectiveness requirements have become so demanding that they can no longer be met solely by fulfilling the principle mandate of humanitarian aid. Since the late 1980s, an approach of linking rehabilitation and development (LRRD) has been discussed, and interest in it has grown again. As is true of the "nexus", the idea is to link short-term emergency relief to long-term development efforts.

The LRRD approach, however, has caused collateral damage in the gradual erosion of humanitarian principles like impartiality, independence and neutrality. In parts, the LRRD approach strives to achieve systematic change, and this does not fit to the basic humanitarian approach which for good reasons was free from long-term thinking. Over time, long-term considerations have won the upper hand over the real priority, which is to save lives fast.

Humanitarian agencies, moreover, have come under increasing pressure to justify themselves. A culture of trust has been replaced by one of control. The results are greater complexity and a tendency to help only where it is "easy".

TOO MUCH COMPLEXITY

The World Humanitarian Summit took place in 2016. It was overshadowed by a number of disasters for which a political solution is still not in sight. The Summit reinforced the debate on linking humanitarian aid and development efforts, and even expanded the notion to include "peace". Instead of a double nexus, we are now considering a triple nexus. The idea is to fight the silo mentality and corresponding behaviour of various agencies by taking an approach geared to ending crises rather than staying stuck in recurrent cycles of humanitarian aid. Fragile states and conflict countries are emphasised in particular.

The logic is as follows: development promotes peace, and humanitarian aid can promote development. Therefore, development cooperation, humanitarian aid and peace efforts should be closely linked in order to maximise synergies. Donors and multilateral organisations are expected to commit to effective coordination mechanisms and establish new methods for various actors to cooperate.

At first glance, this theory of salvaging humanitarian aid looks good. For practical reasons, however, there are three fundamental reasons to be sceptical:

● First: given that the principles of humanitarian aid can hardly be reconciled with LRRD, the idea to include peace in a triple nexus does not look convincing. Humanitarian agencies must be able to convince those who hold power in any conflict that they only want to save lives. Trust is indispensable for getting access to the people in need. Suspicions arise when humanitarian aid is closely tied to addressing underlying causes, strengthening national institutions, promoting peace or implementing a security strategy. In other words: the nexus robs humanitarian aid of the very features that make it unique. The principle of neutrality is undermined if development and peace have to be considered at the same time. Not without reason has humanitarian aid always explicitly steered clear of other goals.

● Second: the idea that "everything is related to everything else" has a disastrous impact on humanitarian aid in practice. Ultimately, need no longer determines whether a relief programme is started. What matters instead is whether efforts can be embedded in a larger agenda. Instead of planning immediate relief, actors first analyse, coordinate and in the end procrastinate. No one can do three things at once. Moreover, emergency relief responds to incentives. Most humanitarian agencies do not only depend on donations from individual people. They also need donor governments' funding, which is easiest to obtain for long-term, multi-dimensional programmes. If the governments concerned all too willingly jump on the nexus train, agencies will continue to operate according to this logic and lack incentives to provide fast short-term aid. Humanitarian aid should be assessed according to whether it saves lives. Other goals should not matter. Terms like "impact", "evaluation", "monitoring", "cross-cutting", "resilience", "output", "outcome" et cetera make sense in development cooperation, but when applied to humanitarian action, they distract from the real job. Even worse, they become empty rhetoric if emergency relief does not happen at all because taking action has become too complicated.

● Third: humanitarian aid has grown fast in recent years in both financial and

substantial terms because there is a dearth of political and diplomatic solutions to serious conflicts. Before humanitarian aid "succeeds", policy has typically failed. There is a risk of the nexus being seen as a large-scale "repair operation" – and that would further conceal the failure of political and diplomatic action.

So what is to be done? There is certainly nothing wrong with the idea of ending crises or better yet preventing them in the first place. That would be indeed preferable to launching ever-new aid cycles. It is also true that humanitarian aid does not occur in a vacuum and cannot be blind to either its positive and negative impacts. Ethics and morality certainly require us to consider people's overall long-term wellbeing.

Unfortunately, the nexus debate is moving further and further away from humanitarian realities. The above mentioned crises provide evidence. Particularly in that kind of scenario, aid must be delivered fast and not be encumbered by overarching, conceptual aspirations. All too often, however, aid stalls. In challenging settings, we must reduce complexity, not add more complexity.

In its original form, humanitarian aid makes a powerful offer by not focusing on anything beyond saving human lives and reducing suffering. Political abstinence during the planning, organisation and provision of aid prevents it from becoming part of the political agenda of warring parties and from being guided by special interests rather than by the suffering of people on both sides of a conflict.

To help many people in desperate need, a return to the original mind-set of humanitarian aid would do more than nexus debates at conference tables in New York, Geneva and Brussels. Where and when that is feasible, humanitarian aid, development cooperation and peace work should of course be coordinated sensibly and systematically, and it makes sense to endorse such efforts. But the priority is something else. Humanitarian aid is supposed to save lives, even in simple acts of charity.

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Reduce vulnerability and build resilience

The UN sees humanitarian aid in the context of long-term development, and crises should be dealt with as close as possible to where they first arise. Mark Lowcock, who is the UN emergency relief coordinator and heads its Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), explained matters in an interview.

Mark Lowcock interviewed by
Hans Dembowski

How does emergency relief relate to long-term development?
Well, emergency assistance saves lives in crisis situations, such as Syria, Yemen or the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). However, it cannot solve the underlying problems in conflict-torn countries. Solutions require political processes, peace and stability and – ultimately – development. In the past, some 100 countries used to be subject to major humanitarian crises, but many of them have developed, and are now much less vulnerable. However, some 30 countries are still chronically affected by crises. The more countries develop, the better they become able to cope with short-term calamities without needing much external support. Therefore, humanitarian agencies have an obligation not only to save lives, but also to work in a way that facilitates long-term development.

Please give an example.
Consider Somalia. We know the country is exposed to the risk of recurrent droughts, and climate change will make things worse. It would be good to have safety nets that could be scaled up and down, according to the need at any given time. That would be better than merely responding to every individual incident of drought. In a country like Ethiopia, moreover, it makes more sense to improve water-resources management in general than to truck water around in times of crisis.

So the idea is to set off a virtuous circle? By facilitating development to build stronger institutions, infrastructure and resilience which, in turn, will reduce the likelihood of violent conflict, which then will facilitate further development?
The better development succeeds, the fewer problems we will have. We should reduce the number of countries that need emergency relief, and that is a major area of focus of the UN reform process that UN Secretary-General António Guterres is leading. We will do our best to make it happen in the field of humanitarian assistance. The more governments gear their policies to reducing communities' vulnerabilities and building resilience, the less their nations will need humanitarian aid.

Are there inherent tensions between humanitarian assistance and long-term development efforts?
There don't have to be tensions, but there can be tensions. Humanitarian agencies should always opt for approaches that lead to win-win situations rather than risk tensions. One important aspect is not to bypass local institutions and communities, because they can make a difference long-term.

Disaster situations tend to be chaotic. Typically, government agencies will fail and civil society will be weak, with various humanitarian agencies newly arriving at the scene. Who must ensure that action is coordinated?
I think all parties must assume some responsibility and consider the big picture. As far as the international community is concerned, I see an important role that UN OCHA must play in promoting coordination.

Humanitarian aid is supposed to be impartial, but some agencies have been accused of taking sides, and that seems to be happening with increasing frequency. How

should aid workers respond to such accusations?
I have never seen aid workers take sides in disaster settings. Their mandate is to help people in need, and stay impartial, neutral and independent. These principles are clear; they were set out by the UN 25 years ago and earlier. It is thanks to these principles that humanitarian agencies get access at all to many places where people are in need. We must take into account, however, that aid resources can be quite meaningful in terms of the economy. We must stay aware of who is benefiting from emergency relief in the wider economy. For example, the trucking industry may profit from the transport of aid resources, and indirect impacts of that kind may cause resentment. In view of occasional attacks on aid workers by terrorist groups, it is essential to communicate with all parties in a conflict. It makes sense to follow the principles carefully and keep explaining them to everyone. That is the best way to maximise acceptance in the long run.

Some disasters get much more media attention than others. Syria makes more headlines than the DRC, for example. Are there forgotten humanitarian crises?
International media attention is indeed selective. Syria gets a lot of attention, and for a while, the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh were in the eye of the world's media. The DRC gets less attention, but people are aware of its problems, nonetheless. At a recent donor conference in Geneva, we were able to raise $ 530 million for our humanitarian response plan in the DRC. Other countries get even less attention. The Central African Republic is an example even though its crisis is severe and a very high share of the population is in need of assistance. My office must assess the challenges and tell the international community what is going on. Every year, we publish an overview which includes the well-known and the less-well-known crises. The last report of this series was released in December. It stated that some 130 million people in 30 countries will likely need support in 2018. My office wants to reach out to 90 million of them and is trying to raise $ 25 billion for that purpose. So far, not quite a third of that money has been pledged. Moreover, there is another category of sudden crises we must prepare for. Examples include the hurricanes that devastated Caribbean islands last year. In

February this year, the worst cyclone in 60 years wreaked havoc on Tonga, the Pacific island state.

Do geostrategic considerations make the difference between a crisis getting attention or being forgotten?
To some extent, they certainly do. A recent example was how the media responded to the allegations of Syria's government having used chemical weapons. Other issues matter too, however, especially whether masses of people flee their homes and become refugees. Such developments ultimately affect domestic politics in Europe, for example.

Has it had an impact on humanitarian aid that governments in Europe and other rich countries worry about refugees arriving at their borders?

Front page of the Global Humanitarian Overview 2018.

Well, it must be said that a number of countries have been very generous in accepting refugees. However, one thing we have learned in the past few years is that it is better, cheaper and more sustainable in the long run to deal with a crisis as closely as possible to where it starts. We don't want to let it spin out of control with amplified consequences affecting other places. Accordingly, there is a trend of countries pledging more money to humanitarian programmes. Last year, the international community pledged $14 billion for this cause, the comparative figure for 2005 was $4 billion. Of course, this increase is partly due to the new crisis in the Middle East, but also governments' desire to tackle challenges as near as possible to where they first arise.

A few months ago, the reputation of aid agencies took a hit because of Oxfam's sex scandal. Aid workers had illegally paid sex workers in Haiti and even abused minors. Will this scandal be forgotten, or will it lead to change?
Sexual abuse is a widespread problem in large organisations. Like Hollywood, the Catholic Church, various national parliaments or the BBC in Britain, aid agencies are affected too. Within the UN, this is a major topic of debate. The UN must live up to our promise of zero tolerance. There must be no immunity; and every staff member must know our values. There must be ways to raise concerns, such concerns must be investigated, and transgressions must be sanctioned in an appropriate manner. Other aid agencies must act accordingly as well. Part of the problem in the Oxfam scandal was that perpetrators, after transgressing in one organisation, were able to get a new job with another organisation.

LINK
Global Humanitarian Overview 2018:
https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/ GHO2018.PDF

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https://www.unocha.org/

Photo: UN OCHA

Aid in itself is not enough

The need for humanitarian aid has long outstripped the financial resources available. The solution is not to deliver ever more – and supposedly more effective – aid. It is to systematically enforce human rights and eventually make aid redundant.

By Hendrik Slusarenka

Many people see rapid delivery of emergency relief as a humanitarian duty. Indeed, aid is sorely needed. Examples are the threat of famine still looming over East Africa or the persecution of Myanmar's Rohingya, forced to flee to Bangladesh with nothing but the clothes on their back.

Aid is not just an issue of humanitarian empathy. It is enshrined in law. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which the UN General Assembly adopted in 1966, states that every person on Earth has a right to social security, freedom from hunger and the highest attainable standard of health. This applies before, during and after a disaster. The entitlement to human rights cannot be suspended.

Nonetheless, the gulf between the global need for aid and the resources deployed for this purpose keeps widening. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) provisionally puts the need for humanitarian aid at $ 25 billion in 2018 (see interview, p. 27). At the same time, the number of people who depend on humanitarian aid is said to be five percent higher than in 2017. Incidentally, only around $ 13 billion of the $ 22.2 billion called for last year were actually pledged.

Obviously, the humanitarian system is reaching its limits, and this trend is refocusing attention on the issue of efficiency. If there is not enough money, how can what is available be used efficiently to reach as many people as possible? This question is valid, but it is based on the technical assumption that aid and cooperation are measurable. In truth, courage, creativity and solidarity are hard to quantify and express in budget items.

THE BUSINESS OF HUMANITARIAN AID

Attempts to make humanitarian aid more efficient have long since given rise to a market-driven system. Banks and mobile-communications providers, for instance, have become coveted partners of humanitarian agencies because their infrastructures facilitate a wide range of cash-transfer services. The European Commission's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) is open to cooperation with private-sector companies under the condition that this is in aid recipients' best interests. The qualifying clause may sound reassuringly reasonable, but it deserves emphasis that business enterprises, by definition, maximise profits, especially if they are not bound by other norms. There is no provision, on the other hand, to strengthen local actors.

In the name of "resilience", market-radical doctrines such as personal responsibility and efficiency are increasingly shaping humanitarian efforts. In principle there is nothing wrong with the idea to help individuals and communities to cope better with – and recover faster from – disasters, but the problem is that this approach ultimately makes victims responsible for their own welfare and fails to address the causes of disasters. Once people have been prepared to survive the next catastrophe, demands for fundamental change can be ignored.

That is no way to meet the ever-increasing need for aid. The root causes of poverty must be tackled. Medico international sees aid as part of a broader political response to overcome hardship. What is needed is long-term empowerment. The social, political and cultural circumstanc-

Providing aid supplies to villages is a challenge in Nepal.

Photo: medico

es in which aid becomes necessary must be analysed, and aid must focus on transforming those circumstances, in order to make aid unnecessary eventually. This basic idea guides development aid and we should insist on applying it to emergency aid as well.

Actors must consider the impact of aid – especially if the deployment of financial and human resources is massive, as was the case after the earthquake in Haiti in 2010. First of all, the "do no harm" principle must apply. This means checking whether the emergency relief delivered puts people into additional danger. In a broader sense, it means designing aid in a way that does not contribute to restoring or consolidating exploitative power structures.

If aid provides only a temporary fix for problems that arise from unjust social settings, it becomes self-perpetuating, by providing legitimacy and creating additional scope for future relief work. It becomes aid for aid's sake.

In contrast, medico international, a Frankfurt based non-governmental organisation, and its project partners take a transformative approach. The three-pronged mission is to defend, criticise and overcome aid. This approach of aid in a spirit of critique depends on all partners' social and political commitment. An underlying tenet is the emphasis on human rights.

The relationships between those who deliver aid and those who receive it are constantly reviewed. That includes medico's relationship with partner organisations, and partner organisations' relationship with people in need.

STRENGTHENING LOCAL PARTNERS

This transformative approach not only accepts the ownership of local partners, it encourages their resolve and seeks eye-level cooperation even though there actually is a (financial) dependence. Partnership does not mean a division of labour in regard to funding and implementation. It means open dialogue, discussion, mutual learning and long-term cooperation. Medico support is intended to strengthen independent local actors.

This is especially important as media interest quickly wanes in the aftermath of a disaster, and international organisations then tend to withdraw money and staff from the area concerned. In contrast, the local organisations – which include local governments, trade unions, human-rights organisations, health-care initiatives and self-help groups – remain on the scene. For medico, partnership is a means to an end – a platform on which to build solidarity and make a joint contribution to societal change.

Not all causes can be tackled of course. No humanitarian project can prevent an earthquake. However, not every earthquake has to become a disaster. Housing conditions, the quality of health care and social and economic safety nets are factors that influence whether – and for whom – a natural event turns into a catastrophe. Transformative emergency aid is delivered in association with local partners and strives to do more than help in a crisis. It is also meant to ensure sustainable progress in terms of covering basic needs.

Medico goes even further, insisting on legal entitlements to relief. Where aid is needed, its delivery must not depend on charity or compassion. Humankind needs a formal social compact – and that will ultimately mean putting an end to aid. By going beyond aid, we will overcome the need for aid.

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Transformative emergency aid in Kenya and Nepal

Kamukunji Paralegal Trust (KAPLET) is a Kenyan partner organisation of medico international, the Frankfurt-based non-governmental organisation. KAPLET delivers emergency aid that goes beyond immediate relief and aims at securing rights for those in need.

For years, KAPLET has campaigned for action on the structural causes of famines. At the peak of last year's drought in East Africa, KAPLET helped remote village communities in the east of Kenya by distributing desperately needed food and water. But it also helps people to exercise their democratic rights, enabling them to demand respect from Kenya's government. "The right to a life free from hunger is spelled out in Kenya's constitution," says KAPLET's Erick Otieno Owuor, "but you cannot do advocacy work with hungry people."

AYON, the Nepalese association of youth organisations, is another medico partner. Immediately after the violent earthquake hit Kathmandu and devastated surrounding areas in April 2015, AYON organised emergency relief for the mountain villages affected, many of which were difficult to access. According to AYON, the impacts of the earthquake are linked to deeply entrenched social disparities. People's vulnerability to the impacts of the earthquake was worsened by widespread poverty, which tends to result from the caste system. It also matters that local governments are largely unaccountable and that there is no scope for public participation in democratic decision-making.

Brabim Kumar K.C., who was the director of AYON at the time, said: "Reconstruction is more than building houses, it is about building social justice." This stance is why medico supports AYON's programmes to train young people in disaster prevention and first aid as well as its efforts to fight discrimination and exclusion in Nepali society. A more equitable society is the best protection against the impacts of natural disasters. (hs)

Support for local communities

Throughout history, human beings have proven to be capable of working together for common causes and supporting one another, often crossing community borders. When disasters strike, people care for one another. This is the experience of the Catholic Health Association of India (CHAI).

By Father Mathew Abraham and Ramu Karra

CHAI is a pan-Indian network of some 3,500 faith-based hospitals, health centres and regional units (see box below). Many thousand people have benefited from our emergency relief. It is important to point out, however, that we see local people as agents of change rather than as mere victims. Their efforts matter, and their communities are indispensable resources.

During Tamil Nadu floods in 2015, for example, neighbours – individuals and households, business establishments and institutions – opened their doors for the victims. Such beneficial action must be encouraged, not bypassed. Often, the local people are quite willing to cooperate with the government and non-governmental agencies.

Natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods and landslides cause enormous pain and unbearable stress. Many survivors have lost loved ones and fear for those who are still missing. Violent conflict and other human-made calamities are even more agonising. The relevance of psychological support and compassionate care are often neglected, especially if aid delivery has become a routine. Everyone has a capacity to be resilient, and that capacity must be supported.

CHAI's holistic approach considers these factors. We train potential volunteers in trauma counselling, enabling them to provide psychological first aid. It is essential to help victims to cope with trauma. Traditional skills must be acknowledged, moreover. In rural India, the modern health-care sector is underdeveloped, so many pregnant women depend on traditional birth attendants (TBAs) (see Ipsita Sapra in D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2017/08, p. 21). When an area is hit by disaster, these TBAs become even more important. After severe flooding and landslides in Uttarakhand in 2013, we began to cooperate with TBAs on behalf of the state government. Updating their skills is a contribution to villagers' disaster preparedness.

CHAI is a learning organisation, adapting to specific situations and heeding the lessons of previous experience. A recent trend is the growing impact of electronic and social media. Digital devices are useful for reaching out to victims. Even where other infrastructure has collapsed, mobile telephony may still be operational. If so, people in remote places can communicate their needs. Moreover, social media can play a significant role in mobilising local resources and financial support. It can also help to form volunteer units spontaneously, and those units then can make arrangements for things like providing safe drinking water, food or shelter in disaster areas.

CHAI appreciates that young, digital-media-savvy volunteers are often aware of environmental and other socially relevant issues. Even while providing emergency aid, for example, they are likely to pay attention to not clogging up drains with plastic waste and opt for other packaging materials instead, such as paper or leaves, to wrap food and other essentials.

CHAI has learned that its faith-based character can be an advantage. Our fulltime staff and our volunteers are committed to the cause, and their commitment is often reinforced by their religion. People approach CHAI without fear of stigma or discrimination. We thus are in a position to provide good and affordable health care to members of underprivileged communities.

Indeed, the fact that the organisation is faith-based helps it to motivate people, including those who belong to other religions. Our mission is to serve everyone in need. As the

Faith-based network

CHAI – the Catholic Health Association of India – is a not-for-profit network that runs hospitals, health centres and regional units all over India. It has been systematically involved in disaster relief since 1993, when a devastating earthquake hit the Latur region in Maharashtra.

CHAI is celebrating its 75th anniversary this year. It was established in 1943 by Mary Glowrey, an Australian nun and medical doctor. Today, it is the country's second largest not-for-profit health-care provider, after the government. CHAI currently has 3,534 member institutions (MIs) of which 90 % are headed by women and 80 % operate in medically under-served areas.

Since the Latur earthquake, CHAI has been engaged in disaster relief. It has delivered humanitarian aid in other crises including Orissa's super cyclone in 1999, the anti-Muslim riots in Gujarat in 2002 and the floods in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in 2017. Moreover, CHAI relief teams went to Nepal after the devastating earthquake in 2015. CHAI relief teams provide medical aid and psychological support, often cooperating with other non-governmental organisations and government bodies in a specific area. Thanks to its many MIs, CHAI can respond to calamities fast.

CHAI is supported by various international faith-based charities including Misereor, Missio Aachen, Kindermissionswerk and Malteser International in Germany. With support from the Dutch charity Liliane Fonds, CHAI has started to pay special attention to the people with disabilities after catastrophes.

CHAI and its member institutions collaborate with other health-care providers, both governmental and non-governmental. Since 1 August 2013, CHAI has a special consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). CHAI wants India to achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 3: "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages". (ma/rk)

Health check-up during Uttarakhand flooding in 2013.

UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) emphasises for good reason, the key principles that underpin humanitarian work are impartiality, non-discrimination, respect for the beliefs of others, diversity, empowerment, equality, humanity and protection against any form of conditionality (UNHCR 2014). Inter-faith dialogue matters very much in this context. As a faith-based network, CHAI upholds, promotes and practices these values. That, after all, is the mandate we have from Jesus Christ, our Master.

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Photo: CHAI

Ray of hope

I was proud to take part in CHAI's disaster response when the earthquake rocked Nepal in April 2015, but what our team witnessed there was tough: collapsed buildings, lost livelihoods, tales of loss and survival. CHAI stands for "Catholic Health Association of India".

Our project was called Asha Kiran (ray of hope) and got support from international charities. We set up our first camp at Lisanku, an especially hard-hit area. Our team consisted of two medical doctors, two nurses and some Nepali student volunteers. We travelled with adequate supplies of medicines, wound dressing materials and IV fluids.

We set up this camp around 8.30 am, and a young girl limped towards it. Her legs were trembling and she kept sobbing. A doctor immediately attended to her and after some time, she felt relieved. After her, people of all age groups started pouring in. Many people needed medical treatment because of cuts, fractured bones and other injuries. Fevers, various infections and diarrhoea were common too.

We observed examples of selflessness and personal sacrifices. One young man carried his elderly father on his back and walked at least two kilometres to reach the camp-site. He was himself bruised, and a wound on his feet was bleeding. He insisted that his father be treated first. Student volunteers also demonstrated selflessness. Their own houses were shattered and their family members were affected by the earthquake, and yet they joined the camp in order to help.

CHAI teams did not only work in the camps, but also went to the villages. This might mean hiking up steep mountain slopes where there were no proper roads. Most villages lacked water and electric power. The teams experienced hardships, including severe cold, shortage of food and lack of proper shelter. However, the Nepali government recognised the effectiveness of the CHAI approach of blending medical aid with socio-psychological support and requested CHAI to support primary health centres in earthquake affected areas. (md)

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Limited access to Syrian people in crisis situations

Around 13 million people in Syria, or about 70 % of the population, must rely on humanitarian aid. But access to those in need can be extremely limited. On average, only about half of them can be reached. Sometimes, aid organisations themselves get under fire or their facilities are attacked. Many agencies have suspended their work.

By Mona Naggar

The conflict in Syria, which began in the spring of 2011, has become one of the most brutal wars in recent decades. Local, regional and international forces are involved in the fighting. The UN stopped counting the dead in 2014 because it could not access disputed territories and was no longer able to review its sources. According to estimates, some 400,000 to 500,000 people have died. The Syrian Network for Human Rights, which is keeping a painstaking record of attacks with civilian casualties, reports that 217,764 civilians had been killed by the end of April 2018. Approximately 1 million people had been wounded.

According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), over 5 million Syrians are registered as refugees in neighbouring countries. About 1 million Syrians have found sanctuary in Europe, and about 6 million are living as displaced people in their own country. Over half of them are children and young people. Many are suffering a humanitarian crisis (also note article by Dagmar Wolf, p. 6).

NUMEROUS RESOLUTIONS

The UN Security Council has drafted numerous resolutions on Syria, many of which focus on protecting civilian people and providing humanitarian aid. Violations of international laws and human rights have been decried. Civilians are being attacked with conventional and chemical weapons. They are being put under siege and starved. Civilian infrastructure has been hit – including schools, hospitals, markets, refugee camps, houses of worship and warehouses for aid supplies.

Local and international humanitarian aid workers are coming under intentional fire too. From the beginning of the conflict to June 2017, over 320 health facilities were targeted, primarily in the provinces of Aleppo, Hama and Idlib, as the website Syria Deeply reports. Specialist clinics as well as maternity and paediatric wards have been shelled. Some aid agencies decided to suspend their efforts because they could not guarantee the safety of patients and personnel. The perpetrators of the attacks have not been punished.

The war in Syria has also meant that approximately two-thirds of the people have neither electric power nor running water. In many areas, people fear for their lives on a daily basis. Many homes have been destroyed. Other people have been driven away from their homes. Some regions have only rudimentary health care, others have none at all.

Many people have lost their jobs and are now living in extreme poverty. The prices for daily necessities – like basic foodstuffs, hygiene products or gas cylinders – have risen sharply. The value of the Syrian pound has dropped dramatically. Many people lack sufficient food and drinking water. Children and young people are not going to school. A third of schools has been destroyed and many others are now home to refugees.

UN OCHA, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, reports 60–70 % of Syrians depend on humanitarian aid. That amounts to almost 13 million people in need of shelter, food, drinking water and health care. But a great many of them can't be reached because aid convoys and humanitarian workers do not have access to where they are. Emergency relief needs permission from the Syrian government and various militias, and any of these parties can refuse to grant it.

Only a fraction of the requested UN aid convoys to besieged and hard-to-reach regions are approved. What's more, Syrian authorities routinely inspect the approved convoys and subsequently confiscate urgently needed medications, as happened in Douma in March of this year. A spokesperson for the World Health Organization (WHO) reported that Syrian security forces stole life-saving medical supplies.

One example of the powerlessness of aid organisations is the siege of Eastern Ghouta, north-east of Damascus. For five years, around 400,000 people were encircled by Syrian government forces and their allies. The goal was to force the surrender of the Islamic militants who had taken hold of the region. The free passage of basic necessities and life-saving medical supplies was blocked.

NOT ENOUGH MEDICAL SUPPLIES

The residents of eastern Ghouta suffered hunger. The sick and injured were rarely allowed to leave the area. Early this year, Ahmad Tarakji, the head of the Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS), described the difficulties his team had to cope with. The facilities they operated were attacked. They did not have enough medical supplies. Permission to evacuate emergency cases was only granted sporadically. In 2017, SAMS applied through UN organisations to evacuate over 600 medical emergencies that could not be treated in eastern Ghouta. After processing the applications for six months, Syrian authorities allowed 29 sick people to leave eastern Ghouta to seek treatment in the capital's hospitals. In the meantime, 19 of those patients had died.

The organisation Doctors Without Borders (MSF – Médecins sans Frontières), which worked in eastern Ghouta until March 2018, similarly reported insurmountable challenges. Lorena Bilbao of MSF Syria remarked after the Syrian army's offensive began in February that clinics and health centres which the organisation supported were attacked. These facilities also lacked necessary medical supplies and other goods. Bit by bit, these centres could no longer provide health care.

The situation of displaced people is desperate too. They are hard to reach and in

urgent distress. They lack food and water. People are living in camps, transit centres, informal settlements or public buildings in various Syrian regions. Mines and improvised explosive devices are still common in those parts of eastern Syria, like Raqqa and the surrounding area, which are no longer under the control of the terrorist organisation ISIS, and they restrict aid workers' scope for action.

Ongoing fighting, an inability to access people in need and bureaucratic hurdles are among the greatest challenges that local and international aid organisations face in Syria. Every month, only about half the people requiring emergency assistance can be reached on average. Aid organisations keep issuing calls, and the UN Security Council keeps adopting resolutions pleading for all warring parties, but especially the Syrian government to allow free access. That would also include access via the neighbouring countries of Iraq, Turkey and Jordan.

The war in Syria is now in its eighth year. An end is not in sight. The major concern of all humanitarian agencies is adequate funding for their programmes. At a donor conference for Syrian refugees held in Brussels at the end of April 2018, the participating countries pledged roughly half the amount the UN was requesting for humanitarian aid: $ 3.7 billion instead of $ 6.5 billion. It is unknown how much money the donors will actually disburse. In 2017, only about half the aid that was promised actually materialised. For people in Syria and Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries, that means fewer food rations and fewer children in school.

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Syrians with emergency rations in Humaymah al-Kabira in the province of Aleppo.

Photo: Lystseva/TASS/picture-alliance/dpa

The dark side of aid

Haiti depends on international aid to a large degree, but foreign experts have an unfavourable reputation. Disaster relief has sometimes compounded the problem. Development cooperation urgently needs to be reformed to promote Haitians' self-determination.

By Leon Valentin Schettler

On 12 January 2010, Haiti was rocked by a devastating earthquake. According to estimates, 222,750 people lost their lives and 313,000 buildings were seriously damaged or destroyed. Many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international organisations (IOs) came to Haiti to offer help and rebuild houses, schools, government buildings and hospitals. They encountered a large number of helpers who were already on site. In Haiti, the volume of official development assistance (ODA) regularly exceeds the volume of the government budget. After the earthquake, the amount of international assistance was about four times as high as the budget.

Reconstruction was far from complete when Hurricane Matthew hit Haiti in October 2016 and destroyed even more infrastructure. Five hundred forty-six people lost their lives. Around 4.4 million people – almost half of the population – are currently suffering from food insecurity, 1.3 million acutely. Apart from these enormous humanitarian challenges, Haiti must rise to a large number of development challenges. The country ranks 163rd out of 187 countries on the Human Development Index.

Haiti consistently depends on external help to an exceptionally large degree – and the international community wants to do its part. Yet, the employees of international organisations have a difficult relationship with the local people. This situation has consequences for the work of IOs, who administer the lion's share of international aid.

The University of Potsdam runs a project called "Governance in areas of limited statehood". Affiliated researchers conducted interviews with IO staff involved in food-security issues in Haiti. The IOs included the World Food Programme (WFP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the World Bank and the European Union. Several employees criticised aid recipients as having exaggerated expectations. Moreover, they mentioned lack of capacities and political will on the side of the Haitian government.

The researchers noticed that many employees seemed irritated, angry, frustrated and sometimes resigned. They had

To a large degree, Haiti depends on official development assistance: staff of NPH Deutschland, a German aid agency, distributing food.

come to Haiti to help, but in their eyes, their aid projects were only making very slow progress or none at all. Often the project partners did not really seem to want to cooperate. Numerous initiatives appeared to be petering out into nothing. Moreover, the IO employees had the impression that they were not perceived as helpers whose efforts the people were thankful for. Just the opposite, in fact.

Haitians clearly feel major resentment towards the IOs. The reasons for this attitude can be found in the country's colonial history, the extreme inequality between IO employees and Haitians and the notoriously bad image Haitians have of the UN peacekeeping mission.

In the 18th century, Saint-Domingue, as Haiti was then called, was France's richest colony. The French were driven out by a revolution. However, this slave revolt – the only successful one in history, by the way – did not lead to real political independence, and even less to economic sovereignty. Even today, two-thirds of the people earn their income from agricultural exports, especially coffee. The majority of them live under the poverty line. The legacy of colonialism is still felt acutely.

Together with Namibia and South Africa, Haiti is one of the three countries in the world with the worst income inequality, as measured by the Gini coefficient. In contrast, IO employees from abroad are wealthy. Most of them live in Petionville, the richest part of the capital Port-au-Prince, where a parallel world has emerged that consists of privately guarded housing complexes, chauffeurs, clubs and expensive supermarkets.

UN peacekeepers were supposed to restore human security. However, the mission brought cholera to Haiti shortly after the 2010 earthquake, contributing to the negative image of foreigners. Over 9,000 people died in the course of the epidemic. Almost 800,000 were infected.

Despite overwhelming evidence, the UN Secretary-General at the time, Ban Ki-moon, waited until the end of 2016 to issue a vague apology for "the role of the UN" in the crisis and offer a promise of reparations. Accusations of sexual misconduct by UN peacekeepers also weigh heavily. The recent revelations of sex parties held by Oxfam employees in Haiti have just thrown more oil on the fire (see D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2018/03, p. 12).

But it's also clear that a lot of the criticism is excessive. Experts agree that without international support and humanitarian aid in particular, Haiti would be worse off today. At the same time, IOs have to ask themselves how they came to be regarded as patronising the local people instead of paving a way for local communities to improve their lot themselves.

Many IO employees working on site are prepared to engage in this kind of self-reflection. Their statements suggest that both sides, IOs and Haitians, need a change of mindset. In order for that to happen, Haitian self-determination must be placed front and centre in development cooperation. Community organising offers a very promising approach to implementing this

maxim (see box below). If more development projects in Haiti were built on this foundation, it would help empower the people and clear the way for long-term cooperation between IOs and Haitians. The time is ripe for such reform.

LEON VALENTIN SCHETTLER is a research associate of the University of Potsdam project mentioned in the essay. It is funded by the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft – DFG) and directed by Professor Andrea Liese. Field research was conducted in Haiti, Niger, Colombia, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire.
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Building trust

Community organising is a method aimed at strengthening local communities by building trust and identifying local leaders and shared goals. It was first developed in the USA and should prove useful for humanitarian aid and development cooperation in places with limited statehood.

The central idea of community organisation is that, to be stable, networks should involve local leaders who others in the community look up to and whose advice they will follow. The local leaders should enjoy local people's trust and be able to speak in their name. A good network is made up of local leaders who represent very different groups that had not been cooperating before.

To implement such an approach, three specific changes would have to be made to the way international organisations (IOs) typically operate in Haiti:

● Local communities are the key to empowerment, but IOs traditionally focus on state agencies. The truth is that the Haitian government has always had only very limited capacities for the effective implementation of projects. However, it is possible to compensate for extremely limited statehood by supporting and coordinating local leaders and building a high level of trust.

● "Bottom-up" projects should take precedence over large projects: IOs and especially development banks like to disburse a lot of money at once. Accordingly, they prefer to fund large projects instead of doing piecemeal work. Community organising, in contrast, focuses on relationships and building trust, not on disbursement. Local leaders cannot even be identified without detailed knowledge of local structures. Consequently, these projects require a lot of time, but not a lot of money.

● Long-term projects need long-term financing: about 90 % of aid money goes to humanitarian projects that usually last a few months. As a result, IO employees have to constantly find creative solutions to "weave" one project into the next. Community organising requires project partners to keep going even if they don't see immediate results.

These hurdles can be overcome. To strengthen Hai-

ti's dairy sector, for example, the FAO started a successful intervention that used "project weaving". The primary goal is to get dairy farmers to cooperate among one another. The meetings, which take place over a longer period, are designed to build trust and help the farmers identify shared interests and establish formal cooperatives. Their social relationships are a top priority because their association has to perform well despite diverging individual concerns.

Whereas in the past, for instance, each dairy farmer sold his milk on the market individually, now this task is performed by envoys from the cooperative. The FAO is facilitating regular exchange concerning veterinary care and milking of the cows. It keeps identifying local leaders who are especially committed to promoting collective interests. In addition, the FAO is providing expertise, technical equipment and space. It is organising network meetings for local leaders from different places. (ls)

When farmers work together, for instance to market products, they all can benefit. Traders on the way to the market in Jérémie, Haiti.

Photo: picture-alliance/blickwinkel

Resilience makes sense

In 2017, natural and human-made disasters struck with unabated force in developed and less-developed countries alike. In spite of decades of emergency preparedness, prevention policies and measures, in many instances the destructive impact of disasters has not been reigned in or significantly reduced.

By Glenn Brigaldino

The hurricanes that struck the USA in 2017 affected millions of people and destroyed countless livelihoods. The damage caused by Hurricane Harvey, which hit Houston, alone is estimated to amount to $ 180 billion. In contrast, the total official development assistance (ODA) made available by members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) last year was worth $ 143 billion.

As a policy and research body of 35 developed countries, the OECD tracks the sectors where aid is directed to. In 2015, the most recent year tracked, disaster prevention and rehabilitation efforts accounted for less than $ 3 billion. Vulnerabilities to disaster risks are multi-faceted and omnipresent. Natural disasters such as floods, droughts and avalanches have increased in intensity and frequency as the impact of climate change deepens. But while disaster preparedness and relief aid have often temporarily been stepped up in response to these challenges, efforts to avoid major loss of lives and livelihoods have not kept up. In large part, this is due to considerable deterioration of existing coping capacities, in particular where prolonged conflicts and political instability have gripped countries and regions.

Social, political and economic shocks have multiplied manyfold in recent years, especially when accompanied by violent conflicts. This results in the loss of countless human lives and the collapse of state institutions, as is tragically evident in places such as South Sudan, Yemen and Syria. The near annihilation of service delivery and crisis-response capacities of the state has devastating consequences for the people concerned. The most vulnerable – and worst affected – are disadvantaged communities who struggle with poverty and marginalisation even before disasters occur.

Under conditions of conflict and crisis, it is an uphill struggle simply to maintain coping mechanisms, whether they are institutional or individual. Where service delivery and policy implementation are still operational, however, the chances of boosting resilience to disasters and crises are better. Nonetheless, poor quality of services, patchy regional coverage and capacity shortfalls may thwart even the best-intended efforts. Moreover, urban-rural divides are often difficult to bridge. Infrastructure-intensive cities need other measures to improve their shock resilience than isolated village communities (World Bank, 2013).

The term "resilience" originated from biology, referring to how organisms cope with ecological stress. It has now gained a foothold in the social sciences and policymaking. Resilience building is about monitoring, anticipating, responding to and

Traditional maize storage in Kano State, Nigeria.

managing risks. Focused action should inform democratic decision-making and lead to lasting change. The concept is of global relevance, and practical measures to implement it should be taken.

In the political context, resilience is not a clearly defined concept. To some degree, it is about a long-term vision. Medico international, the Frankfurt based healthcare NGO, has warned that this trendy buzzword may serve to supersede the sustainability concept (see article on page 29) and ultimately blame disaster victims for their own suffering. On the other hand, some donor institutions have adopted detailed action plans and committed to funding (EU Commission, 2013).

From a grassroots perspective, it would be wrong to wait for high-level policy debate to be resolved. Many forms of resilience strengthening can be launched fast and without major funding. They are a matter of common sense, not ideology.

LOCAL-LEVEL ACTION

A starting point is people's self-organisation. The stronger it is, the better communities can develop potentially life-saving buffer capacities to absorb stress, hazards, disturbances or destructive forces.

Contingency plans make sense too. Interventions in a handful of areas can reduce the impact of both human-made and natural disasters at the local level. Relevant examples include:

- Basic health services can benefit from a range of preparedness measures. Such measures facilitate continuity of service provisions or a quick resumption thereof. Drawing up a safe health clinic checklist can enable health workers and managers to better identify institutional shortcomings. It can also help in overseeing human resource and logistics challenges, should disaster strike. The World Health Organization offers sensible guidelines (WHO, 2015).

- School emergency operations plans can make educational facilities safer environments for their students and teachers. The buildings may have to be used as temporary accommodations for displaced people. In physical terms, schools built in accordance with appropriate architectural standards withstand earthquakes better. UN-Habitat and the UNISDR (the UN office for disaster risk reduction) have published

guidelines for schools and hospitals (UN-Habitat and UNISDR, 2012).

- Water, sanitation, and hygiene programmes are essential for community resilience. Disasters may disrupt or destroy water supply, storage, treatment facilities and sanitation systems. Community-led risk reduction approaches can contribute to designing and building stronger and more resilient basic infrastructure, at safer locations.

- Poverty and food insecurity compound disaster risks. Research shows that for highly resource-constrained people who depend on low-input, small-scale agriculture and pastoralism, notions of personal well-being are conflated with food security and the fulfilment of relatively basic material needs. Resilience thus becomes equated with meeting short-term subsistence needs and taking action to prepare against future shocks and stresses (Thiede, 2016). Income opportunities outside agriculture can help to improve fragile livelihoods. Access to credit and community services can provide further short-term relief for what are essentially structural and political problems.

- An often overlooked intervention area is pest control. Resilience to risks posed by pests is often limited because of the high cost of herbicides, insecticides and of rodent control measures. While pest control tends to focus on invertebrate pests like stem borers, armyworms and locusts, little attention is paid to vertebrate pests like rodents or birds. Rodents are a particularly concerning group of pests. They can cause farms considerable damage because of their abundance, diversity, feeding habits and high reproduction abilities. Income-stressed small-scale farmers can lose entire crops to one or a variety of such pests. Alternative modes of crop storage can help limit losses to rodents as can crop diversification, where feasible (Swanepoel and Belmain, 2015).

Without doubt, resilience building must go far beyond the individual and community levels. Structural conditions must be tackled. The high-level debates and resulting policies are important. Resilience must be conceived in a way that it improves the fate of vulnerable people and ultimately supports the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and its partners have recently

published a Multi-Hazard Early Warning Systems Checklist. It can serve as a practical, non-technical reference tool to ensure that the major elements of an effective early warning system are in place (WMO, 2018).

However, until global discourse reaches a conclusive definition of the term resilience that can find widespread application, a multitude of local-level actions can lead to much-needed short-term improvements. There is no reason not to start building resilience now.

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Business-cycle surveys help entrepreneurs to take decisions in Ghana.

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Photo: STCCI Ghana