

D+C

DIGITAL MONTHLY

DEVELOPMENT AND
COOPERATION

D+C

ENTWICKLUNG UND
ZUSAMMENARBEIT

E+Z

International
Journal

ISSN
2366-7257

2023 08

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FOCUS

Protecting biodiversity

Biodiversity has several dimensions. The number of different species matters, but so do the great variation of ecosystems they live in as well as the genetic diversity that makes any single species resilient. By destroying nature, humankind is putting its own existence at risk. Ultimately, even the food security of high-income nations depends on the protection of biodiversity. Agriculture cannot thrive when ecosystems fail. The UN Convention on Biological Diversity is just as important as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Title: Releasing fish into a rice field in China's Zhejiang Province.
Photo: picture alliance / Xinhua News Agency / Xu Yu





Our focus section on biodiversity starts on page 20. It pertains to the UN's 14th and 15th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG): Life below water and Life on land.

Accepted global duty

In July, the European Parliament's mainstream conservatives and right-wing populists tried to derail important environmental legislation which the European Commission initiated as part of its Green Deal. Fortunately, the opponents failed to block the Nature Restoration Law by a dozen votes, but they did manage to dilute the draft.

Leaders of the European People's Party, the coalition of mainstream conservatives, pretended to be "pragmatic" in the sense of trying to shield farmers and consumers from economic harm. That is reckless nonsense.

Protecting biodiversity is a global necessity, and it requires the conservation and restoration of ecosystems. Business as usual is not an option. It is what has caused the current global environmental crisis, with its separate, but mutually reinforcing trends of global heating, biodiversity loss and desertification. The European Green Deal is the EU's sensible response.

„The entire European Green Deal may feel inconvenient, but non-action will prove far more expensive, and even deadly in the long run.“

To mitigate the climate crisis, we must stop depleting nature. Natural ecosystems serve as carbon sinks. They also play a major role in the provision of fresh water. Diverse ecosystems are more resilient to both flooding and drought. They are also healthy in the very literal sense of being less likely to allow a disease to spread from one species to another, so they help to prevent future pandemics.

What has become "conventional" agriculture, by contrast, is environmentally unsustainable. It typically means intensive use

of pesticides and chemical fertilisers, reducing rather than supporting biodiversity. It is also energy intensive. Industrial-scale meat and dairy production in particular are drivers of global heating. It also breeds antibiotic resistant pathogens and causes nitrate pollution. Europe's farmers are not the stewards of nature their national unions claim them to be.

Nature restoration must be part of any meaningful European Green Deal. The ecosystems of high-income nations tend to be in a particularly bad shape. The same nations have historically emitted the most greenhouse gases. Per-capita, European countries' environmental footprints are still quite large. The EU has a global duty to act – and its member governments have officially reaffirmed that duty by agreeing to a set of international biodiversity goals at the Kunming-Montréal summit in December.

Earth's biodiversity is dwindling depressingly fast. The World Wildlife Fund estimates that the populations of wild animal species have declined by 69% on average internationally in the past five decades. According to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, more than 42,000 species are at risk of extinction.

Biodiversity has several dimensions. The number of species matters, but so does the variety of habitats as well as the genetic diversity within a species. Resilience depends on all dimensions. Protecting diversity means to pass on a liveable planet to future generations. Further depletion is a recipe for disaster. This is the scientific truth. It is neither an ideological matter nor a sentimental one. Action is urgent, and it will cause considerable costs – at domestic and international levels.

If European leaders fail to restore forests and wetlands at home, they cannot convincingly tell foreign partners to safeguard their respective ecosystems. The Nature Protection Law must take force as intended by the European Commission. The entire European Green Deal may feel inconvenient, but non-action will prove far more expensive, and even deadly in the long run.



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UKRAINE

War is fuelling climate crisis

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine is causing significant greenhouse gas emissions. It also reveals the connection between climate action and security policy.

By Mustafa Shrestha

A recent study by the Initiative on GHG Accounting of War provides information on the climate impact of the war in Ukraine. The research was supported by Ukraine's Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources. Lennard de Klerk and his team investigated the greenhouse gas emissions that were released during the first year of the war.

First of all, they took into account emissions caused by direct fighting and the resulting fires. Second, military vehicles require large quantities of fuel, and troops and equipment are transported long distances to the fronts. Consequently, the team also included the greenhouse gases emitted during the run-up to the war. Third, the post-war period will also affect the war's climate impact. When peace is restored, destroyed buildings will have to be reconstructed. Building is energy-intensive, however, and generates high emissions.

Based on their data, de Klerk and his team estimate the CO₂ emissions of 12 months of war at about 120 million tonnes:

- Direct fighting and military transport caused 21.9 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions.
- Fires released 17.7 million tonnes of CO₂ into the atmosphere.
- Emissions totalling 2.7 million tonnes were generated by the migration of refugees.
- The closure of airspaces led to flight diversions with an additional 12 million tonnes of emissions.
- The reconstruction of housing and infrastructure will be particularly climate-intensive, emitting an estimated 50.2 million tonnes.
- The sabotage of the Nord Stream gas pipeline, the largest one-time event, was registered as releasing 14.6 million tonnes of CO₂.

According to the study, the entire volume corresponds to the annual CO₂ emissions of Belgium. Thus, the war is damaging the climate to the same degree as the everyday life of a medium-sized industrialised European country.

The experts maintain that the first six months of the war were particularly damaging to the climate. Direct emissions from weapons and military transport remained constant over the year, according to the study, but there were fewer fires during the cold winter months. At the beginning of the war, the fronts also shifted more often. The resulting destruction generated immense volumes of greenhouse gases, the team of experts explains.

The CO₂ impact could be lessened, however, if the international community generously supported reconstruction in order to promote climate-friendly building methods. The authors point out that the Paris Agreement contains financing models for such cases.

Medium-term impacts of the war could even strengthen climate protection in Europe. According to the study, it will shape energy policy. Members of the EU aim to be less dependent on Russian gas imports. As a result, the authors believe that natural gas

will lose its status as a bridge technology. At the same time, the development of renewable resources will be expedited.

For the Ukrainian energy minister German Galushchenko, climate protection and security interests go hand in hand. He claims that between October 2022 and May 2023, Russia attacked Ukraine's energy grid over 270 times, forcing Ukraine to accelerate the development of renewable energy. Galushchenko emphasises that this would allow electricity to be produced decentralised, which would make the energy system less vulnerable to attacks.

Prior to the outbreak of the war, Ukraine had published ambitious climate plans. The country had promised to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions by 65 % by 2030 compared to the reference year 1990.

But before Ukraine can invest in green energy, stability must be restored, stresses the report by the Initiative on GHG Accounting of War. Until that happens, the country will be forced to keep focusing its economy on the military.

Sustainable peace could take a long time to achieve, however – and in the meantime, the climate crisis will continue to get worse.



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article as part of his internship at [D+C/E+Z](mailto:euz.editor@dandc.eu).



A fire rages after Russian rockets hit an oil refinery and an oil depot in Odesa in 2022.

WORLD INFORMATION ORDER

Social-media platforms matter

Democracy depends on citizens making informed decisions based on facts and the analysis of evidence. A human right to trustworthy information would be useful. That may sound utopian, but it makes sense in an era increasingly marked by misleading propaganda spreading on social-media platforms.

By Hans Dembowski with input from Anna-Katharina Hornidge

Global systems of knowledge production and knowledge distribution are biased. High-income nations have long shaped the internationally accepted standards:

- of knowledge production,
- of quality assurance and
- of expression (including publishing conventions).

Some of the best-equipped and most renowned academic institutions continue to be located in North America, Europe and Australia. Moreover, scholars from these institutions have easier access to some of the most influential international mass media, so scholars and journalists based in North America and Europe have substantially more scope for shaping global debate. That has a bearing on whether a global challenge gets international or only regional attention. In short: we continue to live in a biased

world information order. One example is the climate crisis. Societies in countries along the equator and whose livelihood systems heavily rely on the environment, on agricultural and fishing seasons, are affected to a substantially higher degree. And yet, concerns are only heard to a limited degree and (too?) late by those largely responsible for global heating.

In the 1970s and 1980s, UNESCO tried to tackle related issues prevalent at the time. However, attempts to introduce what was called the “New World Information and Communication Order” did not deliver satisfying results. Knowledge production and knowledge distribution mostly remained the privilege of high-income nations. They benefited from the fact that information generated and spread was diverse enough to have some claim to pluralism – though not to equal global representation. It was also sufficiently evidence-based to withstand fact checking. The existing world information order had serious flaws, but government-controlled research institutions and media from the Soviet Union and other one-party regimes could not challenge the west with equal credibility.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the topic of the world information order did not get much international attention. That is

no longer so. In spite of shared global agendas – consider, for example, UN sustainable development goals – the global polity looks increasingly fragmented. Compounding the problems, right-wing populism (which typically promotes plutocratic interests) is threatening democracy in many countries, very much including high-income countries.

DRIVING PUBLIC ATTENTION

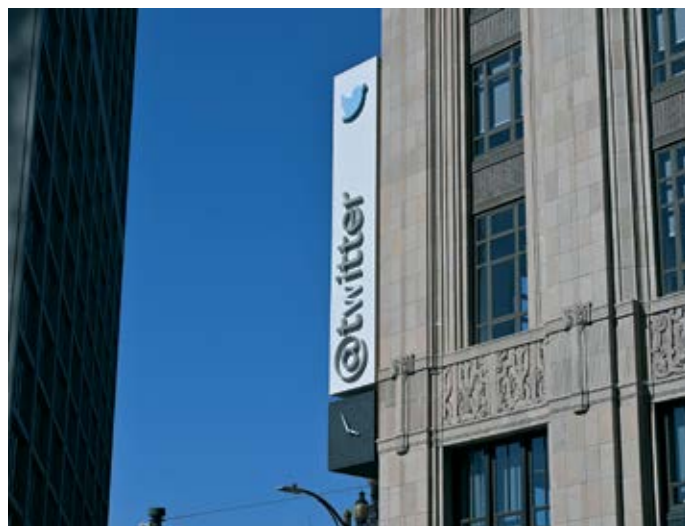
Global systems of knowledge distribution, moreover, have changed dramatically. Today, social-media platforms matter very much. To a considerable extent, they drive public attention and international debate.

Unfortunately, they are not fit for purpose. Yes, they do help persons with highly developed media literacy to keep track of new developments. But others are at risk of falling prey to propaganda or ‘fake news’. To use social media well, one must know how to tell a reliable from an unreliable source and also be able to do some basic fact checking.

Conventional media do not always perform their roles as gatekeepers and agenda setters well, but at least they normally try to rise to their responsibility. They do so because public trust is essential for their business model long term and because national media laws make them liable for information they publish. In comparison, what is happening on social-media platforms is geared to the short term and largely lawless. Accounts can be fake, information can be fake, and the platform owners are only liable to a very limited extent.

It also matters that social-media platforms are designed to facilitate interaction between individuals, so they do not lend themselves easily to institutions. While various individual scholars and journalists have large followings on social-media platforms, academic institutions and media houses perform less well. At the same time, dubious influencers without any professional credentials also attract large numbers of followers. Anyone who wants to spread lies is free to invent fake accounts and invent items that fit propaganda narratives. The Russia-based Internet Research Agency is known to have done so at an industrial scale.

A democratic public sphere needs uncensored information and freedom of opinion based on reliable facts and data. Debate must neither be controlled by the government nor distorted by special interests.



Algorithms serve corporate interests: head office of Twitter in San Francisco (before owner Elon Musk started rebranding the platform “X”)...



... and Facebook parent Meta in nearby Silicon Valley.

Social-media platforms, unfortunately, are less open than they seem at first glance. They are owned by oligopolistic enterprises. Oligopolistic structures always emerge when a certain good or service depends on a network. Corporate interests matter very much, even though platforms make users believe that their algorithms are only trained to fulfil users' wishes. The full truth, of course, is that algorithms also reflect owners' preferences. It is certainly no coincidence that criticism of social-media platforms is hardly promoted. Moreover, algorithms respond to paid advertising and not only to users' habits.

They even change users' habits in the sense of keeping them on a specific platform rather than helping them access more profound information elsewhere. Stoking outrage serves that purpose. To keep people glued to the screen, social-media platforms continuously supply users with narratives they appreciate, without much regard for facts and evidence. Psychologists warn that the constant buzz of excitement can make platforms addictive. Evidence shows, moreover, that individual users have been radicalised by increasingly extreme content of a similar nature.

In high-income countries, regulation remains quite weak. In the USA, the platforms basically decide to what extent they want to moderate content themselves. In the EU, they must take down hate speech within 24 hours of being informed of offensive posts. In both jurisdictions, it is perfectly legal to spread lies that undermine democracy anonymously.

As is typical of our unequal world, problems are even more serious in countries with weak capacities. Major social-media platforms do not do content moderation in African and Asian languages. Even Spanish gets less attention than English. Governments with authoritarian leanings, moreover, have a tendency of either banning social-media platforms or pressing them into serving their purposes. Users' rights are often disregarded. Though TikTok is Chinese owned and Telegram was created by Russians and is now based in Dubai, these platforms do not provide a counterweight to Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. In this regard, they are as useless as the Soviet news agency TASS was as a counterweight to AP and Reuters in the 1980s.

PROMOTE DEMOCRACY

Democracy is under attack around the world. Social-media platforms are contributing to this problem. We need something like a human right to reliable information. As the history of UNESCO's New World Information and Communications Order shows, such a right cannot be expected to be introduced fast. History also shows that what looks utopian now may become normal in the future. The idea is worth pursuing.

In the meantime, governments that claim to promote democracy must not leave social-media platforms to themselves. At very least, they must pass and enforce liability rules at the national level and, whenever possible, at supranational levels too. EU regulations sometimes become interna-

tional standards. Indeed, its new Digital Services Act (DSA) tackles some of the problems, though it does not include full liability and has no stringent rules regarding platforms' potentially radicalising content moderation. It is complex regulation, the full impact of which will depend on judicial interpretations, moreover (see box next page).

In any case, donor governments should support partner countries in attempts to prudently regulate the cyber sphere. Developing capacities in research and media, particularly in low-income countries, remain essential too.

If we want the SDG agenda to succeed, we need societies around the world to understand the global challenges we are facing. In other words, we must stem distorting fake-news propaganda. Those who agitate against minorities, downplay the threats of climate change and fear-monger with conspiracy theories are not harmlessly using their freedom of speech, but undermining the future of humankind. They must be made to reveal their identity and held accountable for the harm they cause. Moreover, there is a need to develop strategies for countering fake-news propaganda that keeps entrenching dangerous narratives deeper.

It is equally important that democratic governments reconsider their own media-outreach strategies. To a large extent, they seem to be using social media naively. They must ask themselves whether their presence on any particular social-media platform adds an undeserved legitimacy to that platform and whether that outweighs the intended impact their presence has. Our species needs global solutions for global problems – and right-wing populism opposes the very idea of global solutions.



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An effort to manage systemic online risks

The EU's Digital Services Act (DSA) is innovative legislation. It tackles some serious problems with online communication, including platforms' content moderation to prevent illegal as well as "awful but lawful" content. If the DSA proves effective, it may have an impact far beyond European borders. The act is quite complex, and not all its norms are defined precisely. Jurists warn that implementation will be difficult.

The DSA came into force in November last year, and all of its obligation will apply in early 2024 at the latest. Its double goal is:

- to ensure the online sphere is safe and open, with all parties' fundamental rights being protected and
- to facilitate healthy business competition in ways that encourage entrepreneurship and foster innovation.

In regard to fact-based journalism and its important opinion-shaping function in democratic societies, freedom of speech matters in particular. This fundamental right is sometimes misunderstood as a permission to lie and deceive (see my contribution in D+C/E+Z Digital Monthly 2022/12, p. 10). For good reason, the DSA takes a more nuanced approach in its effort to promote truthfulness in the public sphere.

The DSA is asymmetric. Very Large Online Platforms (VLOPs) and Very Large Search Engines (VLSEs) must fulfil the most duties. They are defined to be "very large" if they attract a monthly 45 million

users in the EU. Giving them particular onerous obligations makes sense because they pose the greatest risks. On the other hand, forcing each and every start-up to fulfil the same duties would give the internet giants a competitive advantage because smaller businesses obviously do not have the same resources as they do.

The DSA gives users' a minimum say in the recommendation systems that the VLOPs use. There must be an option to switch off individual profiling, for example. Moreover, users should be given choices regarding what kind of content they want to be made aware of.

The DSA aspires to restrict illegal content such as hate speech. Nonetheless, it does not make the VLOPs liable for distributing such content unless they are fully aware of its

illegal nature. The background is that stringent liability might make them excessively careful and restrict speech that should be free. However, the DSA obliges the VLOPs to establish a system which allows users to report problematic posts easily and, on that basis, to remove obviously illegal content immediately. They must pay particular attention to "trusted flaggers" with a history of giving useful input. VLOPs, moreover, must inform the authorities in cases of doubt. In this regard, the DSA mainstreams existing rules in EU member states.

While conspiracy theories and disinformation are not always illegal, the DSA is meant to put a check on them too. For this purpose, the DSA introduces new due diligence obligations for content moderation. Platforms basically moderate content according to their own rules. The DSA demands that they spell out clear terms and conditions regarding what they permit or forbid. The DSA thus respects the fact that private businesses must

be able to manage their affairs as they think best, but it also acknowledges that the VLOPs' impact on the public sphere is too strong for them to be left entirely to themselves.

To protect users' rights, the DSA demands that terms and conditions must be unambiguous and non-discriminatory. Moreover, the VLOPs must explain every restrictive decision to the user concerned, and that person must have an opportunity to express an objection and appeal for reversal.

The DSA aspires not only to protect individual users. It is also supposed to manage the systemic risks that result from the spread of disinformation online. For this purpose, it obliges the VLOPs to provide annual assessments of the systemic risks they perceive and report on how they intend to modify their content moderation accordingly. On request, the platforms must share relevant data with European authorities as well as with independent researchers vetted by European authorities.

SCHOLARS' ASSESSMENT

However, the DSA neither spells out clearly how these new transparency requirements relate to private-sector companies' protected trade secrets (concerning algorithms, for example) nor how they affect users' data privacy. Florence G'Sell, who teaches digital governance at Science-Po University in Paris, regrets that "the provisions on controlling systemic risks and fostering dialogue between platforms and regulators on this matter are not more precise".

According to Mattias Wendel, a law professor at Leip-



The toughest new EU rules apply to online giants like Facebook, Twitter and Google.

zig University, problems of this kind haunt the entire DSA. He explicitly wonders whether the EU is “taking or escaping legislative responsibility”.

The background is that the DSA tries to balance several fundamental rights, including the freedom of speech, data privacy and business freedoms (contract, occupation, property). Moreover, it is balancing private businesses’ profit interests with safeguarding the public sphere. Finally, it relies on different sets of rules, which include not only EU legislation, but also member states’ laws as well as corporate terms and conditions. In Wendel’s eyes, the DSA often fails to de-

fine precisely which norm gets preference in which context. He therefore expects law courts to resolve many open questions case by case. Final decisions will thus rest with the European Court of Justice (ECJ).

Recent history shows that EU regulations sometimes have an impact on the internet even beyond European borders. One reason is that they are copied in other jurisdictions. Moreover, online giants may comply with European rules voluntarily for either business or political reasons.

As stated above, there is generally reason to worry about censorship when government authorities get involved in is-

issues of content distribution. The EU is probably setting a good example since the DSA is keenly aware of the fundamental rights of both providers and users. “The aim is to strengthen and consolidate European democrac(ies), and this proves that the European Union sees itself not only as an economic union but as a political union with common fundamental values,” argues Antje von Ungern-Sternberg, who has edited a useful collection of essays on content regulation in the EU (full disclosure: every literal quote in this article is from the book).

As a law professor at Trier University, she sees ample rea-

son for optimism in the experience that “there is nothing to suggest so far that freedom of expression is not in good hands with the ECJ”. The European Court of Justice, of course, will be the ultimate arbiter in DSA enforcement. To what extent the DSA actually protects business interests and to what extent it safeguards public discourse will depend on its judgments. DEM

LINK

von Ungern-Sternberg, A., ed., 2023: Content regulation in the European Union

<https://irdt-schriften.uni-trier.de/index.php/irdt/catalog/view/3/3/25>

ROLE MODELS

Global leadership

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala is the first woman and the first African to lead the World Trade Organization (WTO). She has broken several glass ceilings in her career.

By **Bimbola Oyesola**

Okonjo-Iweala is a brave amazon on the global stage and an ambassador for African women. She serves as an important role model. From 2003 to 2006, she was the first female finance minister of Nigeria and then became the first female foreign minister, but only served for a short time. In 2011, a different president reappointed her as finance minister, and she stayed in that position until 2015.

One of her great successes as finance minister was sovereign-debt relief worth \$30 billion. She led the Nigerian team in the

restructuring negotiations with the Paris Club of established creditor nations. Moreover, she promoted more transparency in public finance. As board member of various institutions, she has also made a difference. They include the vaccine alliance GAVI and the African Risk Capacity, which is spearheading climate insurance.

Her career includes long stints at the World Bank, where she rose through the ranks to the top-level management, serving as managing director for operations. Her candidacy – as the first woman and the first African – to become the bank’s president, however, failed in 2012. Nigeria’s government had proposed her.

In 2021, Okonjo-Iweala became director general of the WTO, once more proposed by the Nigerian government. Her compatriots did not find her success surprising. They

know her to be a committed, determined and hard-working person. She is considered to be one of the world’s most powerful women. We Nigerians also see her as an ambassador of our nation.

UNEQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

In patriarchal African societies, women and girls generally do not have the same opportunities as boys and men. Early marriages, domestic chores and traditional notions of women as men’s property still matter very much. However, things have begun to change.

In this context, Okonjo-Iweala’s rise to leading positions in the national cabinet under President Olusegun Obasanjo signalled a new wave of women’s empowerment. Indeed, she is not the only prominent role model young girls can look up to. There are several others, including:

- Amina Mohammed, the former Nigerian minister of the environment who now serves as deputy secretary-general of the UN. Her role is crucial for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. In terms



Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala
in Beijing in June
2023.

of international impacts, she comes close to Okonjo-Iweala.

- Obiageli Ezekwesili is another former minister (for education and for solid minerals). She is now a civil-society activist.
- Ibukun Awosika is a businesswoman and philanthropist. She chairs the board of First Bank, a multinational corporation with branch offices across West Africa.
- Folorunso Alakija is a billionaire and philanthropist. She is the executive vice-chairperson of Famfa Oil and leads the charitable Rose of Sharon Foundation which provides support to widows and orphans.
- Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is an award-winning novelist. Her book “Americanah” became a global bestseller. Her Ted

speech on feminism made waves internationally.

Okonjo-Iweala’s public profile is much appreciated. Oyinkan Olasanoye, a female trade-union leader, says: “She serves as a role model to the extent that today everybody, not only a girl-child looks up to her when considering appropriate behaviour and what a person can achieve in life.” The labour activist adds: “Young African girls can have hope that the world which they are growing into embraces women as leaders.”

Sixteen-year-old secondary-school student Praise Murphy agrees. “When I was in my primary and junior classes, I used to see her on TV.” She points out that she goes to an all-girls school and that all of her classmates feel inspired by Okonjo-Iweala’s achievements.

More generally speaking, Okonjo-Iweala’s career proves that education makes a difference. It motivates Nigerian parents to invest in their children’s education, whether they are girls or boys. Of course, the WTO chief provides a strong example of what an African woman can achieve to people in the continent’s other countries too.

Okonjo-Iweala was born to a noble family in the Delta region in 1954. She thus had a privileged childhood, growing up and

going to school in Nigeria. She later obtained her academic degrees from elite universities in the USA, including a PhD in development economics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She is passionate about fighting poverty and eradicating corruption.

Assuming office at the helm of the WTO, she stated: “A strong WTO is vital if we are to recover fully and rapidly from the devastation wrought by the Covid-19 pandemic. I look forward to working with members to shape and implement the policy responses we need to get the global economy going again.” She acknowledged that the organisation faces challenges, but expressed the determination to make it “stronger, more agile and better adapted to the realities of today”.

The full truth is that the WTO had been losing clout for years before she became its leader. With her at the helm, it managed to reach some new, though minor agreements. They showed that member governments want it to keep going.



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A doctor measures the arm circumference of a severely malnourished baby in Somalia.

NUTRITION

Don't forget the boys

Research shows that girls and women are particularly affected by hunger and undernutrition. However, things are more complicated. On the way to SDG2 “Zero hunger”, boys and men must not be forgotten.

By Michael B. Krawinkel

“Zero hunger” is the 2nd UN Sustainable Development Goal. It aims to end hunger and achieve food security as well as improved nutrition. Gender aspects are often emphasised in research on nutrition. Major German non-governmental organisations (NGO) stress that women are particularly affected by hunger and malnutrition. World Food Program USA reckons that nearly 60% of the 345 million people who are severely hungry worldwide are women and girls. Moreover, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) recently reported a higher global rate of food insecurity for women than for men (FAO et al., 2022).

While it is doubtlessly important to pursue the goal of ensuring that no girl and woman is malnourished, boys and men should not be forgotten too. This is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, attributing gender aspects to malnutrition is not an easy task. In many surveys, data collec-

tion is restricted to children under five years and women in childbearing age, while the nutritional status of boys and men in countries with food insecurity is often not documented.

Secondly, data show that males are by no means better off than females everywhere in the world. This calls for a more differentiated picture. For example, according to the FAO report quoted above, boys under five years were more affected by stunting than girls in most regions. Moreover, in perinatal medicine and paediatrics, it is well known that child mortality – the share of children who die before they are five years old – is generally significantly higher for boys than for girls.

BOYS AFFECTED BY THINNESS

The Global Nutrition Report (GNR) 2021 is a multi-stakeholder initiative of, among others, governments, civil-society organisations and experts in nutrition. It states that globally, in 2019, 10.9% of boys between five and nine years of age suffered from thinness, compared to 8.9% of girls at that age. At the age group from 10 to 19 years, the figures are 12.3% for males and 7.9% for females. According to the report, the global prevalence

of thinness among both children and adolescents has declined modestly since 2010 for boys and girls.

For some countries, the 2020 version of the Global Nutrition Report showed bigger differences of undernutrition prevalence between boys and girls. It stated, for example, that Lesotho has the largest sex gap in childhood and adolescent underweight (boys 32.5%, girls 14.1%), followed by Zimbabwe (boys 32.5%, girls 15.0%) and DR Congo (boys 37.8%, girls 21.9%).

My team at Justus Liebig University Gießen collected data for the German NGO Welthungerhilfe in 2004 that support the observation of women and girls being not generally more often affected by malnutrition than men and boys. In a nutrition baseline survey in the Vavuniya District of Sri Lanka, the prevalence of malnutrition was the same in women and men.

An earlier study addressed the prevalence of malnutrition in Southern Madagascar in 1999/2000. In urban areas, both sexes were affected by food insecurity in 2000, with about 10% more men being malnourished compared to women.

It is important to note that the intention of this article is not to reduce attention for undernutrition in females. It is more an alert. Boys and men are affected by malnutrition too, in some places even more than girls and women. They also deserve to be taken care of. Therefore, interventions to prevent undernutrition need to be gender-sensitive as a gender imbalance can vary in different regions and age-groups.

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Livestock farmers in Ethiopia feel the impact of prolonged drought.

2030 AGENDA

SDGs slipping out of reach

The global community should be on track to ending hunger and poverty. However, at the midway point to achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, this target has moved out of reach, civil-society organisations lament.

By Sabine Balk

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) established by the UN in 2015 are “almost unachievable” by the target date of 2030 according to Mathias Mogge, Chief Executive Officer of Welthungerhilfe, the international NGO based in Germany. After decades of major progress in the fight against hunger and poverty, the number of people affected by acute hunger has risen steadily since 2018, as documented in the “Global Report on Food Crises 2023”, a joint publication by, among others, the UN and the EU.

According to the report, 258 million people in 58 countries suffered from acute hunger last year. The number went up from 193 million in 2021. Today people in seven countries are on the brink of dying from starvation.

Germany’s Federal Foreign Office reports that the number of people who are so

poor that they depend on humanitarian aid will rise to 339 million this year, an increase of about 100 million compared to last year. The number of displaced persons and refugees around the world has also increased dramatically. It recently reached the 110 million mark, according to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR).

“I am very concerned to see that we once again have experienced setbacks in the fight against poverty and hunger,” Mogge said at the presentation of “Kompass – Zur Wirklichkeit der deutschen Entwicklungspolitik” (“Compass – On the reality of German development policy”). The NGOs Welthungerhilfe and terre des hommes (tdh) have been publishing this report annually for 30 years. According to “Kompass”, the main reasons for these setbacks are the Covid-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the rise in extreme weather, which has jeopardised the food supply in many countries.

Welthungerhilfe and tdh are pleased that Germany’s official development assistance (ODA) has been at 0.7% of gross national income (GNI) for three years, as requested by the UN. Last year, Germany’s ODA reached 0.83%, the largest share of GNI to date. In numbers, that is €33.3 billion in

ODA and an increase of 13.5% compared to 2021. Part of this increase can be attributed to the fact that spending on refugees living in Germany rose by 77% during this period. Most of the refugees came from Ukraine.

NGOs are urging that German ODA be kept at all costs from falling back under the level of 0.7% of GNI (gross national income). They are alarmed because the German government’s 2024 budget envisages drastic cuts for ODA. “That would be a catastrophic signal and a big step backwards”, emphasises Joshua Hofert from terre des hommes. According to him, Germany cannot give up its leading role as the world’s second largest donor, based on the amount spent. The largest net contributor is the US.

The organisations believe that more ODA must reach the least developed countries, most of which are located in sub-Saharan Africa. Even though these countries are most impacted by the climate crisis and conflicts, German ODA has not increased in the region for years.

Mogge praised the current “feminist development policy” being pursued by Germany’s Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) (see article by Svenja Schulze in the D+C/E+Z Digital Monthly 2023/07). The BMZ is sending a strong signal, he argues. Nevertheless, he believes that human rights and women’s rights should be advanced in difficult political climates as well.

One of the most challenging countries is Afghanistan, where women are systematically repressed since the radical-Islamist Taliban seized power. Both Welthungerhilfe and terre des hommes still operate in Afghanistan and are advocating for women’s rights. However, they say they are currently succeeding only in negotiations with “local authorities and on very narrow issues”. The experts don’t foresee that the situation will improve any time soon.

LINK

Global Report on Food Crises 2023:

<https://www.fsinplatform.org/global-report-food-crises-2023>



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A heavy cross to bear

In Burundi, married couples who do not have children face social stigma. In general, the woman is held responsible.

Patrick is 38 years old and spent 12 years in a childless marriage. It was tough, he says. In addition to the disappointment of not having children, his wife was treated with hostility. Patrick's friends repeatedly advised him to cast her out of the house and end the marriage. However, unlike many other men in his position, he stood by his wife.

Patrick's wife had to endure years of abuse from in-laws and acquaintances: "Some even accused me of marrying Patrick just to make him suffer. Others told me I was a jinx. I suffered for eleven years, but luckily my husband was understanding and always supported me."

Patrick had faith in God: "We prayed and never let ourselves be affected by the gossip and the advice of those who were not well disposed towards us." After eleven years, the couple's prayers were answered. They had a daughter, and later a second.

Patrick and his wife live in the city and are highly educated. They were able to handle the situation better than couples in the countryside. Candide and Celestin live in a rural area and for two years after they got married, they waited in vain for Candide to get pregnant. Candide had many arguments with her husband, who blamed her – and also beat

her – for being childless. She defended herself, saying it was God's will.

"Then my in-laws ordered my husband, in my presence, to drive me out of the house immediately, which he did. I went back to my parents," Candide says. A few months later, her ex-husband remarried but again remained childless. Then, after four years, he threw his second wife out of the house. She married again and bore a child a year later.

Many childless couples in Burundi seek support from church representatives. They are advised to be patient and reminded of their promise to stay together "for better or for worse".

Doctors approached by childless couples recommend medical examination and counselling. They explain that involuntary childlessness is a health problem and can affect both men and women. Unfortunately, physicians note that many men in Burundi accuse their wives of being infertile and refuse to be examined themselves. Only specialists can determine where the problem lies – and they are in short supply in Burundi.

According to figures published by the WHO in 2016, one in four couples in Africa are infertile. In many cases, the problem is due to untreated infectious diseases, which may result from child marriage, unsafe abortion, unsafe delivery, sexually transmitted diseases or female circumcision. These cases are preventable.



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MASTHEAD / IMPRINT

D+C DEVELOPMENT AND COOPERATION

Sustainable development requires global awareness and local action.

Vol. 50, 2023

D+C is the identical twin of the German edition E+Z

Internet: www.DandC.eu

ISSN 2366-7257

The production of this Digital Monthly was finalised on 28.07.2023.

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

We invite people who work in different sectors and live all around the world to contribute to D+C/E+Z. The editors request that no unsolicited manuscripts be sent, but proposals for contributions are welcome. After editing manuscripts according to journalistic standards, we ask the authors to approve the final texts before publishing their items. As we edit interviews for clarity and brevity, we also ask our interviewees for approval of the final manuscripts to ensure we do not distort their message. That is standard practice in German journalism.

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Fazit Communication GmbH
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ADDRESS OF THE PUBLISHER AND EDITORIAL OFFICE:
Pariser Straße 1, D-60486 Frankfurt am Main, Germany

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Disclaimer according to § 5,2 Hessian Law on the Freedom and Rights of the Press: The shareholder of the company is FAZ Fazit Stiftung.

ADVERTISING AND SUBSCRIPTION SERVICE:

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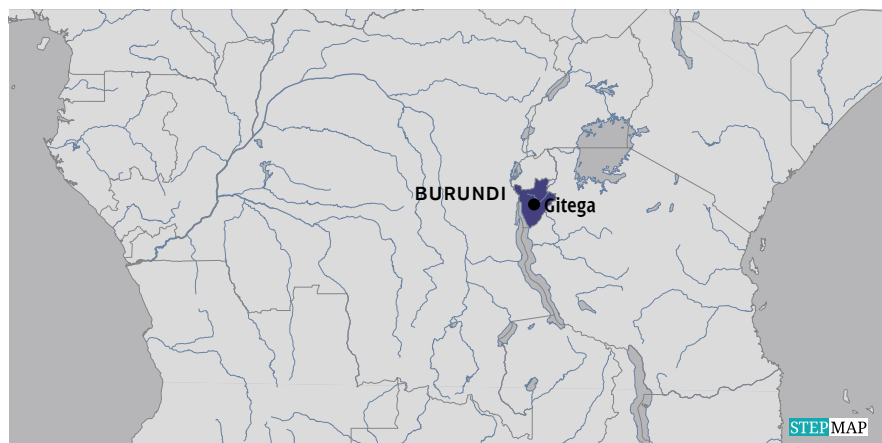
PRINTING:

Westdeutsche Verlags- und Druckerei GmbH
Kurfürstenstraße 46
D-64546 Mörfelden-Walldorf, Germany

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PRINT SUBSCRIPTION PRICES (INCL. MAILING CHARGES):

single issue: € 2.20
annual subscription, Germany: € 14.00
annual subscription, world: € 18.00





Culture Special

As every summer, the D+C/E+Z editorial team presents books, music and films that we appreciate and would like to recommend. The oeuvres are tackling issues of developmental relevance, and we would be pleased if our recommendations inspired you to read, watch or listen to them. This year we are presenting our culture special in two Digital Monthlies – in August and September.

INTERCULTURAL MUSIC

Music like droplets and flowing water

The Nile Project was a multinational music collective inspired by a river. It sang songs in a variety of styles and languages about life along and with the Nile. Like many projects in the region, it failed because of politics.

By Katharina Wilhelm Otieno

In 2011, the year of the Arab Spring, Egyptian ethnomusicologist Mina Girgis decided to launch a music project. It was not inspired by the protests around Cairo's Tahrir Square but by one of the few constants in Egyptian life: the Nile.

However, the Nile is not just Egyptian and Girgis quickly realised that such a project – like Africa's longest river – would have to flow across national boundaries. His vision was a collaborative venture bringing together musicians from all of the countries bordering the Nile. Starting in 2012, the Nile Project toured Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Egypt and Ethiopia with around 18 musicians and staged workshops for local music groups in which the focus was on learning from one another.

The message of the Nile Project was political from the start. The potentially

unifying power of the river is held back by numerous conflicts within and between the Nile countries. Three years ago, Ethiopia and Egypt came to the brink of a “water war” over the use of the Nile. That was after Ethiopia persisted in building the world's largest dam on the upper reaches of the Blue Nile, thereby massively reducing the flow of water to Egypt for the benefit of its own electricity supply.

Girgis and the other Nile Project musicians saw hope instead in the unifying power of music. They made three albums and an EP (Extended Play). The material on the first album, “Aswan”, was recorded live at their first joint concerts in the Egyptian city of the same name. As on the other albums, the lyrics are in Amharic, Kiswahili, Tigrinya, Kikundi, Luganda, Kinyarwanda and Nilotic dialects like Dholuo. Differences in Arabic dialects, in particular, meant that singers from Sudan and Egypt, for example, could not always agree on how certain words should be pronounced in duets. During performances,



The group's first album is named after the Egyptian city of Aswan on the Nile.

this was simply explained to the audience and each singer then used the pronunciation customary in their respective region.

Those early recordings show the diversity of the collective. Fast dance tracks like “Salaam Nubia”, with multiple female singers and driving drums, are interspersed by the wistful desert sound of pieces like “Tezeta”, featuring solo male vocals and modern wind instruments, including saxophones.

“Jinja”, the second Nile Project album, is named after the Ugandan city at the source of the Nile. Released in 2017, it shows that four years of working together produced a more synchronised sound. While the instrumental, tonal and vocal mix on the “Aswan” album gave some of the tracks a certain dissonant quality, “Jinja” feels like a more harmonious piece of work, despite the fact that it retains all of the original musical diversity.

Even a song like “Ya Abai Wuha” (“The Waters of the Nile”) – in which a single female voice solemnly sings the great river’s praises in Amharic before a sudden switch to dance rhythms driven by flutes and drums – conveys a palpable sense of unity. It is the group’s most powerful work to date.

“Tana”, the third album, reinforces the impression of togetherness, as do the transitions within songs. Hardly any track ends in the tempo or style in which it began, which is why all the songs are between five-and-a-half and ten minutes long. Nevertheless,

the listener almost always knows where on the Nile they are. “Sigalagala” (Dholuo for “howl”), for example, is influenced by classical Ugandan and Kenyan pop, while the Arabic “Ibn Masr” (“Son of Egypt”) opens with music that immediately transports to the Sahara. Excitement mounts when the different cultures come together in the middle of a song, as in “Naloona Sielewi” (“Look, I don’t understand it”), in which two singers ask each other in Nubian and Kiswahili: What is the point of borders?

Many of the songs are about overcoming borders, about camel drivers who travel through all the Nile countries or about bonds forged by sharing meals. In “Ma Badoor”, Kasiva Mutua and Asia Madani sing that it is enough that the Nile is the father of all. Other recurring themes are love, beauty, friendship, family, Allah, the Christian God and, over and over again, reverence for the Nile as the source of life. Some of the collective’s lyrics are available in translation on the project’s website.

For a number of years, the group took the music of the Nile all over the world, touring Europe and the USA and giving a highly acclaimed concert in 2015 at the UN headquarters in New York City. The collective then discovered that music, like water, runs up against man-made boundaries.

By that time, the Nile Project was registered as a non-governmental organisation (NGO). That put it on the radar of the

Egyptian government, which passed a law in 2017 making it easier for action to be taken against civil-society organisations. As the German daily newspaper taz reported, against a backdrop of rising tensions – especially between Ethiopia and Egypt – the group found it increasingly difficult to meet and obtain visas to travel. The collective had many Ethiopian members from the outset.

Rivalries with another project at the group’s main sponsor, the Swiss Development Agency, also led to funds being diverted – spelling the temporary end of the Nile Project. The group’s last recording was released in 2019 – an EP on which the Nile musicians teamed up with drum artist Jan Schulte aka Wolf Müller and demonstrated their diversity yet again by effortlessly transforming traditional Nilotic singing and Kenyan nyatiti music into the kind of ambient sound that is a sure-fire success in Europe’s bars and clubs. On vinyl, the EP is largely sold out. However, it can still be found along with the other Nile Project albums on all streaming providers.

THE NILE PROJECT:
<http://nileproject.org/>



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Arti performed in Benares in 2019: the Hindu ceremony figures in Krupa Ge's novel.

GENDER JUSTICE

Eight decades of change

Krupa Ge's debut novel "What we know about her" explores women's fates in South India from before independence in 1947 to late 2019.

By Hans Dembowski

Krupa Ge's storytelling is very subtle and nuanced. She takes the perspective of a young Indian PhD student, Yamuna, who lives in the southern state of Tamil Nadu and wants to understand her family's history. In particular, she is interested in her grandmother's sister, Lalitha, who became a prominent classical singer in the early 1940s. Yamuna's grandfather, Kannaiya, now in his 90s, does not want to discuss his sister-in-law's fate and also refuses to hand over old letters.

The characters in Ge's excellent novel cannot be defined in terms of black and white. The progressive trade-union activist becomes a devout Hindu after retiring. The wifebeater is loving and positively affirmative when it comes to a little girl. The self-confident leftist mother still worries about what relatives may think and certainly wants to see her children marry.

Ge tackles several controversial issues. The gender-justice dimension of "What

we know about her" is most obvious. She shows the historic evolution from arranged child marriage to teenage marriage to self-determined relationships outside the wedlock. The scope for female self-expression, including outside the family, has grown. Nonetheless, domestic violence, sexual abuse and repression persist. Questions of respectability remain relevant, and extended families still exert pressure.

Ge intertwines the gender debate in fascinating, but less obvious ways with an assessment of authoritarian identity politics. The novel is set in December 2019 when protests against a reform of citizenship laws rocked India. The Hindu-supremacist government of Prime Minister Modi enacted rules with a strong anti-Muslim bias. Ge does not discuss the politics explicitly, and readers who are not familiar with India may miss many of her hints to the events of 2019 and, more generally, Hindutva, the ideology of Hindu supremacism.

Ge is aware of the long history of right-wing fanaticism. Quite fittingly, Lalitha's husband, who looks like Hitler, is a Hindutva activist. It took me some googling to find out that the Mahasabha party he belongs to

is a precursor of the RSS, the cadre organisation which was modelled on Mussolini's fascists and spawned a huge network of Hindu-supremacist outfits. Modi's party, the BJP, belongs to that network, and he is an RSS member himself. He is also the MP for Benares, Hinduism's holy city. In the novel, Yamuna travels there twice and sees it with the eyes of a South Indian tourist.

Ge does not disown Hinduism, but rejects the abuse of the faith for manipulative identity politics. Her novel also tackles caste issues, but they blend into the big topic of traditional norms versus individual choice. Non-Indian readers will get the main message even if they miss caste-related nuances. Indeed, the metropolitan modernity Ge describes in Chennai is actually very similar to what people experience in the west. Everyone must decide for themselves to what extent they want to conform to expectations and to what extent they want to chart their own course in life.

The book has a very Indian feel. Lalitha comes to accept her adult life, which, apart from a short break, is mostly loveless and marked by violence. Inner peace and happiness result from embracing one's fate, not from resisting it. The expectation of permanent bliss, by contrast, can easily lead to constant disappointment, so the pursuit of happiness tends to result in enduring mass frustration.

Ge does not reject western individualism, but she is clearly aware of its limits. A western author might have pondered to what extent different protagonists are liberated and self-empowered on some scale from 0 to 10, but Ge takes a different approach. She depicts Lalitha and Yamuna as children of their respective eras, with scope for some self-empowerment, but limits imposed by society. Both do what they can to take fate into their own hands, but ultimately no one can control fate. What matters is the two poles, not the scale between them.

BOOK

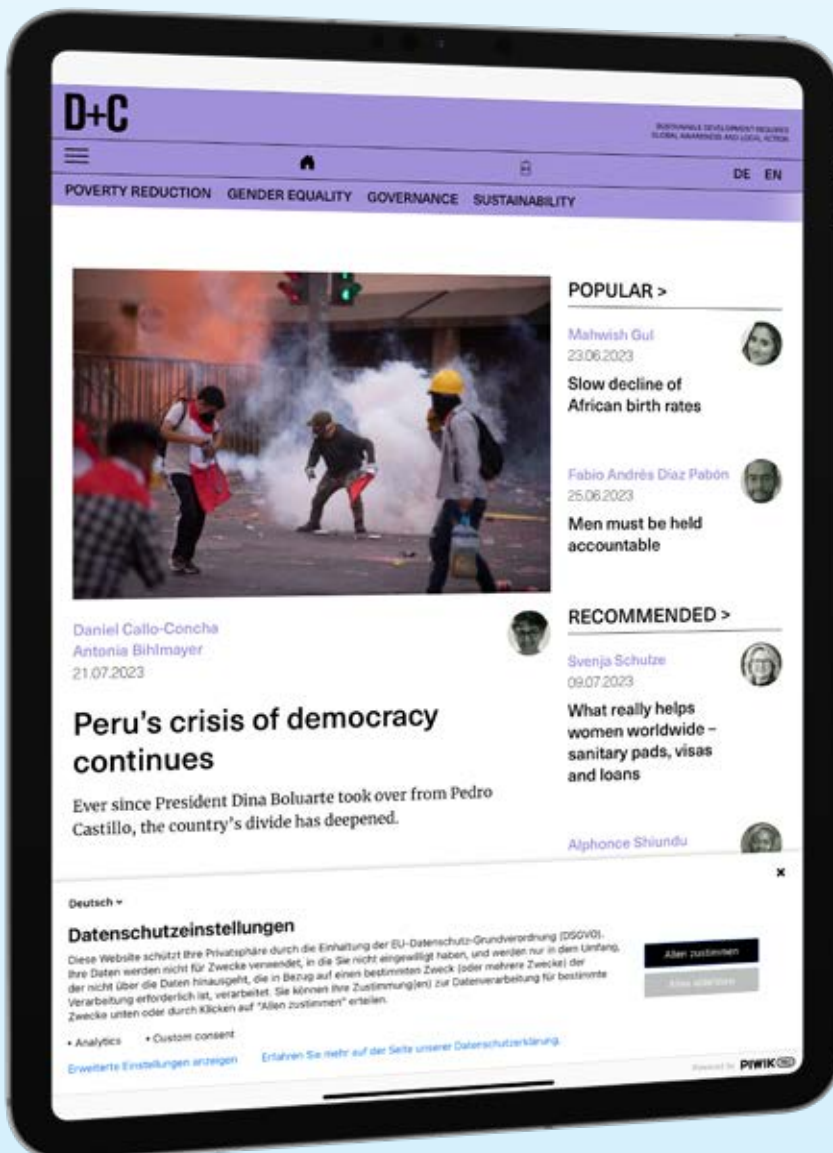
Krupa Ge, 2021: What we know about her. Chennai: Context.



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FILM

Emancipation and bloodshed

In the entertaining action film “The Woman King”, a guard of female warriors fights for the self-determination of their people. The film is based on historical circumstances in the former West African kingdom of Dahomey. However, it’s less concerned with accurately depicting past events than with entertaining and inspiring its audience.

By Jörg Döbereiner

African female soldiers, armed with machetes and spears, brutally attack an enemy village under the cover of darkness: the action-packed opening sequence of “The Woman King” recalls historical dramas like “Braveheart” or “Gladiator”. This time,

however, it is not white men who show their fighting prowess, but instead the “Agojie”, an all-female elite guard of the fictionalised West African kingdom of Dahomey.

Led by General Nanisca, the warriors battle a supposedly superior alliance of neighbouring peoples who are oppressing the Dahomey and have already sold some of them to white slave traders. The film sets the events in the year 1823.

Nanisca, complexly portrayed by Oscar winner Viola Davis, is, on the one hand, a tough leader, and, on the other, deeply traumatised: she became pregnant after being raped by her enemies and had to give up her child immediately after birth. Her authoritarian leadership style is challenged by

the young Nawi, played by Thuso Mbedu, who is eager to earn a place in the guard.

Both characters undergo a development. Nanisca faces her past and gets caught up in the competition to see which woman will be chosen to reign alongside the new ruler, King Ghezo (Golden Globe winner John Boyega) as “Woman King”. And for Nawi, who turns down an arranged marriage, the training to become an elite soldier is a process of emancipation and self-discovery. It is primarily these two strong female characters that give the film its emotional depth.

AGAINST SLAVERY

The proud Ghezo also wants the Dahomey to emancipate themselves. In “The Woman King”, there’s only one way to achieve that: battle. It’s waged through more fast-paced action scenes, some of which are

very brutal. There is no shortage of blood in this movie, which is why it is not recommended for viewers below the age of 16.

Even when the Dahomey battle neighbouring African peoples, Nanisca makes it unmistakably clear who the real opponents are: “The white man has brought immorality here”, she says. “They will not stop until the whole of Africa is theirs to enslave.”

“The Woman King” has been sharply criticised for its depiction of the Dahomey and slavery. One argument is that the female protagonists come off too well, and the film missed its chance to appropriately do justice to the nuanced history of slavery by obscuring how much the historical kingdom of Dahomey actually profited from the slave trade. Dahomey existed from the 17th to the 19th century in what is now Benin and did indeed produce exceptional female soldiers.

INSPIRATION INSTEAD OF HISTORICAL ACCURACY

The drama, which was filmed in South Africa, does quote its historical model, but ultimately claims to be a work of fiction. It’s less concerned with historical accuracy than with being an inspiration to its audiences, for example with this speech by King Ghezo: “The Europeans and the Americans have seen: if you want to hold a people in chains, one must first convince them that they are meant to be bound. We joined them in becoming our own oppressor. But no more. No more. We are a warrior people! And there is power in our mind. In our unity. In our culture. If we understand that power, we will be limitless.”

These messages likely resonate with many people in Africa and other parts of the world, given ongoing racism and oppression. For good reason the African American Film Critics Association (AAFCA) presented its award for best picture to “The Woman King” in 2023. Gina Prince-Bythewood was awarded best director.

FILM

The Woman King, 2022, USA, 2 h 14 min, FSK 16, director: Gina Prince-Bythewood.



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Seh-Dong-Hong-Beh, a leader of the Dahomey female warriors, painted by Frederick Forbes in 1851.

GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

Lopsided world order

Western policymakers have a habit of emphasising “the rules-based world order”. They often do not notice that the global order looks rather shaky to people in low- and middle-income countries.

By Hans Dembowski

For several reasons, the system of global governance simply does not serve their needs:

- In view of atrocious warfare, which only rarely affected Europe in recent decades, the Security Council often remains impotent because a permanent member wields its veto. Russia, China and the USA have done so in recent times.
- The universal declaration of human rights is not universally observed. The UN has no effective tools of enforcement.
- The global ecosystem is set to collapse. The UN conventions on climate change, biodiversity and desertification are not fit for purpose so far.
- In the past 20 years, the EU and the USA opted for bilateral trade agreements instead of focusing on the WTO’s Doha Development Round, which did not include topics like investors’ rights that they were keen on.
- Though sovereign debt crises have been a recurring phenomenon for decades, there still is no coherent legal system to resolve them.

For similar reasons, Financial Times columnist Martin Wolf accused western powers of hypocrisy in the 12 July issue. One consequence is that western governments find fewer partners than hoped for sanctions on Russia. We have rudimentary foundations of global governance, but they do not make the world a safe place for all. Much remains to be done.

In this setting, the summit on development and climate finance which the French government hosted in Paris in June was an important opportunity. It did not deliver globally binding results, but it did set the stage for far-reaching decisions. Some radical ideas such as introducing global taxes for global public goods are interesting, but difficult to implement, at least in the short run.

More pragmatic proposals included: High-income nations should make many billions of special-drawing rights, a kind of internal IMF currency, available for less fortunate countries’ climate needs. International financial institutions should shield investments in essential projects in developing countries from currency risks. The G20’s common framework on debt treatment should be expanded to include middle income countries.

An incremental result in Paris was that creditor governments agreed on a debt-restructuring deal for Zambia. It postpones payments and reduces interest rates, but

does not include write downs, as Zambian and Western diplomats had demanded. China disagreed. Whether the deal gives Zambia’s economy the much needed new momentum, remains to be seen.

In our era of growing polarisation, it is difficult to reach consensus with China. Nonetheless, western governments must be more proactive in the pursuit of lasting solutions. Partners across the developing world see how fast and generously the west is mobilising support for Ukraine, which obviously neither Russia nor China endorse. Nor do some countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Support for Ukraine is necessary. There can be no effective global governance if imperialist aggression of the Russian kind is allowed to prevail. Supporting disadvantaged nations in their fight against poverty and environmental disaster is just as urgent, however. Western action to tackle global challenges cannot wait until China eventually gets on board.

Finance ministers of rich nations should bear in mind that China’s Belt and Road initiative often seemed more generous to partners in Africa, Asia and Latin America than what western governments offered in recent decades. Now that China’s stubborn attitude to debt relief is sending a different message, western governments should grasp the opportunity. They must commit to investing in sustainable solutions. And they must keep all promises.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are not a luxury. If humanity does not get a grip on poverty and environmental decline, ever more disasters will increase deprivation, destitution and despair. The results will include more scapegoating, hatred and violence. Failure is not an option. It would make life much more uncomfortable everywhere, very much including high-income countries.

SDG achievement, including in high-income countries, however, would equal giant steps towards a true rules-based world order. If high-income countries do not pave the way, they are implicitly renouncing any serious claim to global leadership.



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz with Egypt’s President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi (left) and Zambia’s President Hakainde Hichilema (right) at the development finance summit in Paris in June.



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MILITARY DEPLOYMENT

Overstaying the welcome

German troops must withdraw faster from Mali than legislators had planned. This new development is healthy since the soldiers' presence in the Sahel country has become self-serving and futile.

By André Uzulis

In late May, Germany's federal parliament, the Bundestag, extended German troops' support of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) for a final 12 months. The idea was to end Bundeswehr deployment there in May 2024. However, the UN Security Council has recently decided to terminate MINUSMA by the end of this year. The implication is that German troops must withdraw sooner.

That MINUSMA is no longer welcome in Mali has been obvious for some time. Accordingly, German troops actually should already have left. In 2013, they were sent to Mali to support Germany's close ally France. Though French troops withdrew a while ago, their German counterparts are still there.

Since the most recent coup in 2021, a military regime has been running Mali. It is known to make things difficult for the Bundeswehr, for example by prohibiting the use of drones or not permitting flights to resupply the German camp. Indeed, the German military had to temporarily suspend its mission because sensible operations had become impossible.

MINUSMA was meant to stabilise the country in view of Islamist extremism and protect the people from militia violence. The current regime's policies are thwarting such efforts. It has invited up to 2000 mercenaries of Wagner, the Russian military-service provider, and it no longer allows MINUSMA access to parts of its territory. The government in Moscow is keen on expanding its influence in Africa and happily grasped the opportunity its Malian counterpart offered.

These developments have made the German troops' mission futile. Sadly, the Federal Government failed to learn the

lessons of Afghanistan. The Bundeswehr should have withdrawn from there when the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) concluded its mission in 2014. At that point, the French troops left. The German contingent, by contrast, stayed until the bitter end.

When the last French soldier departed from Mali in 2022, that should have been the signal for Germany to withdraw its troops as well. The full truth is that Bundeswehr troops do not even have the equipment they would need to operate effectively without their French partners in Mali.

They stayed nonetheless. The reason was policymakers' concern that Germany might appear to be unreliable. In particular, the Federal Foreign Office is worried about Germany's reputation. The Bundeswehr therefore basically fortified its Camp Castor near Gao and hardly left it anymore. However, the local people appreciate its presence in view of the protection it provided in the past. The regime in Bamako, however, does not take sensitivities of this kind into account.

Now Germany's troops must withdraw in only half the time the Bundestag wanted to give them. Hopefully, every soldier will

return home safe. The Bundeswehr is professional, so that looks feasible, though it will not be easy. Camp Castor is like a small town, with a church, a hospital and a post office on about one square kilometre. Some 1500 people live here, including some international allies. The greatest challenge, of course, is to ensure that none of the many and diverse weapons end up in the wrong hands.

Mali is no longer a reliable partner, so MINUSMA has looked outdated for a while. So far, Germany has been considering Niger a partner for stabilising the region, though that may change after the coup attempt in late July. Germany has been involved in training special forces there and started participating in a new military EU mission on invitation by Niger's government. In contrast to the mission in Mali, however, it is limited to only rather few troops. Even if it does not last, it may prove the model for future deployments outside NATO territory.

Russia's attack on Ukraine has changed German policymakers' view of the world. The alliance's eastern borders are now the top priority. With the withdrawal from Mali, a 30-year era of major foreign deployments is ending. What matters most now is the defence of Germany and the NATO.



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German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius visited Camp Castor in April.

A flock of migratory cranes in a national park on Germany's Baltic coast.

FOCUS

Protecting biodiversity

How to make multilateralism succeed

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China's precious agricultural heritage

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MULTILATERAL POLICYMAKING

Involving local people to reach biodiversity goals

At the biodiversity summit of Kunming-Montréal in 2022, Jochen Flasbarth of Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) helped to broker consensus in the final stages. He told D+C/E+Z what makes multilateral negotiations result in agreement – and why the future of Germany and other countries depends on nature conservation in far-away places.

Jochen Flasbarth interviewed by Katharina Wilhelm Otieno and Jörg Döbereiner

At the biodiversity summit in Kunming-Montréal at the end of 2022, the global community agreed to put 30% of the world's oceans and land under protection by 2030. What will happen next?

Given the geopolitical upheaval of the current moment, the conference's success matters beyond the issue of biodiversity. In the context of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the summit proved that multilateralism can still work. Global problems require multilateral solutions.

The outcome of the conference is a specific framework of targets to be achieved by 2030. Apart from global action – consider the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund – the big issue is to implement national biodiversity strategies and plans of action. The concept resembles the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) in climate protection. Germany is providing systematic support to partner countries, helping them to implement their national biodiversity plans.

You yourself made a significant contribution to the final consensus in Montréal. How did that come about?

China had the presidency and was pulling the strings accordingly. Following established procedures, the major points of contention were only tackled close to the end of the conference. At that point, so-called facilitators were tasked with finding the kind

of consensus that big international conferences always need.

There was a lot of discussion about the goal of designating 30% of all land as protected areas. Nobody disputes the importance of protected areas. What is more important, however, is to use land and oceans sustainably, in ways that promote biodiversity. The question of how we farm around the world is more urgent than whether 28% or 32% of a country's territory is protected. However, the figure of 30% had attained so much symbolic importance that the success of the conference depended on it. We thus had to deliver, which we were ultimately able to do. Other difficult issues included measures to protect genetic resources and funding.

You were a facilitator on the issue of financing, along with Jeanne d'Arc Mujawamariya, Rwanda's minister of environment.

Yes, we already knew each other because we had worked together at climate summits

earlier. People apparently knew that we get along well, which is important. It was also good that the presidency stayed in constant contact with the three teams of facilitators. Nonetheless, success came at a price.

What do you mean?

The funding needs are enormous, and it is good that we have agreed on goals:

- By 2030, at least \$500 billion of environmentally harmful subsidies are to be phased out each year.
- At the same time, at least \$200 billion per year is to be mobilised from public and private sources for biodiversity-related goals.
- By 2025, at least \$20 billion and, by 2030, at least \$30 billion are to flow annually from industrialised to developing countries as part of the overall financial requirement. That is more than Jeanne d'Arc Mujawamariya and I had proposed. Moreover, we did not propose a goal for 2025 – the presidency did so.

Why didn't you?

Given the generally tight state of public finances, we saw that the classic donor countries would not be able to raise their budgets for international biodiversity protection to this extent in the coming years. When you know that even the best intentions will hardly secure the funding, these fixed figures may become an enormous liability



Opening ceremony of the biodiversity summit in Kunming.

for further cooperation. They may damage trust.

There was also debate about whether the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund should become an independent institution or be hosted by an existing one. We facilitators wanted to affiliate it with the Global Environment Facility (GEF), which has a governance structure that takes into account the concerns of developing countries and is not dominated by the west. We got agreement on that score.

What were developing countries' concerns?

Just like industrialised countries, developing countries are not a monolithic block with unified positions. To some, an independent structure that would provide equal representation for developing countries was important. However, there were tactical interests as well. Some Latin American countries vehemently called for an independent fund, with the true aim of driving up payments.

From the point of view of the BMZ and other donor institutions, affiliating the fund with the GEF would make it more efficient and effective. New funds have no guarantee of succeeding. Plugging into existing structures generates less bureaucracy, thereby improving access especially for countries with weak capacities.

Is there a basic formula for successfully concluding multilateral negotiations?

There is no "one size fits all" solution. First of all, it is necessary to firmly believe that international negotiations do lead to a certain degree of commitment. The decisions from Kunming-Montréal send a strong signal in terms of both policy and international law. But success also depends on many other things. In the final phase, it is important to have actors who understand parties' mutual interests. That is the role of the facilitators in particular. It is imperative that they subordinate some of their own national interests in order to propose a globally accepted solution. The goal is to reasonably balance the interests of all participants.

How do the interests of countries with high, middle and low incomes differ?

Every country's interests depend on a variety of factors. The least developed countries (LDCs) want as much direct and uncomplicated financial support as possible. The



Moors and swamps are vital for many species, including the critically endangered red ruffed lemur from Madagascar.

situation is more complicated in emerging markets. Brazil's current government of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, for example, is demanding more international support for forest and climate protection. On the other hand, the Democratic Republic of the Congo wants to be compensated for not using resources the way industrialised countries did in the past. That is a very complicated discussion, and one must consider very carefully whether you want to go down that road. Another interesting case is Costa Rica, where reforestation has become a particularly successful model. Costa Rica is playing a positive, mediating role.

Does success also depend on civil society?

There is a strong community of non-governmental organisations in the field of biodiversity and conservation. It is not entirely unified, but it acts in concert on important issues. There are also non-governmental organisations that advocate for the interests of indigenous peoples. To a certain extent, indigenous rights and nature conservation go hand in hand. Some indigenous organisations also worry, however, that global conservation will be carried out at their expense in the areas where they live. Ultimately local people must generally be included in local efforts. Those who want to expand protected areas must also cultivate acceptance so that biodiversity goals can really be achieved.

To what extent does Germany's future depend on conservation in distant parts of the world?

The future of not just Germany but of all countries depends on it because global environmental crises feed off each other. If we don't make progress on protecting biodiversity, we will also fail to reach the 1.5-degree climate goal. We will make progress on climate mitigation if we protect and manage forests, moors and oceans in ways that make them absorb and bind CO₂. Unfortunately, the reverse is also true. Global warming is changing ecosystems and accelerating the loss of biodiversity.

Is there a specific developmental perspective on biodiversity?

It takes many forms. For example: ecosystem protection can make an enormous contribution to creating local jobs. In projects like reforestation, rewetting moors and restoring mangroves or river systems, there is enormous potential for creating jobs in the short, medium and long term. In that way, protecting biodiversity can also help generate sources of income.



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Farmer releases fish into a rice field in Qingtian County, China.

TRADITIONAL AGRICULTURE

Interplay of culture and nature

In regions where sustainable agriculture has been practised over centuries, ecosystems with remarkable biodiversity have flourished. The UN has designated some of these areas as agricultural heritage. Examples from China show why they deserve to be protected.

By Min Qingwen and Guo Xuan

In rural China, farmers still employ the traditional practice of cultivating rice on flooded terraces while simultaneously raising fish in the water. Such unique forms of land use have evolved over centuries, harmonising with nature. The wisdom passed down through generations has resulted in sustainable ecosystems, enabling local communities to feed themselves while also preserving natural resources.

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) recognises such unique ecosystems by designating them Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS). China boasts 19 out of the 74 GIAHS worldwide as of June 2023. Qingtian county in Zhejiang Province is known

for its traditional rice-fish culture, while other GIAHS in China include a mountainous region, also in Zhejiang, where mushroom cultivation coexists with sustainable agroforestry, and the city of Fuzhou with its jasmine and tea culture system.

GIAHS are complex systems with interconnected components working together. They exhibit remarkable agrobiodiversity, which is defined by the FAO as the variety of animals, plants and microorganisms that are used directly or indirectly for food and agriculture, including crops, livestock, forestry and fisheries.

A key aspect of GIAHS is the presence of different types of diversity, namely:

- agri-species diversity,
- agroecosystem and landscape diversity and
- agricultural diversity.

BIODIVERSITY STRENGTHENS ECOSYSTEMS

There are several ways to enhance agri-species diversity. One method is mixed cropping, where different crops are grown together in the same field. Another approach is

intercropping, where a crop is planted immediately after another crop is harvested in the same field (Zhang et al., 2016). Introducing other species is an option too. For example, as mentioned above, rice fields can be enriched with fish and, in some cases, ducks as well.

Positive interactions can arise when different species utilise available resources in their unique ways. For example, rice plants provide both nourishment and shade to fish. In return, the fish consume pests, enhance the soil and fertilise the plants through their waste.

Increased biodiversity can therefore enhance ecosystem functions, productivity and stability. A study conducted in Zhejiang found that rice yields in rice-fish culture were significantly higher than in rice monoculture without fish. This improvement was achieved without the use of pesticides. Additionally, the presence of fish minimised weed and pest populations (Xie et al., 2011). Other studies have arrived at similar results.

In various GIAHS locations, distinctive agricultural landscapes have developed as a result of the dynamic interplay between humans and nature. They can consist of forests, grasslands or farmlands and can also be influenced by rivers and lakes. Moreover, the homes of the local residents who have contributed to the formation of these areas over extended periods, are an integral part of these landscapes.

One example of resourceful land management can be found in northern China's mountainous region of Shexian. Throughout the centuries, residents constructed large-scale dryland terraces on steep hillsides. These structures allow them to optimise the use of limited water and soil resources. On these terraces, they grow a variety of crops such as Chinese prickly ash, walnuts, millet and corn. The resulting cultivated landscape is a mixture of stone terraces, forests, shrubs, waterways and communities in the valley. The individual components are closely interconnected and coexist harmoniously.

Biodiversity is also closely connected to cultural diversity. In areas designated as GIAHS, local residents have adapted to their natural environment over long periods of time. The rich experiences of various ethnic groups are evident in their unique cultures, which form a significant aspect of GIAHS. In southern China, for example, the Dong people keep not only fish in their rice fields,

“GIAHS combine traditional cultivation techniques with modern approaches to sustainability and resource efficiency.”

but also ducks. This diversity in agriculture is tightly interwoven with their traditional culture, encompassing aspects such as diet, clothing, architecture and medicine. Additionally, immaterial aspects like religion, traditions and locally applied rules play a role in preserving agricultural diversity (Min et al., 2008, Zhang et al., 2016).

PROTECTING LANDSCAPES

There are three main steps to protecting unique agroecosystems efficiently. First, it is important to understand why residents value and maintain the ecosystem. That requires conducting in-depth research on the subject and showing respect for the local communities.

Second, broad participation in protective measures is essential. China has introduced a five-step approach that involves governments, corporations, researchers, social organisations and farmers (Min et al., 2022). The latter play a particularly important role in protecting the biodiversity of GIAHS.

Third, it is crucial to promote multi-disciplinary research (Zhang et al., 2016). This involves providing assistance to researchers, farmers and other stakeholders

so they can explore the various benefits that ecosystems offer to humanity. The focus should be on the relationship between economic development and the preservation of agrobiodiversity. That includes supporting agricultural practices which help maintain this diversity.

To preserve biodiversity, it is beneficial for GIAHS regions to be economically productive. The distinct ecological environments of GIAHS offer good conditions for producing high quality (organic) products. Considering the growing demand for healthier food in China, these products have strong market potential.

Brands have been successfully created in various places, for instance in the aforementioned Qingtian county, where rice cultivation is combined with fish farming. The GIAHS project significantly enhanced the recognition of both rice and fish. As a result, rice produced by that method commands notably higher prices than conventional rice. The price of fish has also risen sharply since the project’s start (Zhang et al., 2016). Other GIAHS locations in China have achieved remarkable success in marketing their products as well (Zhang et al., 2016).

GIAHS combine traditional cultivation techniques with modern approaches to sustainability and resource efficiency. They offer a blueprint for living and doing business sustainably and in harmony with nature. We should follow their example when it comes to tackling major global challenges like the climate crisis, disaster preparedness, food security and biodiversity loss.

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Terraces created by residents in Shexian County.



Giraffes in Lake Mburo National Park, located in Uganda's Cattle Corridor.

LAND USE CONFLICTS

Wilderness under pressure

In Uganda, nature, herders and farmers compete for land resources. Fast population growth has increased the pressure on former 'wastelands'. In order to facilitate sustainable conservation, better planning is needed – and it must involve local communities.

By David Mfitumukiza

From Uganda's south-west to the north-east runs a strip of savanna land where herders have traditionally grazed cattle. It is called the Cattle Corridor. The savanna fauna is dominated by grasses and shrubs, sprinkled with groups of trees. Herding communities have long shared this landscape with wild animals – both herbivores like zebras, giraffes and antelopes as well as carnivores like lions and leopards. Wildfires, irregular rainfall, dry spells and droughts are typical for this ecosystem.

In the past 30 to 40 years, pressure on the Cattle Corridor has increased considerably. The population of Uganda more than doubled to over 45 million. People who want to escape poverty and land shortages in different parts of the country tend to migrate to

'wastelands', where they can purchase land relatively cheap with the goal of making it usable, including for crop farming and informal settlements.

Accordingly, land use has changed in the Cattle Corridor. Agriculture has gained a foothold. Farmers primarily cultivate corn, beans and bananas, but other crops too. Areas in which livestock and wild animals could formerly roam unhindered are now flecked with farmland. Wild animals are affected in particular. Their habitat is shrinking.

When wild animals move onto cultivated land, tensions arise. Predators attack livestock, and herbivores decimate harvests. To protect their livelihoods, sometimes people kill wild animals. On the other hand, lions and other carnivores have killed some people and domestic animals.

Several national parks and other protected areas have been established along the Cattle Corridor. A considerable share of the wild animals stay there. However, there are still problems. In times of prolonged drought, animals tend to leave the protected areas and eventually find their way into settlements and agricultural land. On the other

hand, cattle herders sometimes drive their animals through protected areas in search of forage and water.

Droughts increase the potential for trouble with local communities and both wild animals and conservationists. They sometimes start to poach wild animals or set fires in protected areas.

COOPERATING WITH COMMUNITIES

When Uganda began consciously conserving its wild flora and fauna, especially during colonial times, it was primarily for external reasons, like tourism or hunting. Conservation was not necessarily designed to help local communities. Things have changed, however. Today, there is an awareness of sustainable conservation only succeeding in cooperation with communities. It cannot be done without their support – or even against them.

In the Cattle Corridor, awareness campaigns are being run to involve local residents in wildlife management. This approach, known as 'community conservation', aims to improve the relationship between wildlife managers and neighbouring communities. It allows communities to access resources in conservation areas and encourages dialogue and local participation in planning and managing those resources. Wildlife managers also engage in community development and support communi-

ties to benefit from tourism both directly and indirectly.

For instance, tourists are encouraged to visit communities to experience their unique culture and support local businesses. Moreover, the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) shares 20% of its annual revenue with the people living near national parks and wildlife reserves, known as ‘revenue sharing’. The shared money can be spent on household and community projects that reduce human-wildlife conflicts or improve people’s livelihoods.

Projects like goat rearing, piggeries, tree planting and beekeeping receive funding at the household level. At the community level, UWA funds the construction of schools, health centres, feeder roads and water tanks. Other projects aim to reduce crop damage caused by wild animals, for

“Increased pressure from population growth and changes in land use do not only affect the Cattle Corridor. Wetlands, forests and other unused areas with valuable ecosystems are shrinking too.”

example by planting thorn hedges. This approach has boosted acceptance. Financial benefits motivate people to work with the authorities.

There are, moreover, some rules that protect wild animals outside the conservation areas. For example, wild animals must be respected wherever they happen to show up. Violators risk prison sentences. Authorities work with local officials to ensure compliance with the laws. This approach is also a way of involving local communities.

SEDENTARINESS EXACERBATES PROBLEMS

As described above, more and more land is being cultivated outside the protected areas. For example, trees and bushes are being cleared to produce charcoal or to make space for settlements, farms or plantations. Biodiversity and ecosystem services are declining as a result.

What’s making matters worse is that most cattle herders have become sedentary.

Rich individuals have acquired land rights for large areas, pushing out wild animals and other people who used to graze their animals in different locations throughout the year. This exclusion is a common cause of land use conflicts between those who have land and those who don’t.

The climate crisis is an aggravating factor too. While rainfall has always been unpredictable in the Cattle Corridor – intense drought and long dry periods are not uncommon – global heating is intensifying extreme weather events. As crops fail more often, farmers try to cultivate more land. They want to maximise their yields through extensive agriculture. In turn, nature is under increased pressure.

INTEGRATED PLANNING IS NEEDED

In order to reduce pressure on Uganda’s original wilderness, planning must be holistic. It must give scope to the various forms of land use and protect wild areas. Legitimate interests must be balanced. It is up to the government to assume responsibility and provide enabling environments for planning accordingly.

At the moment, the government is focusing on protected areas. Much of the land outside these areas is owned by private individuals, who use it as they see fit – often with no consideration for the surrounding people or environment. This scenario is unsustainable. Since many tensions result from existing land-ownership rules and associated inequities, reforms are needed.

Furthermore, the profits from conservation efforts should be distributed differently. Instead of investing 20% in surrounding communities, the ratio should be flipped, so 80% would flow to local people. Once they see conservation as a reliable source of income for better living, they will become more actively engaged including locally led investment in wildlife conservation.

Better use should also be made of the money, for instance to fight poverty in a targeted way. So far, the poorest of the poor hardly benefit in ways that are responsive to their needs and priorities. For example, if a school is financed with funds from conservation projects, that often does not help all children from the most disadvantaged families. Some cannot go to school at all because they have to work or lack basic ne-



cessities. Poverty is in fact a serious threat to conservation because it undermines its acceptance.

Moreover, agricultural production methods need to be optimised. The land simply must be used better than it was in the past. For instance, irrigation could ensure that farms survive droughts instead of extensive land use as a means of increasing yield potential. Uganda actually has enough annual rainfall, but the water is not used efficiently enough, and is not distributed fairly.

Uganda has ambitions to develop from a low-income to a middle-income country. A fundamental challenge is to draft a holistic development plan that takes appropriate account of conservation as part and parcel of sustainable development. Increased pressure from population growth and changes in land use do not only affect the Cattle Corridor. Wetlands, forests and other unused areas with valuable ecosystems are shrinking too. If current trends continue, there is a risk that these areas could be overrun and so badly damaged that they lose their biodiversity. The various services that these ecosystems provide to society would be lost as well.

Unique ecosystems must therefore get special status in land-use plans. That does not necessarily mean that they are always designated as protected areas. However, settlements or cultivation should be done in controlled ways that take into account their special functions. The economic and social development of Uganda must not happen at the expense of nature.



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GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY

The basis of our existence

The progressive loss of biodiversity threatens people's livelihoods and global food security. It is high time for a holistic, inclusive approach to protect biodiversity and reconcile it with agriculture. It can be done, says Melissa de Kock of UNEP's Biodiversity, People and Landscapes Unit.

Melissa de Kock interviewed by Katharina Wilhelm Otieno

Why are wild species and biodiversity so important?

They are the basis of our existence on this planet. Biodiversity is the cornerstone of ecosystems, and ecosystems are the reason we have food, clothing and air to breathe. It is also the foundation of our economic system. We depend on natural resources for everything.

What tangible effects will the progressive loss of biodiversity have for people's livelihoods and food security?

If there are no more fish in the sea, then there are no more fish for people to eat. We need healthy soils for a healthy diet, we

need plants for clean air. Without biodiversity we cannot survive.

Many indigenous peoples have an incredibly close connection to nature. Industrialised countries tend to overemphasise profit. So, this connection is lost, and with it our health and not least part of our culture.

What perspective do you have on the conflicts between human rights and biodiversity, for example regarding the displacement of indigenous people?

80% of the planet's remaining biodiversity is located in indigenous peoples' lands. And more than 90% of these lands are in good or fair ecological condition. At least 36% of the indigenous territories are located in areas considered key regions for biodiversity. This shows that indigenous communities play a central role here.

In the past, many conservation actions displaced people. This was a very colonialist attitude and led to a disconnection between indigenous peoples and their land. The indigenous people knew how to manage their land sustainably before the colonisers came.

So, there should be no conflict or human-rights issue at all.

Human rights should actually be the foundation for the conservation of biodiversity. Indigenous peoples are the best custodians of biodiversity. We must move towards a more inclusive path of conservation for a sustainable management of biodiversity.

Are all species of equal relevance to the survival of our planet and how do we know which species are most important?

I hope we never get into a situation where we have to make these kinds of decisions. Biodiversity is all part of an interconnected system. Every species has a job to do. It is like an engine. If you take one component out, it still runs – just not very well. Take out many components and the whole system breaks down. It is not just rhinos and elephants that need to be protected – the small species are absolutely critical too. We must never give preference to one species over another. We must see the system as a whole, and we need all the components for it to work properly.

Examples such as the bee population decline are quite well known to the public.

Are there other important but lesser-known species that are threatened with extinction?

According to the Red List of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), more than 42,000 species are currently threatened with extinction. Not all of them play as obvious



Thousands of dead fish float in the Hatir Jheel Lake in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

a role as bees. But as I said, it is a system that needs all species to continue operating.

What role does marine biodiversity play?

The ocean covers two thirds of our planet. It plays a crucial role in climate regulation because it absorbs carbon, for example. Species such as mangroves, which are also nurseries for fish, are important too. The ocean provides a significant source of protein for millions of people. Without the ocean, we would be in a worse state than we already are.

What should a sensible blue economy look like?

The key is sustainability: No more should be taken than is sustainable. At the same time, human wellbeing and the economy must also be considered. We need protected marine areas, and we need to ensure the rights of coastal communities. Monitoring and research can help here to assess fish stocks and set sustainable fishing quotas.

We know that high-tech agriculture threatens biodiversity too. What does a biodiversity-friendly agricultural approach need to look like?

In 2021, the UN held the international Food Systems Summit. One of the main recommendations of this summit was nature-friendly production. This means working with nature instead of against it. With large-scale industrial monocultures, you eventually get into a situation where the soil can no longer regenerate, and you constantly have to use artificial fertilisers.

This means that a biodiversity-friendly agricultural approach must work with agroecological principles such as environmentally friendly fertilisers, intercropping or mixed cropping and leaving some land for soil regeneration. The use of indigenous tree species plays a role as well. This can be done on both large and small scales.

But it is also about changing the way we consume. We need to think about a diversified diet that does not rely only on highly processed foods from monocultures.

Such approaches sometimes conflict with the goals of economic or infrastructure development, especially as many biodiversity hotspots are in countries with lower or middle income. How can this be reconciled better than in the past? How can poverty and hunger be tackled without endangering biodiversity?

The answer is twofold. It is about changing global consumption patterns and finding ways to live with and benefit from nature without overexploiting it.

The reason many biodiversity hotspots are located in low- and middle-income countries is that these areas have not been overexploited yet. High-income countries have already destroyed a significant component of their own biodiversity. Developing countries should be applauded for preserving their biodiversity hotspots and supported to sustain them.

One problem, however, is that much of what is being produced in developing countries is actually meant for consumption in richer nations. There is a lot of land that is appropriated for growing food for export. The space for production for local consumption is shrinking.

“There is certainly public will to do the right thing.”

We need to change the way we produce and consume globally. Rich countries need to reduce their consumption and we need more agroecological measures in all countries that allow livestock, agriculture and biodiversity to co-exist.

Community-based conservation, as evidenced in many developing countries, is one of the most successful ways of living with nature. There are different approaches to this. In Kenya, for example, community members voluntarily leave a certain area and farm elsewhere to enable wildlife to thrive. In Namibia, some communities continue to farm and raise livestock on their land and keep certain zones reserved for wildlife. All these communities generate high incomes from tourism or carbon credits, which allow them to live on their land without transforming it for extensive agriculture.

What further steps need to be taken to protect biodiversity and what is UNEP's role in it?

Our work is all about science and policy, analysing data and bringing it together. One of our flagship publications is the Global Environment Outlook (GEO). We try our best to help member states make informed decisions and comply with agreements like the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

We are also working with countries to find out how they can best achieve the goals of the Kunming-Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework as an outcome of the UN Conference on Biodiversity (COP15) 2022 by supporting them to develop their national biodiversity strategies.

However, there are many different levels. UNEP has a very specific niche where it supports governments and gives a voice to the environment. But indigenous peoples and local communities also play a big role for UNEP, as do non-governmental organisations and the private sector. It's a holistic system that we are engaging with, from individuals to companies to governments.

How do you assess the progress made after the UN Summit in Rio thirty years ago, especially with regard to the CBD?

That was an important milestone. Unfortunately, the CBD targets have not been met in the meantime. But there is certainly public will to do the right thing. And the Kunming-Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework offers a great new opportunity to finally achieve strong biodiversity targets and outcomes for the benefit of society as a whole.

What relevance do you assign to this framework and COP15?

For me, COP15 was a rollercoaster of emotions. At the beginning it was devastating to see people not moving forward and not compromising. Honestly, I was afraid we would not go anywhere. But what did emerge is remarkable. The central role of indigenous peoples and local communities as well as women was recognised. This is a very inclusive agreement. And for me the key to sustainable biodiversity conservation is inclusiveness. It cannot be done by a small group of people. It has to be done by everyone, so the recognition that we need a whole-of-society approach is encouraging.

LINK

The Global Environment Outlook

<https://www.unep.org/geo/>



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At Lake Bosomtwe in Ghana, both the interests of the local communities and those of nature conservation must be taken into account.

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

Making the most of a biosphere reserve

German and Ghanaian scientists are cooperating to involve local people more in protecting a UNESCO biosphere reserve. The goal is to bridge knowledge gaps in order to provide tangible benefits to communities.

By Tobias Cremer, Friederike Major, Yaw Boakye Agyeman and Franziska Rottig

Lake Bosomtwe was formed by a meteor approximately one million years ago. It is located about 30 kilometres from Kumasi, the capital of Ghana's Ashanti Region. It became a UNESCO biosphere reserve in 2016. It is the newest of the three reserves in Ghana and covers a core area of almost 44,000 hectares. The lake's fishery resources support a local economy of over 70,000 people.

The surrounding area is used for subsistence crop farming and the cultivation of cash crops like cocoa.

It is also an important tourist destination that attracts both domestic and international visitors and therefore contributes to Ghana's gross domestic product. Nonetheless, the lake's full tourism potential remains untapped. The area's infrastructure is not adequate, marketing efforts remain insufficient, and tourists should be offered a wider range of options. To address these shortcomings, a targeted, sustainable and comprehensive tourism management plan is needed.

Rapid population growth has led to increased construction and farming around the lake. Results include deforestation, bio-

diversity loss, improper waste management, reduced fish stocks and pollution. These problems have triggered several research projects with a focus on the biosphere reserve. However, research efforts so far lack coordination and a clear direction. Moreover, local communities are largely unaware of the biosphere reserve, its zones, functions and regulations. It is striking, moreover, that neither regional nor national development plans take full account of the biosphere reserve.

IDENTIFYING RESEARCH GAPS

Coordinated action is necessary for Lake Bosomtwe Biosphere Reserve to fulfil its purpose as a protected area and become a model for sustainable development. With an eye to the above-mentioned challenges, the Biosphere Learning Laboratory Lake Bosomtwe (BL3B) project was launched in 2021. It will run until 2024 and is funded by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). The main objective is to establish a strong professional network of researchers and educators.

Additionally, the project aims to promote practical teaching and research.

“A final workshop with all project partners at Lake Bosomtwe is planned for late 2024. It will inform local people about the biosphere reserve.”

Knowledge exchange among its partners matters too. They include Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development (HNEE) and several Ghanaian universities: University of Energy and Natural Resources (UENR), Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Akenten Appiah-Menka University of Skills Training and Entrepreneurial Development (AAMUSTED) and the Forestry Research Institute of Ghana (CSIR-FORIG).

A key part of the project is to involve local communities and authorities in order to understand their specific needs and demands. The approach is meant to result in a research strategy that considers local circumstances and needs, so policy interventions will ultimately benefit both the protection of the biosphere reserve and the livelihoods of the local people.

UNDERSTANDING PEOPLE’S NEEDS

For example, a team of German scholars visited Lake Bosomtwe in early October 2022. At home, they work for the HNEE, the Schaalsee-Elbe Biosphere Reserve and the Succow Foundation. After sharing insights with African stakeholders, including researchers from the three partner universities, they visited the municipalities of Amakom and Nkawi. They wanted to learn about the needs of the local communities in order to identify relevant research topics.

The team interviewed residents and specifically paid attention to women, girls and young people. The interviews revealed that the locals’ most pressing need is to find additional sources of income, as relying solely on fishing is no longer feasible.

Moreover, a workshop was held with officers from Ghanaian authorities in charge of water resources, forestry, fisheries and tourism. The stakeholders emphasised the urgent need to ensure that rules and regulations in the biosphere reserve are respected, especially in the core zone.

It was also mentioned that local people are increasingly frustrated with researchers. Numerous studies were carried out in recent decades, but the scholars involved only rarely informed local communities about the results. The local people saw rather few useful outcomes.

Early studies at Lake Bosomtwe, moreover, had focused on hydrological parameters such as water quality, followed by research on livelihoods of local communities. Only quite limited research efforts have focused on forestry, agriculture or tourism.

Finally, the universities cooperating in the project identified the most relevant topics for future research activities in the biosphere reserve. They include:

- alternative livelihoods, including sustainable tourism,
- agriculture,
- forestry,
- fisheries,
- communication between researchers and local communities and
- health issues.

Specific research fields and questions were developed on the basis of these rather broad topics. For example, the topic “agriculture” was allocated to five different dimensions, and specific research demands were identified:

- Economic, e.g., analysis of possibilities for the installation of boreholes for irrigation as well as for collection of rainwater for irrigation.
- Socio-cultural, e.g., analysis of indigenous farming practices and relevant cultural beliefs.
- Ecological, e.g., analysis of the influence of pesticides usage on soil, fauna and flora and development of approaches to reduce the use of chemical pesticides.
- Management and governance, e.g., assessment of organic-farming practices and implications for water quality of the lake.
- Cross-sectional, e.g., assessment of practices for soil fertility and pest management as well as farmers’ perceptions on integration of shade trees into cocoa farming and indigenous knowledge regarding this.

The project partners divided the responsibilities for the different research topics among themselves.

In the coming months, up to eight students from HNEE will visit Ghana. Together with Ghanaian students, they will begin to do research on the defined topics.

Their work will help to bridge research gaps and foster a closer cooperation between all partner universities with an eye to future research activities and funding applications. A final workshop with all project partners at Lake Bosomtwe is planned for late 2024. It will inform local people about the biosphere reserve and lead to specific proposals for future research cooperation.



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Marina Silva at her inauguration in January.

ECOSYSTEMS

Hope for Brazil's forests

Marina Silva, the Brazilian Minister of Environment and Climate Change, has promised to end deforestation in the Amazon. Noticeable progress has been made since she took office six months ago. However, the challenge remains immense.

By **Thuany Rodrigues**

The new government of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva began by repealing various environmental laws passed by the former government under Jair Bolsonaro. The responsible minister, Marina Silva, has already announced penalties for illegal deforestation as well as new forms of monitoring. For example, satellite images should help identify farmers who are logging illegally.

Subsequently, they should automatically be denied access to bank loans.

Silva has said that monitoring deforestation is an “act of revenge” on Bolsonaro’s government. During her inauguration speech in January, she reported that uncontrolled logging had taken place in recent years and that indigenous areas had been exposed to organised crime. As recently as February, more forest was cleared in the Brazilian Legal Amazon (BLA) than in any other February since records began – restoring order obviously takes more time than destroying it.

Her plans address the climate emergency too, which she calls “the greatest global challenge that humanity is currently confronted with”. If it is not addressed, she says,

there will be “unacceptable” costs: a sharp reduction in GDP, national production-rate losses and ultimately misery and death caused by ongoing environmental disasters.

In the context of World Environment Day on 5 June, the government announced a series of measures that give hints about the course of action that will be taken. For example, the Ministries of Indigenous Peoples and Justice and Public Security want to work together to define indigenous territories. The latter also launched a call for tenders worth 3 million reais (about € 600,000) for measures to combat the social discrimination of indigenous peoples.

Within the same setting, Silva’s Ministry of Environment and Climate Change introduced new goals as part of the fifth phase of its Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Deforestation in the Legal Amazon (PPCDAm). The plan, developed in 2004 under Silva’s direction with input from 12 other ministries and several federal agencies, aims to end deforestation in the region by 2030. It had already significantly contrib-

uted to an 83 % decline in logging from 2004 to 2012 before it was dropped by Bolsonaro's government.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The core plan of the PPCDAm comprises 12 strategic objectives, including:

- accountability for environmental crimes and administrative offences concerning deforestation and forest degradation,
- improved opportunities to monitor deforestation, fires and the dismantling of production chains,
- progress in environmental regulation with improvements of the National Rural Environmental Registry,
- securing the allocation and protection of unused public land,
- and the creation, improvement and implementation of normative and economic control instruments.

Satellite technology will serve surveillance purposes. The new phase of the plan now contains over 130 targets to be achieved by 2027. They include the inspection of 30 % of the illegally deforested region, which has been identified by the Prodes system of the National Institute for Space Research (INPE), the official satellite technology for monitoring deforestation. Currently, only around six percent of the cleared areas are monitored.

Half of these illegally deforested areas in federally protected units should be closed immediately. The plan also aims to increase the number of environmental offence complaints in the first instance by ten percent as soon as this year.

Next year, the goal is to develop traceability systems for agricultural and mineral products from the Amazon region in order to stem illegal extraction. By 2027, the government wants to cancel all illegal entries in the Rural Environmental Registry that over-

lap with federal protected land. The measures are in line with the demands of the European Union, with which Brazil is currently negotiating the final details of an economic agreement. The EU is pressuring Brazil to take stronger action against deforestation.

A major challenge is to align business plans and infrastructure projects with deforestation reduction targets. By 2027, companies and infrastructure projects should also make greater efforts to reduce logging and greenhouse-gas emissions, for example, by using their land differently.

To this end, a programme has been set up that concentrates on four main areas: monitoring, environmental and territorial control, the promotion of sustainable production and the creation of normative and economic instruments to reduce logging and implement the measures.

As part of the legislative package, President Lula also approved a draft that would extend the time limit for including rural property in the environmental regulation programme and vetoed measures that would weaken the Atlantic rainforest on Brazil's east coast.

President Lula and Minister Silva furthermore signalled the return of the so-called Bolsa Verde programme, which is compensation the government pays to families who live in traditional communities, find themselves in a socially weak position and at the same time conserve natural resources. Speaking with journalists, the minister explained that around 80% of Brazil's protected forests are located in indigenous territories.

In addition, there are initiatives like the creation of Serra do Teixeira, a 61,000-hectare national park in the state of Paraíba; an 1800-hectare expansion of the Chocoaré-Mato Grosso conservation area in mid-western Brazil; and the revision of the technical committee aimed at promoting the transition of the production sector to a low-carbon economy.

ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION MIGHT GENERATE 215,000 JOBS BY 2030

On social media, Minister Silva quoted a study from the Instituto Escolhas that suggested that expanding forest concessions and aiming to restore 12 million hectares of forest by 2030 could create 215,000 jobs.

Ivan Henrique de Mattos e Silva, professor of political science at the Federal Uni-



versity of Amapá, sees the new measures as an urgently needed acceleration of Brazilian environmental protection. Its mechanisms had been ineffective under the Bolsonaro government. He believes that the situation of indigenous peoples has also improved.

Nevertheless, de Mattos e Silva feels that Brazil still has a long way to go to become a global benchmark again in the fight against the climate crisis and deforestation. He bases his argument on two factors: first, the difficulty of rebalancing the budget of the control and monitoring organs as quickly as the economy would require – a difficulty that could get worse with the passage of the new tax framework – and the entrenchment of Bolsonarism.

The political scientist says: “Bolsonaro's legacy is still alive and deeply rooted, both socially and institutionally”. In his eyes, the environmental agenda is at the core of a fierce conflict between opposing interests, so the new government is facing enormous challenges. “It remains to be seen whether President Lula and Minister Silva will be able to overcome them”, de Mattos e Silva concludes.

A start has been made, however: according to statements by Minister Silva, logging in the Amazon region declined by 31% from January to May. What's more, she claims that the structured resumption of inspections contributed to a 179% increase in reports of violations, a 107% increase in seizures and a 203% increase in the destruction of equipment that is used in environmental crimes.



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“The political scientist says: ‘Bolsonaro's legacy is still alive and deeply rooted, both socially and institutionally.’ In his eyes, the environmental agenda is at the core of a fierce conflict between opposing interests.”



This spectacled bear recently appeared near a settlement.

considers the protection of the earth important and has formulated numerous laws to this end, but on the other hand opens many loopholes for logging and slash-and-burn agriculture, for example, and directly or indirectly supports the expansion of agricultural land. In 2015, the former government under President Evo Morales even issued a decree allowing for the extraction of fossil fuels in protected areas. Those in question are primarily oil and natural gas. The decree remains in effect.

TRADITIONAL SLASH-AND-BURN

Seven of the 22 national protected areas are in southern Bolivia. Both nationally and internationally, they are far less known than the protected areas in the Amazon region in the country's north and east, and they receive little state funding for their administration.

The needs of the residents in zones where human intervention is permitted are also largely ignored. "Forgotten by the authorities, we live without opportunities for development and without the ability to sell our products," says Mauro Castillo from the village of Potrereros, which is part of the ANMI Serranía del Ñíao. "They just tell us that we are not allowed to cut down the forest." The 2631-square kilometres protected area, which also comprises a large national park, is located in the Andes at up to 2800 meters above sea level in the Chuquisaca Department.

Juana Carballo, who lives in the same village, adds: "Even though it's remote, it's lovely to live here. There is a large variety of trees and animals, and you can grow anything. Our fields are very steep, though, and we can only farm them for three or four years. After that they lose their productivity, and we have to slash-and-burn new areas."

This traditional practice is one of the main reasons why protected areas are losing their environmental functions. More and more families are moving here and tilling fields on the slopes of the mountains. As soon as they lose their fertility through cultivation and erosion, farmers clear new areas.

Another factor is the free-range and pasture grazing of livestock. The animals hamper the natural regeneration of the grassland and encroach into areas where

LIVING WITH NATURE

Protected areas under threat

Bolivia has an extraordinary amount of biodiversity. A good fourth of the country's territory is dedicated to protecting it. Yet numerous human activities are posing a threat.

By Zulma Martínez Vargas and Katja Dombrowski

Bolivia is one of the 15 most biologically diverse countries on Earth. It is home to a multitude of species of birds, mammals, butterflies, amphibians and freshwater fish. There are a lot of tubers, grains, vegetables, fruit trees and other plants as well. According to the Bolivian Ministry of Environment and Water, the South American country is home to about 40% of the world's biodiversity, which includes genetic, ecosystem and species diversity. Bolivia's ecosystems extend from the highland of the Andes to the tropical rainforest in the Amazon region and encompass deserts, steppes and various types of forest.

To preserve this wealth, Bolivia has established a total of 137 protected areas since the last century, including 22 at national level. Together they make up slightly more than a fourth of the country's territory. The stated goal is to stop deforestation and the exploitation of natural resources in these areas.

Their protection status varies. For example, in national parks, all resource use and infrastructure measures are prohibited, whereas individual activities like scientific research, ecotourism and environmental education are allowed. Indigenous groups that have long resided in the area may also practice their subsistence farming if they have a permit. Conversely, in other protected areas, like the ANMI (Área Natural de Manejo Integrado – Integrated Management Natural Area), farmers are allowed to produce above subsistence level.

According to estimates, a total of approximately 150,000 people legally reside in Bolivia's protected areas. Most of them are indigenous people, who use natural resources in traditional, sustainable ways. They live in harmony with nature and pose no threat to biodiversity.

The threat comes from elsewhere. Among the numerous, well-documented dangers to the natural resources and biodiversity of Bolivia's protected areas are poaching, the illegal trade of plants and animals, drug trade, land grabbing and logging. Other threats include the extraction of resources like oil, natural gas or gold.

These questions reveal a contradiction in Bolivian policy, which on the one hand

wild animals live. Their habitat then disappears, causing them to attack the livestock. This leads to conflicts between rangers, whose job it is to protect the wild animals, and residents, who see a threat to their livestock.

Tomás Calahumana, the head ranger in the ANMI El Palmar in Presto, which is also located in Chuquisaca, says: “Due to the expansion of agricultural areas, animals like the spectacled bear are becoming isolated and are no longer able to find food.” Recently a spectacled bear appeared near a human settlement. The species is endemic to the tropical Andes and is listed as vulnerable on the Red List of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN).

“It cannot be denied that trade and logging are taking place in this area and are leading to the disappearance of biodiversity,” says environmental activist Alexis Mon-

tellano. “For example, this year in El Palmar, we realised that an area is shrinking that is home to a species of palm that only grows in this region. And in the Ñaño national park, there are always slash-and-burn operations that become forest fires.” Montellano also bemoans the lack of annual monitoring reports. “The strategies to protect local biodiversity must be rethought,” he urges. Civil society is called on to step in here as well (see box below).

The problem is not restricted to Bolivia. “All around the world, the expansion of agricultural areas has led to a loss of biodiversity,” says Montellano, “to the point that domestic species and wild animals are disappearing entirely.”

He points out that crops and livestock nowadays make up the majority of all living things and adds: “Wild plants and animals are under threat worldwide.” Experts assume that numerous species that are now

going extinct have never even been discovered – including in Bolivia, where many areas are unexplored.



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Dialogue for diversity

The deforestation rate inside Bolivia’s protected areas is significantly lower than outside. There are two central reasons for this: one, monitoring by rangers for SERNAP (Servicio Nacional de Áreas Protegidas), the authority responsible for protected areas; and two, the assumption that indigenous communities who live in protected areas will protect biodiversity and the natural environment in general.

The work and engagement of civil society also play an important role. The **Fundación Acción Cultural Loyola (ACLO)** is one of the non-governmental organisations that promote environmentally friendly activities in the protected areas of the Chuquisaca Department. The partner organisation of the German World Peace Service (**Weltfriedensdienst – WFD**) has its headquarters in Sucre, the capi-

tal of the department and of the entire country.

Activities such as organic farming, beekeeping, fish farming and gardening receive support. ACLO also provides information on and raises awareness for environmental issues, along

with addressing conflicts of interest. The goal is to use and conserve natural resources sustainably.

In this context, the project “Culture of peace and dialogue to promote the good life in southern Bolivia”, which receives support from the WFD as part of its Civil Peace Service (**Ziviler Friedensdienst – ZFD**) programme, has, among other

things, initiated a multi-actor dialogue. The first meeting took place in October 2022 and the second in May 2023. These meetings brought together for the first time all those involved in the administration and management of protected areas. The next meeting is scheduled for March 2024 .

Ultimately, the project should produce a shared agenda for dealing with the protected areas. What’s more, both residents as well as decisionmakers should be encouraged to protect biodiversity in these areas because biodiversity in Bolivia is facing numerous threats (see main text).

The project is a component of a larger plan to bring about constructive conflict transformation in Bolivia, which is receiving support from the ZFD. The aim is to initiate processes for peace and justice. With regard to protected areas, all parties should actively contribute to conserving biodiversity.

ZMV, KD



View of the **Serranía del Ñaño** protected area in the Andes.



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