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AGRICULTURE

Why more food
processing makes
sense in Malawi

LIVING WITH DISABILITIES

Colombian efforts to
improve medical care
and social inclusion

WORLD BANK

What difference President
Ajay Banga's reform
agenda can make



Democracy under attack

Editorial

- 3 **HANS DEMBOWSKI**
Why separate branches of government are indispensable

Magazine

- 4 **RABSON KONDOWE**
Malawi should process more food in order to fight poverty and drive rural development
- 6 **SATU SANTALA**
IFAD supports disadvantaged rural communities
- 8 **SARAH GRÜNEWALD**
How to make life easier for people with disabilities in Colombia
- 10 **DERRICK SILIMINA / MASTHEAD (IMPRINT)**
Nowadays: Welcome side-effect of Zambia's pension system

Debate

- 11 **LUIZ RAMALHO**
Brazil assumes G20 presidency in challenging times
- 12 **LENA ROHRBACH**
Hate speech on social media must stop
- 13 **JÖRG DÖBEREINER**
Ajay Banga's reform agenda for the World Bank is overdue

Focus: Democracy under attack

- 16 **INTERVIEW WITH MOSES LUBABALI**
How devolution is making a difference in Kenya
- 18 **BERNHARD AMLER AND CHRISTOPH KOWALEWSKI**
Fighting corruption at the international level
- 20 **INTERVIEW WITH VLADIMIR ANTWI-DANSO**
Important aspects of West Africa's military coups
- 22 **CLAIRE DAVIS**
US democracy is still at risk
- 24 **ANDRÉ DE MELLO E SOUZA**
Brazil fast excluded Bolsonaro from public office after his supporters stormed government buildings
- 26 **INTERVIEW WITH SUSAN NEIMAN**
Netanyahu's security policy has failed completely
- 29 **MARVA KHAN**
Pakistan will go to the polls in midst of escalating crises early next year
- 31 **INTERVIEW WITH AHILAN KADIRGAMAR**
Since the government defaulted, poverty and repression are getting worse in Sri Lanka
- 33 **ISAH SHAFIQ**
Assessing whether Chinese aid undermines democracy

FOCUS

Democracy under attack

Democracy is at risk in many countries, including the USA. Persons with authoritarian attitudes claim positions of leadership, with little respect for the constitutional order. They want to centralise power, undoing the separation of different branches of government. Disregard for voters' choices is unacceptable, and undermining the separation of state powers makes things worse. Where each and every decision is ultimately up to some kind of supreme leader, all civic liberties are eroded fast. The implication is that there will be fewer development opportunities, less prosperity and uncontrolled dominance by vested interests. Democracy may often prove to have flaws, but authoritarian rule is generally worse.

Title: Trump supporters attacking the US Capitol on 6 January 2021.
Photo: picture-alliance/ZUMAPRESS.com/Carol Guzy





Our focus section on democracy under attack starts on page 15. It pertains to the UN's 16th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG): Peace, justice and strong institutions. It also has a bearing on other SDGs.

Unchecked and unbalanced

For 20 years, I've been the editor-in-chief of D+C, and democracy promotion was always part of our mission. Successive German governments expressed their faith in people's self-government, the rule of law and reasonable global governance based on – preferably democratic – nation states. The rhetoric has changed, however, so it is now common to speak of defending rather than promoting democracy.

Democracy is indeed under attack. That is so even in prosperous western nations where its roots were believed to be strong. Right-wing populism is on the rise. Its top leaders typically claim to represent “the” nation directly and exclusively. They pretend that it consists of a homogenous community which supports them. Everyone else is accused of being a traitor, elitist, corrupt, criminal, naïve et cetera.

This is an international phenomenon. Donald Trump is the most prominent example. Unfortunately, there are too many others to list in a short editorial.

Once someone like Trump gains power, they try to perpetuate their rule by

“For elections to be fair and take place regularly, a country needs constitutional checks and balances. Otherwise, any incumbent government will be tempted to bend election rules in order to stay in power.”

changing the institutional order. The good news is that populist governments nonetheless sometimes lose elections. Even where that happens, however, the institutional order tends to be damaged.

In the US, there is no evidence of the 2020 elections having been rigged, but Trump supporters believe they were. Fortunately, the judiciary did not fall for the “big lie”. Trump appointed many judges, however, including three on the Supreme Court where the solid right-wing majority is passing judgements – on abortion, for example – that most US citizens disagree with.

Many people believe that democracy is primarily about electing the top leader. They miss an important point. For elections to be fair and take place regularly, a country needs constitutional checks and balances. Otherwise, any incumbent government will be tempted to bend election rules in order to stay in power. An independent judiciary is therefore of crucial importance. Only it can guarantee that elections are not rendered meaningless over time. And that is precisely why it is problematic that the US Supreme Court has become politicised and is losing people's trust.

Checks and balances are necessary to keep the administrative leadership from twisting everything in its favour. Constitutions must clearly define the roles of separate branches of government – executive, legislation and judiciary but also national and subnational – and spell out people's unalienable rights. Good constitutions make abuses of power much more difficult, though not impossible.

The separation of powers, moreover, is the basis for what sociologists call functional differentiation. It means that social systems – markets, academic research, civil society, media discourse, technology development et cetera – are not subjected to the whims of the top political leader.

The systems operate according to their own requirements, which makes them more dynamic. The political system must provide and enforce sensible regulations in a transparent manner to ensure that the systems stay integrated and do not undermine one another.

For example, it should not allow economic growth to destroy the environmental basis of society. Democracies' track record in this regard is less than perfect – but Trump-like people tend to undo ecological progress if they can.

A well-designed democratic order ensures basic liberties at many levels, but it does not grant people in positions of power or great wealth the freedom to simply do as they please. The health of society thus depends on a good constitution. As history shows, dictatorship is rarely benign, but normally unchecked and unbalanced.



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Processing cow's milk locally can create jobs.

LABOUR MARKET

Developing Malawi's food sector

The country's food-processing industry has great potential. However, it cannot keep up with demand. Cooperatives can be part of the solution, as the example of Malawi's oldest dairy cooperative shows.

By Rabson Kondowe

Malawi's economy depends on agriculture, which employs over 80% of the population, according to World Bank data. Productivity remains low and keeps the food sector from meeting the rising demand. The gap is filled by imports.

Despite the large share of the agricultural sector, less than two percent of Malawi's population work in the country's food processing industry. There are only a few businesses, and they suffer from limited technical and business capacity, lack of financing and poor linkages to both farmers and the consumer market. The industry largely consists of small and medium-sized businesses, including cooperatives, which deserve particular attention.

A cooperative is a business jointly owned and democratically controlled by its members to meet their shared needs. The members share collective responsibilities, and each of them has a say in how the business is run. Benefits derived from the cooperative are distributed equitably among the members. Cooperatives cut across all

sectors of Malawi's economy with agro-business cooperatives leading the pack at 70%. Financial cooperatives follow at 10%. Other industries include beekeeping, furniture, mining and services like cleaning.

CREATING NEW JOBS

Cooperatives play a vital role in generating jobs in Malawi, and they have the potential to become even more important, including for the country's food processing industry. Take, for example, Bvumbwe Dairy Farmers Cooperative Society (BDFCS), Malawi's oldest dairy cooperative. It started in 1998 with 10 farmers who were given two cows each by the government. Over the years, the cooperative's membership swelled to 1500 farmers. Following the branching out of most members, it stands today at 71 farmers with 160



cows. The BDFCS employs both its members and seven additional staff for daily operations.

One of the staff members is 25-year-old Lucia Mwale. She works at the BDFCS factory at Bvumbwe Trading Center in the rural district of Thyolo, about 30 kilometres south of Blantyre, Malawi's second largest city. Mwale operates a milk processing machine for the production of value-added products such as yogurt and chambiko, a local sour milk product.

A single mother who once struggled with unemployment, Mwale found a new lease of life through her role at BDFCS. "When I left my first job as a shopkeeper, I stayed unemployed for four years," she said. "I am now able to provide for myself and my child."

Malawi's most established food processing companies are located in the country's three main cities Blantyre, Lilongwe and Mzuzu. However, it is rural cooperatives like BDFCS that provide opportunities where job prospects are particularly dim. "Indeed, our cooperative and many others can really change the narrative here, where unemployment looms large," says BDFCS secretary Charles Jota. "Our goal is to one day sell our yogurt, chambiko and milk in retail shops across the country, just like the way these established dairy companies do. Once we do that, we are going to employ a lot of people," he adds.

HINDERED BY BUREAUCRACY

Like many other businesses in Malawi, BDFCS is facing hurdles. Market access and growth are crucial issues. "Our small size

hinders us from creating more jobs. The first step towards expansion hinges on obtaining certification from the Malawi Bureau of Standards, enabling us to market our products nationwide,” says Charles Jota. He deplores that BDFCS has been unsuccessfully applying for a certification since one year and thus remains limited to distributing its products on the local market in Thyolo.

Cumbersome procedures to get Malawi Bureau of Standards certification are a common problem for many small or medium businesses in agro-processing like BDFCS, hindering them to diversify their sales market and extend beyond the rural sphere. Relying solely on the rural market, however, can prove financially insufficient to fuel growth.

While challenges persist, Smith Nkhata, a lecturer specialised in food technology and nutritional sciences at Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources, believes cooperatives are a working model to uplift economies in Malawi. “Beyond offering livelihoods, cooperatives embody a larger vision. One where sustainable expansion

“Cooperatives play a vital role in generating jobs in Malawi, and they have the potential to become even more important, including for the country’s food processing industry.”

not only supports employment but also nourishes a community’s socio-economic fabric,” he says. Nkhata points out that employees in food processing require thorough and proper training in order to contribute to more impactful growth.

LOCAL FOOD PROCESSING

According to Nkhata, most established food processors gravitate towards urban centres for the availability of expertise, electricity and established markets which ultimately leaves the rural areas as a mere source of raw materials. He proposes a transformative

approach of fostering value addition at the grassroots level.

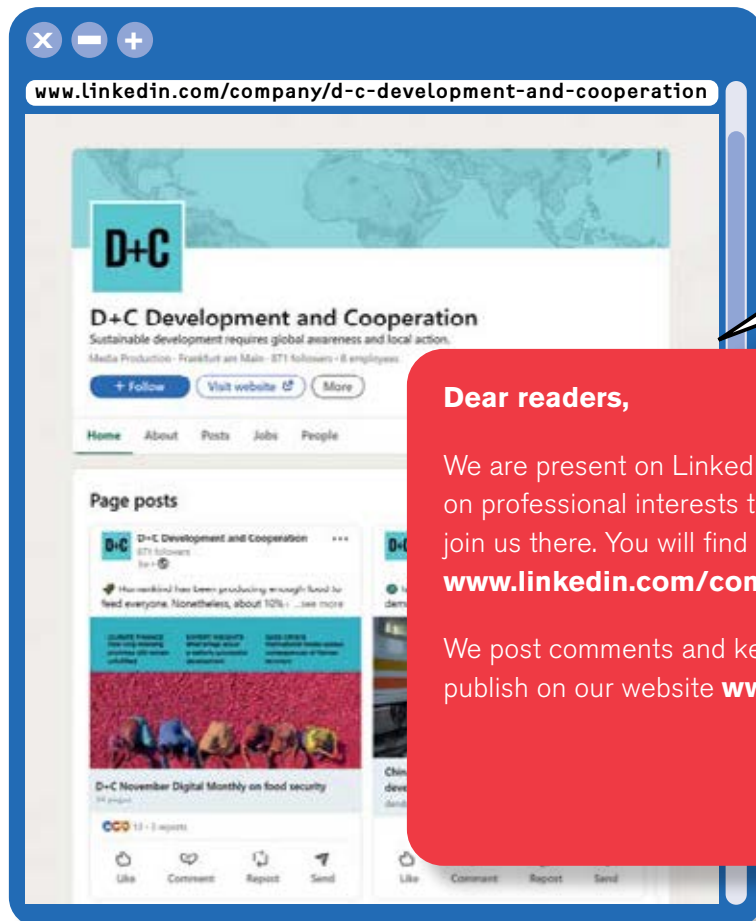
The merits of establishing processing in plants in rural areas are plentiful, Nkhata explains. For example, proximity to raw materials offers advantages. Numerous companies headquartered in urban hubs source their raw materials from remote regions, incurring substantial transportation costs. By contrast, processing units in rural areas could not only harness local resources and offer much-needed employment but also present cost-effective alternatives for established food processing players.

For individuals like Lucia Mwale, BDFCS has not only provided a livelihood but also ignited a passion for food processing. “I continue to learn a lot,” she says. “I hope one day to have my own dairy business and employ as many people as I can.”



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Farmer watering her plants in Rwanda.

FUNDING

Investing in rural communities

Smallholder farmers are central to achieving food security. The UN organisation IFAD supports them with funds, access to markets and training, among other things.

By Satu Santala

Small-scale farmers put one third of the world's food on our tables. However, their communities often remain overlooked and chronically underfunded, especially in the rural areas of low- and lower middle-income countries (LICs and LMICs) where poverty and hunger are most entrenched. These areas have been side-lined for decades and are home to 80% of the world's poorest. Making just six cents for every dollar worth of food they produce, many see no other option but to migrate in pursuit of better opportunities.

Felipe Nazar, a farmer from the Philippines, puts it straight in an interview with

The New Humanitarian: "We don't earn anything during harvests. We just survive. We're practically giving away our crops." To make matters worse, these communities are also the most vulnerable to climate change.

Investing in rural communities can alleviate poverty and fight hunger effectively. However, international assistance still falls short of addressing the increasing demands. According to OECD data, only \$9.4 billion was allocated for agriculture, forestry and fishing in 2021, representing only four percent of the global official development assistance (ODA), the flow of financial resources from developed to developing countries to finance their socioeconomic development. The lack of adequate funding hampers the transformative potential of rural communities to end hunger and poverty by 2030, as demanded by the UN's 2nd Sustainable Development Goal (SDG2). But there is hope.

HOW IFAD WORKS

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), a UN specialised agency and international financial institution, works to eliminate poverty and hunger in rural areas of developing countries by investing in rural people. IFAD provides low-interest and highly concessional loans and grants through effective financial strategies. The UN Fund has 177 member states and was established in the 1970s in response to an energy and food crisis akin to what we are witnessing today. Since then, IFAD has been channelling investments to rural communities to boost food security, nutrition and incomes. Currently, IFAD is undergoing its triennial consultation to replenish the fund and agree on priorities for the future.

IFAD aims to assemble and catalyse finance going to rural areas, including cooperating with the private sector for this purpose. Measures include pooling resources, derisking operations and providing expert support to address intertwined topics like food security, migration, climate adaptation, private sector engagement and gender equality. Investing in long-term rural development

through organisations like IFAD reduces emergency costs and promotes sustainable growth. Every dollar spent on resilience can save up to \$10 in emergency aid. According to its own data, IFAD transforms every unit of investment into six-fold returns.

IFAD partners with governments for customised solutions. In Malawi, for example, a project improved market access for small-scale farmers and brought about multiple value-chains benefits through sustainable agricultural practices, intensified production and natural resource management. IFAD also strengthened local institutions and participated in policy dialogues to promote market-led agricultural growth and consistent policy implementation.

“Rural development transcends the boundaries of rural areas – its implications ripple through global issues like migration, women’s empowerment, climate change and food security.”

Beyond funding, IFAD ensures access to knowledge and decision-making processes, notably for women, youth and persons with disabilities. For example, the UN Fund features the so-called household methodologies (HHMs) approach which aims to support family members in working together to achieve a fairer workload. This targets patterns of gender inequality, thereby increasing agricultural productivity, improving nutrition and fostering overall social development.

IFAD also provides cushion to imminent crises. For example, it responded to the Covid-19 pandemic through the Rural Poor Stimulus Facility, a multi-donor initiative to ensure rural small-scale farmers had timely access to inputs, information, markets and finance. Moreover, IFAD tackled the ripple effects of the war in Ukraine with its Crisis Response Initiative which supported rural communities’ resilience and capacity to mitigate the impact of shocks. This includes access to seeds, fuel and fertiliser as well as investing in small-scale infrastructure to improve productive capacity and reduce post-harvest losses.

IFAD is not just a fund; it is a strategic partner for sustainable development. One of IFAD’s main concerns is finding the right balance between immediate aid and long-term investment. It is high time we invest to combat the root causes of hunger and poverty, rather than simply reacting to recurrent crises.

AGRICULTURAL SOLUTIONS AND PRIVATE-SECTOR ENGAGEMENT

One example of IFAD’s approach is the Rural Adelante (RA) initiative in El Salvador: it developed rural areas and agriculture, providing opportunities for women and youth – and alternatives to migration – while adapting to new climatic patterns. For instance, it doubled production and allowed year-round cultivation by introducing hydroponics, where plants are grown without soil and nourished with a nutrient-rich solution. As one female farmer participating in RA puts it: “With hydroponics, we have a great advantage; we better control pests, plant quality seeds and use qualified varieties.”

The initiative encouraged young rural populations’ participation in value chains through financial support while recognising the unique challenges faced by women, who make up 40% of its active participants. The project also targeted traditionally excluded and vulnerable groups like indigenous peoples, children and the elderly. Beyond the main activities, the project conducted applied policy-research.

IFAD strongly advocates for financial inclusion using digital technologies, value-chain financing, credit cooperatives, and public-private partnerships (PPPs). In rural development, PPPs link small scale farmers, as private operators, to the wider market. Climate change is unpredictable to a certain degree, which makes it necessary for these farmers to have access to resources and technology. IFAD’s strategy goes beyond derisking and regulatory reforms and emphasises private sector engagement, aligning private investments with the SDGs, the Paris Agreement and a vision for a sustainable global food system.

IFAD is pioneering a financial framework promoting collaboration and partnerships, leading food-systems financing with the World Bank and the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub. Events in 2023, like the

SDG Summit and COP28, amplify these efforts. Food-system transformation pillars – coordination, finance, governance and innovation – must be prioritised as elements of a critical pathway to achieve the SDGs. IFAD’s current replenishment offers a blueprint for addressing these challenges and boosting financial commitment to rural food system transformation.

In order to respond to increased needs due to the war in Ukraine, the aftermaths of slow Covid-19 recovery and the energy crisis, IFAD is making a concerted effort to raise more funds to serve rural people. Scaled up support of donor countries is vital, as is finding new ways to bring in new financing. In addition to its current replenishment process with member states, IFAD is raising an additional \$500 million through private placements. The money will be used for proactive measures to tackle climate displacement, social instability and gender inequality.

Germany is one of the countries boosting IFAD’s engagement with the private sector and endorsing sustainable financial strategies. KfW, a pioneer lender for IFAD since 2014, recently extended a €400 million promotional loan for IFAD’s \$3.5 billion programme in 2022–2024.

BEYOND RURAL AREAS

Rural development transcends the boundaries of rural areas – its implications ripple through global issues like migration, women’s empowerment, climate change and food security. Therefore, supporting IFAD is about addressing immediate challenges for humanity, as well as investing in medium to long-term solutions. By doing so, global commitment to the most vulnerable people in the world can be reaffirmed.

Germany’s support has been instrumental in driving positive change in rural communities worldwide. We hope it will continue standing with IFAD, championing the cause of those who feed the world and ensuring a resilient future for the generations to come.



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Tania during a therapy session with physiotherapist Lilián Beltrán.

LIVING WITH DISABILITY

Therapy and participation

In Colombia, it is often hard for young people with disabilities to obtain medical care and participate in society. The “Familias siguen adelante” project aims to change that by getting relatives involved.

By Sarah Grünewald

The effort and concentration are clearly visible on 14-year-old Tania’s face. Lying on her stomach on an exercise ball, she tries to straighten her torso. Her whole body trembles, but after a few attempts she succeeds. With a beaming smile, she looks at her mother Patricia, who is seated on the floor in front of her. They are both clearly proud of this progress. Tania has spastic cer-

bral palsy, a movement disorder and muscle stiffness caused by brain damage before birth. She relies on a wheelchair.

Tania is one of around 180,000 children and teenagers under the age of 19 with disabilities in Colombia. And that is only the official figure. A large number of cases probably go unreported due to inaccurate data collection and the difficulties of surveying households in remote areas. One thing is certain: every single one of these youngsters needs special attention, therapy and care for their development.

Children with disabilities have the same rights as other children – for example, rights to healthcare, education and protection from violence and neglect. That is

stipulated in the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and in the 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The signatory countries, which include Germany and Colombia, have committed themselves to protect and guarantee such rights.

In reality, however, people with disabilities worldwide face a wide range of restrictions and discrimination in all areas of life. One in five households in Latin America and the Caribbean living in extreme poverty has at least one member with disabilities (World Bank 2021). Access to education, decent jobs and public services is often poor, especially for people in the lower socioeconomic groups. Medical treatment and personal support services are often expensive, increasing the risk of poverty.

IMPEDED ACCESS TO SERVICES

Medical care for children with disabilities is inadequate in many countries. Where it

is available, it is often costly and non-inclusive. Moreover, it tends to be poorer in rural areas than in urban settlements. Colombia is no exception: access to health and rehabilitation services is impeded by bureaucracy, and appointments can be hard to get. Where people fail to take part in rehabilitation programmes, the reason is often lack of money. Other reasons include the lack of approval by their health-insurance company and the sheer distance between their home and the care centre. Rural areas in particular are short of support services, day-care facilities and therapy centres.

Lack of access to adequate rehabilitation has serious consequences for the physical and mental development of children with disabilities, including their overall quality of life. Their limbs become less mobile and basic functions such as grasping deteriorate. Joint pain, posture problems and pressure sores due to poor positioning get worse. This makes everyday care procedures such as bathing and dressing more difficult, placing a greater strain on caregivers.

FAMILY SUPPORT PROJECT

In most cases, family members are the ones who provide care. For many, it is not only a physical, psychological and emotional burden, but one which also heightens their risk of poverty. The task of caring for a child with disability often falls to the mother, who also runs the household. The financial strain is intense, since this is often associated with a loss of income, and families receive hardly any monetary support from the state.

Tania's mother Patricia experienced those difficulties herself. Finding a place for her daughter at a day-care centre proved impossible, and the low salary she earned as a nurse would not allow her to engage a daytime home carer. Eventually, she gave up her job at a doctor's surgery and devoted herself entirely to providing care and support for her daughter.

At some point, however, the cost of food, medication, doctor's visits and assistive devices increased so much that she could no longer make ends meet with the little she earned from small part-time jobs. In the end, her 70-year-old mother moved in to care for her granddaughter. Patricia took a job as a kitchen assistant.

Patricia's employer is Fundación Proyecto Unión, a non-profit organisation

dedicated to promoting social inclusion. In Tocancipá, a municipality in the state of Cundinamarca, north of the Colombian capital Bogotá, it runs a project called Casa de los Ángeles, which offers a range of support services for families in need, including those with children with disabilities. For example, when seriously ill children are brought to Bogotá for medical treatment from remote areas, Casa de los Ángeles offers free accommodation for the families.

In March 2023, the Foundation launched another project, addressing the problem of limited access to therapy services for children with disabilities. It is called "Familias siguen adelante" which means that families move forward despite difficulties through perseverance. The project operates a free therapy and rehabilitation programme catering for 24 children, teenagers and young adults with physical and mental disabilities. Their ages range from two to 28. The German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) supports the project with €10,000, administered by the Germany-based Stiftung Nord-Süd-Brücken ("North-South Bridges Foundation"). The German aid organisation Friends of Angels Germany is receiving the funding and implementing the project jointly with Fundación Proyecto Unión until end of January 2024.

The participants in the programme live in Tocancipá, in the neighbouring community of Sopó or in one of the surrounding villages. Without the project, they would not have access to comparable therapy services. "Familias siguen adelante" seeks to promote their individual development, improve their mobility, enable them to be more independent and facilitate their social inclusion. Each participant receives an hour of one-to-one occupational therapy and physiotherapy twice a week for three months.

INVOLVEMENT OF CAREGIVERS

The project's focus is also on the caregivers. They can obviously help to significantly improve the social inclusion of children with disabilities, so families are actively involved in the rehabilitation programme. Caregivers attend the therapy sessions which enables them to continue the training at home and consolidate the progress made. Most families are in a precarious financial situation, so the project reimburses transport costs

for each participant and an accompanying caregiver.

"I see the parents as my co-therapists," says Lilián Beltrán, the programme's physiotherapist. "It helps me a lot to understand what everyday life in the family is like and what ways the children and parents have found to make certain daily routines work better. I can then tailor the therapy to the individual's needs. And I learn something new from them every time."

Patricia feels the project is bearing fruit. "I have noticed many positive changes in Tania," she says. She finds her daughter is more alert and keener to interact with oth-

"Medical care for children with disabilities is inadequate in many countries. Where it is available, it is often costly and non-inclusive."

er children. What is more, Tania is making progress physically, which makes daily care tasks such as dressing or washing easier.

Projects like "Familias siguen adelante" show how important it is to provide free therapy for young people with disabilities and their families. Governments worldwide need to step up their efforts to improve inclusivity so that children and teenagers with disabilities can exercise the same rights as their peers and find their own way in life.

LINKS

Fundación Proyecto Unión:
<https://www.proyectounion.org/>
Friends of Angels Germany:
<https://www.friendsofangers.de>

World Bank, 2021: Disability inclusion in Latin America and the Caribbean: A path to sustainable development. Washington D.C.
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/12/02/la-inclusion-de-las-personas-con-discapacidad-clave-para-el-desarrollo-sostenible-de-america-latina-y-el-caribe>



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Benefits for Zambian workers

According to a new law, workers in Zambia can now withdraw up to 20% of their pension savings. However, only savers who have been contributing to the national pension scheme for at least five years or making 60 contributions are eligible to withdraw money.

“We have signed into law the National Pension Scheme Amendment Bill 2023, which is in line with our promise to the Zambian people. The new law will allow citizens to reinvest the funds into various ventures and assets of their choice,” Zambian President Hakainde Hichilema said recently.

The effects of the legislation have been instant as hundreds of workers keep queueing up or going online to verify if they are eligible for benefits. As of June 2023, the pension-scheme authority has paid out 7.5 billion Zambian kwacha (ZK) (€300 million) to more than 316,000 members. The government set aside a total of around ZK 11 billion (€480 million) to pay 600,000 eligible members, according to the pension authority. The

body projects that the least projected withdrawal will be ZK 5,000 (€220) and the maximum ZK 160,000 (€7015) per contributor.

Lackson Chota, a civil servant, bubbled with excitement after finding out that he is eligible for pre-term benefits. “After I got mine recently, I invested the money in building a boarding house for students. Student accommodation is in demand. I am guaranteed a threefold return from my initial investment of ZK 100,000. I plan to reinvest the income into building a block of flats,” Chota says.

Equally, Ruth Tembo, an employee at a Chinese clinic in Lusaka’s Roma suburb, is optimistic that the pension pay out will have a positive impact. “I have always wanted to start a poultry business. Once I withdraw my cash, I want to build a poultry house and buy other inputs to run the venture. I think the payment will help many people to take the step into entrepreneurship.”

This is the first time employees in Zambia have been able to access their benefits earlier. Economists argue that the move will spur economic development and reduce rising poverty. Disposable incomes will increase trade and commerce and contribute to relief, especially in the private sector.

The Pensions and Insurance Authority however advises workers in Zambia to be careful with the use of their savings. People should rather look for investment opportunities instead of spending the money on consumer goods.

Amos Kunda, a mine worker from the north-western province, has taken the advice. “I decided to invest my 20% in government bonds and once they mature, I will be able to use interest to invest in my children’s education,” he says.

Financial analyst Kelvin Chisanga believes the country will witness an increase in trade and commerce that will boost government revenue. “The ZK 11 billion to be injected into the economy will create aggregate demand,” Chisanga says.



STEP MAP



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Sustainable development requires global awareness and local action.

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GLOBAL AFFAIRS

G20 presidency in difficult times

Brazil is taking over the G20 presidency until November 2024. President Lula da Silva hopes to strengthen Brazil's international role after the Bolsonaro years. Given the current geopolitical upheaval, however, he faces major diplomatic challenges.

By Luiz Ramalho

From December 2023 to November 2024, Brazil will hold the rotating presidency of the Group of 20 (G20), which now actually comprises 21 members, following the admission of the African Union at the last summit in India.

The Brazilian government will therefore be responsible for organising the summit of heads of state and government as well as the G20 ministerial meetings in 2024. Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva is hoping to make the G20 presidency a foreign-policy milestone that will cement Brazil's return to the international stage following the isolationist government of his right-wing extremist predecessor, Jair Bolsonaro.

The main duty of the presidency is to steer the agendas of working groups, task forces and initiatives. It also includes the establishment of a series of so-called engagement groups, which lend a voice to representatives from business (B20), labour (L20), science (S20), women (W20), youth (Y20) and civil-society organisations (C20). The Brazilian government is preparing an eventful programme for 2024 in 15 cities, culminating in the summit in Rio de Janeiro on 18 and 19 November 2024.

DIFFICULT CONSENSUS-BUILDING

Brazil is assuming the G20 presidency at a time in which geopolitical fragmentation and the formation of political blocs is making political consensus building more difficult within the international community, as the last G20 summit in India showed.

Maintaining the relevancy of the G20 is the main task of 2024. The G20 brings together both the emerging economies that

make up the BRICS group and the industrialised nations that form the Group of 7 (G7). China recently achieved an expansion of BRICS, despite scepticism from India and Brazil, and boycotted the last G20 summit in India. It will be a significant challenge for Brazilian diplomacy to deliver tangible and relevant results and build consensus, reconciling G20 and Brics agendas.



President Lula da Silva at this year's G20 summit in New Delhi.

In India, Lula da Silva announced the following priorities:

- climate and sustainable development,
- reforming multilateral institutions,
- poverty reduction, fighting social inequality and food security,
- fair taxation, foreign debt, new approaches to development finance and restructuring global finance governance,
- racism and gender equality as cross-sector issues.

In particular, Brazil has long advocated for the UN Security Council to admit new permanent members. The Brazilian presidency offers an opportunity to promote these reforms, especially against the backdrop of geopolitical restructuring due to Russia's attack on Ukraine, China's new role as an emerging power and the paralysis and mutual blockade of Security Council veto

powers in response to the terrorist attacks by Hamas and Israel's military occupation of the Gaza Strip.

In some ways, Brazil could proceed differently and more innovatively than its predecessors. For example, Lula da Silva is striving for a G20 process with social participation. A social summit is planned to take place in the immediate run-up to the G20 summit in November 2024. It would mark a significant change. The G20 process has never offered much room for civil society involvement. Only few non-state actors have participated in meetings in the past.

Particularly with regard to global economic and financial systems, Brazil wants

to open up discussions to civil society and other actors organised in the engagement groups. They are supposed to enter into direct dialogue with the group of Sherpas (who work as mediators on behalf of foreign ministries to steer the G20 process and negotiate final declarations) and contribute their own policy statements.

Brazil's priorities align with the principles of a just transition, which also guide German development cooperation. Therefore, the Brazilian presidency offers Germany an opportunity to promote these issues internationally and through dialogue.



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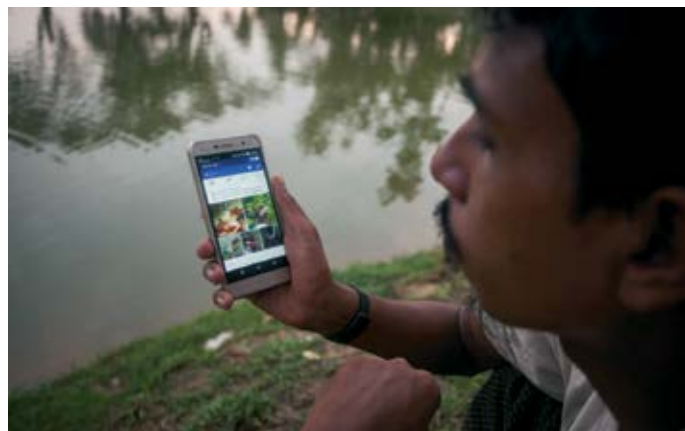
SOCIAL MEDIA

Stop online hate

Social media companies are failing to moderate their platforms. As a result, online hate speech leads to analogue violence, as conflict zones like Ethiopia and Myanmar show.

By Lena Rohrbach

Social networks have a proven capacity to fuel spirals of violence, especially in the context of crises and wars. This is one of the human-rights problems of the digital age and has been analysed in Ethiopia and Myanmar by the human-rights organisa-



A Rohingya man looking at Facebook in 2017. Social media played a significant role in spreading calls for violence against the Rohingya in Myanmar.

tion Amnesty International. Online use in both countries is dominated by Facebook. Indeed, for many people in the global south, the platform virtually is “the internet”.

During the armed conflict in northern Ethiopia from 2020 to 2022, horrific violence was directed against the civilian population in the Tigray Region. In the report “A death sentence for my father”, Amnesty International documents how Meta – the company behind Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram – contributed to the barbarity. Among the cases presented is that of chemistry professor Meareg Amare, who was killed after being targeted in Facebook posts. He was one of many victims of violence “primed” on Facebook.

In Myanmar, Facebook played a significant role in the violent expulsion of the

Rohingya, as documented in Amnesty International’s report “The social atrocity”. In the months prior to the expulsion in summer 2017, people linked to the Myanmar military and to ultra-nationalist Buddhist groups flooded the network with false information and content inciting violence against the Rohingya. The United Nations’ independent fact-finding mission on Myanmar concluded that the role of social media was “significant” in the atrocities that ensued.

The spread of violence on social media is facilitated by two fundamental problems.

The first is that polarising and emotive content grabs people’s attention, so it is often favoured by the algorithms that decide what users see. Those algorithms are designed to ensure that users stay on the platforms and interact with them for as long as possible. In doing so, they leave behind numerous data traces, making up a digital footprint that permits targeted advertising. The longer users stay on a platform, the more adverts they can be shown.

The second problem is that Facebook – and all the other major social-media platforms – fail to resource and ensure consistency when it comes to moderating and deleting problematic content. This is particularly true in the global south. In Ethiopia, for example, more than 80 languages are spoken but Facebook can moderate in

only four of them. There is also insufficient awareness of local contexts. As the situations escalated in both Ethiopia and Myanmar, Meta failed to respond appropriately to numerous warnings from civil-society organisations, human-rights experts and its own Facebook Oversight Board.

According to the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, social-media companies have a responsibility to respect human rights. They must therefore urgently

- implement human rights due diligence, analyse risks and take remedial action;
- reduce the impacts of algorithmic amplification in all countries, for example by taking steps to limit resharing or group sizes;
- implement special measures in risk contexts, such as disabling recommendation algorithms;
- provide trained staff for all the languages used and context-sensitive guidelines for content moderation;
- set up compensation funds for victims of online violence and violence incited online.

Governments worldwide need to oblige social-media companies to implement human rights due diligence and adjust their business model. This includes banning targeted advertising based on invasive data tracking practices. Last but not least, they need to create and properly resource national regulatory authorities and ensure individual and collective access to legal remedies. If they fail to do so, the events that unfurled in Ethiopia and Myanmar were just the beginning.

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World Bank President Ajay Banga at the institution's annual meeting in Marrakesh in October.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT FINANCE

Close funding gaps

The World Bank's reform agenda is an urgent matter. However, more needs to happen to make international development finance commensurate with huge global challenges. Strong economies must make more money available.

By Jörg Döbereiner

There is no doubt in international discourse that development finance must improve in order to become commensurate with current crises. The climate crisis, the erosion of biodiversity, the lingering impact of Covid-19 and wars are issues that transcend national borders, all too often with global impacts. The international community is far from fulfilling its ambitions. That became soberingly evident in this year's half-time stock-taking of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG1, the eradication of extreme poverty, has probably become unachievable by 2030.

To get as close to the goals as possible, countries with low average incomes need more loans and more concessional money

from multilateral development banks. It is therefore good news that the World Bank and regional development banks recently agreed to improve cooperation, expand financial capacities and act in a faster and more flexible manner.

The World Bank is the largest of these institutions and therefore matters in particular. It is often perceived as too bureaucratic, inflexible and cautious. Shareholders including the USA and Germany launched its reform process last year. The standard bearer of change is Ajay Banga, who became the Bank's president in June. He spelled out his vision at the annual meetings of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in Morocco in October. The core mission is still to fight poverty and boost prosperity, but the newly declared aspiration is to make that happen "on a liveable planet". Banga thus wants to pay more attention to the above-mentioned global challenges. In his eyes, they blend into one another and cannot be distinguished precisely.

That is true. The big global crises are indeed mutually reinforcing. The climate

crisis threatens food security; environmental destruction makes pandemics more likely; wars displace masses of people and can lead to rising food and energy prices. Getting a grip on one crisis thus helps to contain others. Synergies of this kind must be grasped.

So yes, the World Bank should indeed respond to crises in a comprehensive manner. It would also do well to mobilise more funding and to allocate resources faster. Banga's plans include somewhat more risky operations and more leveraging of private-sector investments. Success would make the World Bank a role model for other multilateral institutions.

Quite obviously, low-income countries must get more money, both from established economic powers and the emerging markets that are now on the threshold of high-income status, as China is, for example. Low-income countries' worries are growing faster than their economies. They did not cause problems like global heating, so they deserve support from those who are responsible. Options include multilateral and bilateral approaches.

A first measure of Banga's success will be whether he can mobilise more money for the World Bank. Low-income countries find the next replenishment of IDA, the International Development Association, particularly important. This branch of the World Bank Group finances projects in countries with a gross national income per capita of \$1,315 or less. In the period 2022 to 2025, IDA has \$93 billion. How much money will be available in the next period will be decided in 2024. Banga needs a record sum.

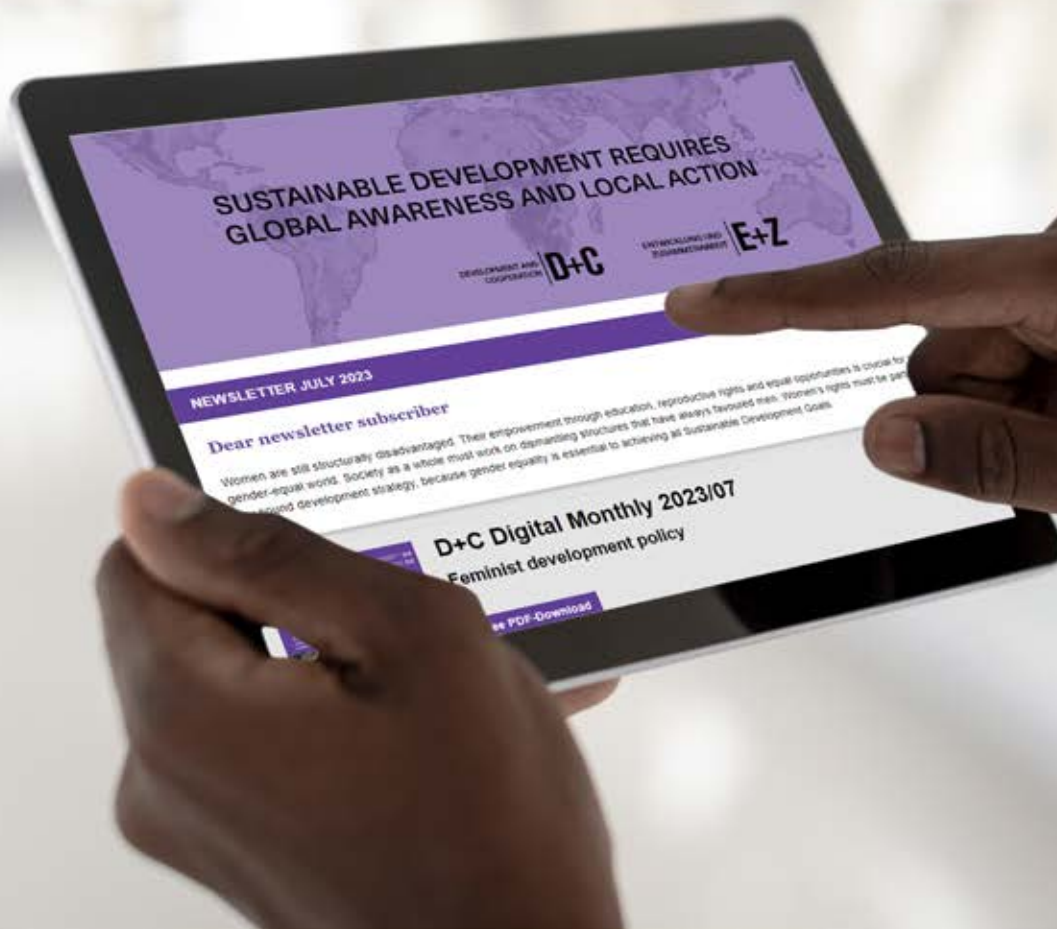
Even if he gets it, however, it will not suffice to close SDG funding gaps. According to the UN, developing countries face a financing gap of \$4 trillion for relevant investments. Moreover, almost 40% of the countries concerned are struggling with serious debt problems. More funding is needed from strong economies and the private sector. Moreover, excessive debts must be restructured in a fair manner, so disadvantaged countries get real development opportunities.



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FOCUS

Democracy under attack

How devolution matters in Kenya

Interview with Moses Lubabali (p. 16)

Fighting corruption internationally

By Bernhard Amler and Christoph Kowalewski (p. 18)

The context of West African military coups

Interview with Vladimir Antwi-Danso (p. 20)

US democracy is still at risk

By Claire Davis (p. 22)

Brazil has put a check on Bolsonaro

By André de Mello e Souza (p. 24)

Jewish philosopher assesses Netanyahu's comprehensive failure

Interview with Susan Neiman (p. 26)

Pakistan will go to the polls in a time of escalating polycrisis

By Marva Khan (p. 29)

After sovereign default, repression and poverty are escalating in Sri Lanka

Interview with Ahilan Kadirgamar (p. 31)

Debate on whether Chinese aid hurts democracy

By Isah Shafiq (p. 33)



As a result of decentralisation, hospitals are now also being built in Kenya's desert regions.

DECENTRALISATION

Responding to local needs

Kenya's devolution redistributed power and fostered local development. While achieving a better resource distribution and increased citizen participation, challenges like revenue collection, corruption and tribalism persist, says Kenyan political expert Moses Lubabali.

Moses Lubabali interviewed by Alba Nakuwa and Katharina Wilhelm Otieno

What does devolution mean in Kenya and when was it implemented?

Devolution was implemented in 2013 following the enactment of the new constitution in the country in 2010. The new constitution redistributed power by devolving responsibilities from the national government to 47 elected county governments.

How has it shifted decision-making to the counties?

Different counties have unique needs based on local climate, environment, or culture.

For this reason, it was the right way to decentralise the government into sub-units where citizens have the mandate to determine their own development structures.

Decentralisation has the potential to address Kenya's long-standing challenges of regional imbalance, exclusion of marginalised groups and ethnic inequalities, while strengthening self-governance at the local level.

What have been key achievements or positive outcomes of the devolution system?

Much has been achieved since the introduction of this system. Above all, national resources have been evenly distributed among the counties so that each county has an equal chance of growth. Thirty percent of national revenue is allocated to counties based on factors like population, poverty rate, land area and fiscal responsibility.

Another positive outcome of devolution is increased public participation. And

public participation improves informed decision-making on the government side, as decisions made at county level must be based on local needs.

How has devolution enhanced citizen participation in local governance?

Devolution provides a platform for citizens to air grievances, resulting in more flexible and effective governance at the county level. This also enables the county government to tailor its services to the needs of the various groups in its area. It usually knows its community better than the national government anyway and can therefore provide appropriate services.

Nevertheless, there is still a lot to do, as certain groups such as young people, women and people with disabilities are still underrepresented in all county governments.

What are the challenges or negative aspects of devolution you have observed in the country?

The challenges lie in revenue collection by county governments as well as mismanagement of funds allocated by the national government. Some counties have not put in place a standard procedure for revenue col-

lection and instead rely heavily on national government revenue when they should be trying to generate their own money to supplement their allocated funds.

Furthermore, some counties have come under criticism for misappropriation of funds while others are unable to account for them, although there are laws governing the management of funds.

“Development must happen at the local level. Moreover, decentralisation has the potential for more direct democracy and can therefore strengthen democracy at the national level as well.”

Decentralisation has also increased tribalism in certain areas, especially in the employment sector. Certain ethnic groups are concentrated in specific counties. It is therefore very difficult to find a county government where different ethnic groups are represented. This has resulted in limited interaction and exchange of ideas between the ethnic groups and an increase in tribalism and nepotism – resources and jobs usually go to the family or community of the distributor. If more representatives of other culturally and geographically distant ethnic groups held positions in the county government, this would be somewhat mitigated, as they would not have the opportunity to enrich their own families through the money allocated to that specific county.

How has devolution influenced the distribution of resources and services across different counties?

Before introducing the decentralised system, people in many regions felt excluded and wanted to have access to public services close to home. Previously, most resources, including public facilities such as hospitals and schools, were located in urban centres. With devolution, each county has an equal opportunity to develop key infrastructure as resources are shared equally.

Some counties are expanding and investing in many areas, but there are still problems with quality and efficiency in de-

livering certain services. This also has something to do with widespread corruption and the misallocation of resources.

What measures have been put in place to ensure accountability and transparency in the devolution system, particularly with regard to county governments?

There are no proper measures in place, which is the biggest challenge for the system. Instead, in my view, many resources are wasted, for example by duplicating positions so that family and friends can get a post.

Services for citizens are also not optimised. For example, we elect senators as subordinates to the governors. They are supposed to work closely with the locals and present their complaints to the governor. Ironically, they often do not have an office where citizens can go to see them.

The main problem, however, is that the decentralised system still lacks a clearly defined structure, standard procedures and role specification.

Are there specific sectors or areas where devolution has had a particularly positive impact?

Decentralisation has proven its worth, particularly in the health sector. Some counties have introduced new healthcare facilities and medical care. Relevant medical equipment is now available in all 47 counties. The deployment of community health workers enabled by devolution has also made it easier for county governments to respond to certain medical emergencies at the community level.

Infrastructure development has also had a positive impact in the counties. However, a lot of funds have gone into the construction and maintenance of roads. Therefore, counties tend to apply for funds for infrastructure because they are well endowed, although they may need development in other sectors more urgently.

In the education sector, counties focus more on the trend towards early childhood development and ignore teacher shortages and infrastructure problems at higher levels.

Have you seen any innovative or successful county-level initiatives that could serve as models for other regions or countries considering devolution?

In the last 10 years since the introduction of the decentralised system, some counties have come up with amazing innovations in which local people have played an important role. Their governments gave them a platform to put forward proposals that could help curb rising unemployment by offering solutions to get people into self-employment. An example of two counties that have done well are Makueni and Kitui. Located in the eastern semi-arid regions of Kenya, they have established a mango and leather industry respectively with financial support from their county governments, based on their respective regional resources, local conditions and cultural knowledge. This has created jobs and strengthened self-reliance.

What lessons or recommendations do you think Kenya can give to other countries that want to use decentralisation as a means of governance and development?

For me, the introduction of this concept was a good decision. Development must happen at the local level. Moreover, the concept has the potential for more direct democracy and can therefore strengthen democracy at the



national level as well. Decentralisation can also promote trade between counties, with some counties being successful in agriculture and others in livestock farming. This will also promote a sense of unity in the long run, something that Kenya is not alone in needing.



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Anti-corruption protests in Guatemala in September.

ABUSE OF POWER

Fighting corruption on an international level

Corruption undermines democracies and supports autocracies. Although some progress has been made in the fight against corruption, international efforts need to increase.

By Bernhard Amler and Christoph Kowalewski

Democracy and freedom worldwide have declined for the 17th consecutive year. That is one of the main takeaways from the “Freedom in the World 2023” report by American NGO Freedom House. At the same time, the global average score on the Transparency International (TI) Corruption Perceptions Index has shown stagnation rather than progress in recent years. Many factors – often country-specific ones – help to give rise to populist governments, autocracies, military regimes and anti-democratic movements in general. However, corruption in all its various forms is one of the most important causes. Where political rights and civil liber-

ties deteriorate, abuse of power for personal gain increases.

Corruption undermines democracy. It destroys public trust in institutions and manipulates political decision-making processes for the benefit of a minority or elite. Moreover, it results in accountability mechanisms being undermined. It also distorts markets, hinders equitable access to services, increases inequality and creates insecurity and instability (TI, 2021).

Autocratic regimes thrive on widespread systemic corruption, including “state capture”, the illicit control of state institutions by private interests. The G7 leaders speak of kleptocracies. In authoritarian systems, power is institutionally concentrated and not subject to democratic control mechanisms, which makes abuse of power more likely. Democratic institutions, in contrast, distribute power. Autocrats view the fight against corruption as a threat because it weakens their influence, both at home and abroad.

None of this is entirely new, but it has become more relevant because, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit’s Democracy Index, more and more countries have been lost in recent years to authoritarian leaders and kleptocrats. Nor is it new that populists come to power with anti-corruption promises, only to undermine the fight against corruption and democratic institutions in order to consolidate their power.

CORRUPTION ON A SMALL AND LARGE SCALE

In many societies, charges of corruption are levelled at “those at the top”, while for ordinary people daily life is fraught with “petty corruption” – small “fees” that need to be paid to access public services, such as appointments with public authorities. This leads to further marginalisation of vulnerable groups and helps normalise forms of corruption that pose a systemic threat to the state, including “grand corruption”: the establishment of kleptocratic structures that facilitate the diversion of state funds by – or with the collusion of – high-ranking state officials and politicians. This can cause massive harm and give rise to gross human-rights violations.

Grand corruption also poses a threat to countries where corruption is not considered a significant social issue. In Georgia, for example, there is evidence of a special form of grand corruption. Known as “stra-

tegic corruption”, it is perpetrated by local oligarchs and the hegemonic power, Russia, with the aim of undermining the democratic societal decision to move closer to the EU.

Authoritarian regimes make extensive use of strategic corruption, notably against western democracies but also to advance their interests in countries of the global south. Their aim is to:

- win over decision-makers for their geopolitical objectives,
- destabilise democratic institutions,
- weaken the fabric of societies and
- undermine their national security.

Strategic corruption is designed to secure long-term influence and is part of the non-military arsenal of modern wars (hybrid warfare). As shown by the example of Ukraine, it also serves to prepare for wars of aggression.

Indeed, every country in the world uses foreign, economic and security policy to exercise influence for its own strategic advantage. The key difference lies in the means (corruption) and the objectives (destabilisation). It is therefore only right and proper that interventions by western industrialised nations in countries of the global south should be assessed by the same criteria. And “the west” would be well advised to uphold democratic decision-making processes and prevent any kind of corruption. However, western states are reluctant to address their own corruption risks, which makes countries like Germany vulnerable to attack.

MONEY FLOWS TO TAX HAVENS

All major forms of corruption share a common trait: they cause substantial harm for the vast majority of society and at the same time lead to a massive increase of power and wealth for a small minority. Typically, much of the money derived from corruption is transferred to so-called tax havens, but a significant amount flows into western economies as investment. Corruption is thus facilitated by illegal cross-border financial flows and money laundering.

There is a glaring need for more action against money laundering. As the Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering (FATF) reported in 2022, Germany is a popular destination for money that originates from organised crime and kleptocratic systems all over the world. Thanks to the scope for concealment, the country

“All major forms of corruption share a common trait: they cause substantial harm for the vast majority of society and at the same time lead to a massive increase of power and wealth for a small minority. Typically, much of the money derived from corruption is transferred to so-called tax havens, but a significant amount flows into western economies as investment.”

offers a wide range of investment opportunities. In addition, there is insufficient repatriation of confiscated assets, as well as lack of compensation payments to affected groups. Democratic states urgently need to review and refine their law enforcement instruments. In many cases, there is a lack of enforcement capacity; in some it is coupled with a suspicious lack of willingness to act.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IS KEY

The mid-term review of the 2030 Agenda shows that the global community is running well short of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The impact of corruption is generally not taken adequately into account. Combating corruption and money laundering needs to be clearly identified and addressed as a prerequisite for achieving the 2030 Agenda – within the context of each and every one of the 17 SDGs. It is important to break the so-called SHE-cycle – Steal-Hide-Enjoy. As long as it is possible to launder money, i.e. conceal its illegal origin (Hide), corruption will remain attractive as the means of theft (Steal). Only when opportunities for investing dirty money are systematically and effectively denied will the incentive for corruption decrease because the benefit from the money (Enjoy) is diminished.

Internationally, there has been progress. Corruption is now a criminal offence worldwide and widely condemned. The US and the G7 have made a firm commitment to support the fight against transnational corruption. And successes in places like Guatemala show what can be achieved when fight-

ing corruption is a priority and is supported by the international community.

What is perplexing, however, is the reluctance of countries like Germany to clearly prioritise anti-corruption action. Comprehensive national efforts and the implementation of binding international agreements are needed here. Stronger international cooperation to uncover illicit financial flows and corruption offences needs to be reflected in national legislation.

A strong civil society, free media and an independent judiciary are vital for a resilient democracy. This is why democratic countries should:

- promote cooperation between civil society and policymakers,
- develop country-specific anti-corruption measures,
- establish sanction mechanisms,
- raise awareness among political and business leaders,
- make state action more transparent, e.g. by ensuring comprehensive accountability and maintaining lobby and transparency registers and
- strengthen independent, investigative media and protect whistleblowers.

Corruption has to be prevented and fought against at government level. Additionally, a national anti-corruption strategy needs to be developed to coordinate all action and create a clear roadmap. Ultimately, corruption must be consistently recognised and addressed as a threat to national security.

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“Across the Muslim world, passions are running high.”
Pro-Palestine rally in Dakar during a previous Gaza crisis in 2014.

WEST AFRICA

“Your blatant double standards”

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has seen a string of successful military coups, from Guinea to Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger since 2021. In this interview, Vladimir Antwi-Danso, a Ghanaian political scientist, assesses the outlook for democratic governance and economic integration in West Africa.

Vladimir Antwi-Danso interviewed by Hans Dembowski

To what extent are the new military regimes changing the nature of the ECOWAS?

Well, this regional organisation is a family of nations that want to leverage economic integration and benefit from synergies. We had to learn early on that there is a security dimension to our aspirations. In the 1980s and 1990s, civil war ravaged some member countries, so the regional block developed security mechanisms that ultimately allowed it to control the violence. In the meantime, however, new security threats have emerged. Terrorism has in-

creased, emanating from the international arena and causing intrastate frictions. So far, the ECOWAS does not have what it takes to stop terrorism. In this context, we are seeing what I call “systemic coups”. They look acceptable to very many people for two reasons: They prevent the implosion of the respective state and they are led by very high-ranking officers. Moreover, they are largely bloodless and enjoy the support of local people. That makes it difficult for the ECOWAS to interfere.

Are you saying the new military regimes are democratically legitimate?

The answer is both yes and no. They are legitimate in the sense of preventing the collapse of the state, but not in the sense of removing an elected government. It is a catch-22 situation. Whatever the military does, they get something wrong.

We only see TV pictures from the capital cities, so perhaps the new regimes do not enjoy the same support in rural areas.

Yes, that may be so, but the big cities are what matters. Rural populations almost entirely lack influence. Their wishes and ideas really do not mean much to elected governments either.

Does the disconnect between formal governance and life in remote villages affect all of West Africa?

I would say it affects all of Africa. State institutions are generally urban-based, and large areas outside the metropolitan centres remain ungoverned. Things are a bit better in countries like Ghana or Kenya, where institutions of governance have a bearing on the entire country, and rural communities have an idea of how state authorities are supposed to serve them. However, that is the exception, not the norm. The West African coup countries all have vast ungoverned regions, which are full of angry young men. Armed gangs, warlords and terrorists fill the power vacuum. To some extent, they also offer livelihoods. Adding to the problems, historical conflicts between ethnic groups tend to linger on.

Islamist terrorists claim to be fighting for the faith – is religion a driver of violence?

No, religion is not to blame for terrorism. It is a tool that terrorists manipulate. They benefit from resentment against the met-

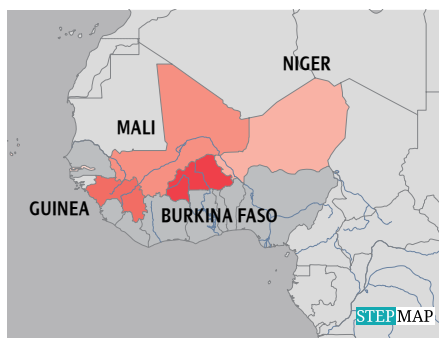
ropolitan culture of the capital cities and claim to be totally different. The name of Boko Haram, the Nigerian terrorist outfit, fittingly means “western education is evil”. Agitation is easy when you can say someone is trying to kill the people of our faith. But let us be very clear: the Koran does not call for what is happening, and most terrorists haven’t really read any Holy Scriptures.

Does the Gaza crisis have an impact on West Africa?

Yes, of course it does. Across the Muslim world, passions are running high. People feel that “the Jews” want to kill dear brethren. The way western governments unconditionally endorse Israel is making the problems worse. For good reason, you call Russia’s indiscriminate bombing of Ukraine a war crime. But when Israel’s indiscriminate bombing of Gaza kills some 8000 people in three weeks, including 3000 children, you then talk of legitimate self-defence. Your blatant double standards hurt your international reputation.

But Israel is indeed fighting a terrorist threat, and the law of war demands that only military targets be attacked, but not that every civilian life be spared.

Yes, that is true, but how do we know Israel is only hitting militarily relevant targets? The rhetoric we hear is atrocious. Some Israeli leaders speak of “human animals” or the need for another “Nakba”, as Arabs call the mass displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in 1948. To masses of Muslims around the world, cutting off more than 2 million people in Gaza from sufficient water, electricity, food, fuel and pharmaceuticals looks like collective punishment. Western governments accuse anyone of anti-Semitism who dares to criticise the Netanyahu government even though there is nothing inherently Jewish about Israel’s deadly military action. Indeed, many prominent Jews disagree with the current military strategy. You can read their comments in international media like the Guardian or the New York Times. Indeed, criticism of Israel is not even necessarily anti-Zionist. Anyone who calls for a two-state solution implicitly accepts Israel’s right to exist. Your leaders want everyone to condemn Hamas, which is indeed an appalling and violent organisation. Western governments would be more convincing, if they didn’t keep silent about



how Israel has been breaching international law for a very long time. Building permanent settlements on occupied land is illegal. Western governments keep preaching human rights, but they stay silent about what Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch call Israel’s Apartheid. All they do is accuse these international non-governmental organisations of anti-Semitism, without responding to the nuanced legal arguments.

Have the EU and its members lost trust across the ECOWAS?

Well, their reputation is in fast decline. Even I as a scholar am losing faith, both in the EU and in the UN. Far too often, international rules do not serve our needs. Why were we deprived of vaccines in the Covid-19 pandemic even though rules of the World Trade Organization state that intellectual property right must not stand in the way of public health? Why is it okay for US administrations to order extrajudicial executions of supposed terrorists abroad? Why do human rights suddenly not matter when someone is adrift in the Mediterranean Sea? The list goes on.

Is the implication that Africans have lost faith in democracy?

The big problem is that the electoral democracies which exist in Africa have largely failed to deliver what people need. The lack of infrastructure, social services and opportunities remains striking. Too many people feel that it doesn’t matter who they cast their vote for.

Is there anything the EU and its members should do?

It would be good if the EU could draft a way forward, proposing solutions to huge global problems. But I doubt you have the necessary collective will and clout. The world

lacks international leadership. The USA has lost any claim to such leadership. Perhaps China will try to rise to the challenge.

Well, I have been observing its various alliances, especially the BRICS. I see very little coherence. The one thing that unites Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa is resentment of the west. At the same time, Chinese policies – regarding debt relief, for example – can be most painful for developing countries.

Yes, that is true. The world is on the brink, and at this point, nobody is proposing viable solutions.

Is this how you assess the ECOWAS as well – on the brink with no solution in sight?

I see a serious risk of the regional bloc disintegrating, with individual countries backing off one by one. The response to the military coups has been problematic. To some extent it forced the new regimes into an alliance. It was awkward, moreover, that ECOWAS leaders insisted on a joint protocol of 2001 which forbids non-constitutional changes of government vis-a-vis new military rulers, after systematically staying quiet when civilian leaders manipulated constitutions. Alassane Ouattara, the president of Côte d’Ivoire, bizarrely admonished his counterparts in Mali to stick to the constitution, after he had just granted himself another unconstitutional term in office. It doesn’t help, of course, that large numbers of people now think that the ECOWAS is only acting on behalf of western governments, when our leaders try to rein in military regimes. Too few understand that West Africa as a whole needs legitimate and effective governance of a kind that authoritarian rule is unlikely to provide. What makes it hard to convey this message, however, is that elected governments have largely failed to provide such governance as well. The full picture is that any weakening or disintegration of the ECOWAS is bad news for economic integration which we need to build prosperity. And that is true beyond West Africa. Without the ECOWAS, Africa’s continental free-trade area will go nowhere.



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Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Joe Biden on the sidelines of the G20 summit in New Delhi in September.

UNITED STATES

Democracy in danger

US President Joe Biden has argued that the world is engaged in a contest between democracy and autocracy. Yet his administration, like those of his predecessors, frequently works with authoritarian leaders abroad. At home, the minority political party is undermining democratic institutions in an attempt to hold onto power.

By Claire Davis

Since his campaign against then-President Donald Trump, Joe Biden has frequently spoken of “the battle between democracy and autocracy” that he claims is taking place around the globe. In a speech on foreign policy in 2019, he accused Trump of failing to uphold basic democratic principles, thereby jeopardising the United States’ standing in the world. Instead of being driven by “chest-thumping” and “Twitter tantrums,” Biden says, US foreign policy should aim to “defend and advance our security, prosperity and democratic values.”

The difficulty is that security, prosperity and democratic values often come into conflict. The US has a long history of prioritising its national security and economic interests over democratic concerns. During the Cold War, the US allied with autocrats such as Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines and François Duvalier of Haiti to limit the spread of communism and the influence of the Soviet Union.

COMPROMISE AND CONTAINMENT

Nowadays, the US is making similar compromises to contain China. Indian prime minister Narendra Modi has persecuted his opponents and brought the country closer to one-party rule. His administration has eroded the independence of the judiciary and endangered the human rights of non-Hindu minorities. Nevertheless, President Biden welcomed Prime Minister Modi to the White House in June 2023. The two countries struck numerous business deals de-

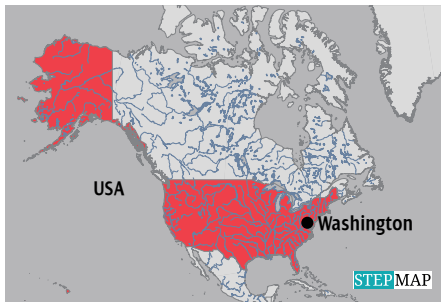
spite protests from demonstrators and some US lawmakers. The Biden administration views India as a bulwark against China, both militarily and economically.

The US has also proven willing to work with Saudi Arabia. Early in his administration, Biden called for an end to arm sales to Saudi Arabia given the country’s human-rights abuses in the war in Yemen. Arms sales have continued, however; as recently as September 2023, the US State Department approved a sale worth \$500 million according to the Defense Security Cooperation Agency.

The Biden administration has repeatedly shown that it considers Saudi Arabia too strategically important to sever ties over moral principles. Oil production in Saudi Arabia impacts petrol prices in the US, and high petrol prices could damage Biden’s chances of re-election in 2024. US officials have also recently pushed to normalise relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel, partly as a way to limit China’s influence in the region. It remains to be seen, however, whether Biden’s willingness to set aside democratic values will bear fruit – oil prices remain high, and Saudi-Israeli relations have been damaged by the current war with Hamas.

The Biden administration, like its predecessors, has also worked with, for ex-

ample, Israel, Egypt, Turkey, Poland, the Philippines and the United Arab Emirates – countries whose democratic track records are spotty at best and non-existent at worst. Thus, Biden’s rhetoric belies the pragmatism that has always driven the US’s foreign policy approach. Whether Biden is guilty of oversimplification or hypocrisy, he would do well to treat allies and adversaries more consistently and not call out abuses in some places while ignoring them in others. The situation is complicated, however, by the US’s own democratic backsliding. According to the Liberal Democracy Index of Varieties of Democracy, the producer of the largest global dataset on democracy, the US has undergone substantial autocratisation in the past 10 years. The structural deficits of US democracy are being exacerbated by political polarisation and attempts by one of the two major parties to stay in power by any means necessary.



Despite the way it positions itself abroad, the US government has always been somewhat ambivalent about democracy. There are numerous impediments to majority rule. For example, when the country was founded in the 18th century, government leaders worried that people would not be well enough informed to elect candidates for national office directly. When US Americans vote for president, they are actually voting for electors. Electors in each state cast their votes based on the winner of the popular vote. Most states have a winner-takes-all approach: if a candidate wins the popular vote in Florida, for instance, he or she wins all 30 of Florida’s electoral votes. The upshot of the winner-takes-all approach is that people who vote for the losing candidate essentially have their votes nullified. Furthermore, it is entirely possible for a candidate to win the nationwide popular

vote but fail to gain enough electoral votes to win the presidency. The reverse is also true: both George W. Bush in 2000 and Donald Trump in 2016 lost the popular vote but nevertheless became president.

Citizens’ votes also do not count equally in the Senate, the upper chamber of the US legislature. Each state is allocated two senators, meaning that states with small populations have a disproportionate influence compared to states with large populations. For example, each senator from the state of Wyoming represents about 290,000 people. By contrast, each senator from the state of California represents about 20 million people. Yet their votes are equal in the Senate. In recent years, citizens of more populous states have voted for Democrats, the US’s left-wing party. Voters in less populous states have favoured Republicans, the right-wing party. Since there are more states with small populations, it has become easier for Republicans to represent a minority of Americans while still holding a majority in the Senate.

REPUBLICAN INSURRECTION

The structural advantage of Republicans in the Senate is especially important because the party is attempting to undermine democracy in a variety of ways. In the Senate, the minority party can use a tactic called the filibuster to delay voting on contentious legislation. Overcoming a filibuster requires securing 60 out of 100 Senate votes – a steep hurdle in today’s polarised political climate. In the past, Republican senators have used the filibuster to block anti-lynching laws and civil-rights legislation. More recently, they blocked a voting rights bill that would have restored some of the voting protections that Republican-led states have dismantled. Critics contend that Republican lawmakers want to make voting more difficult for Black and Latino voters, who tend to vote for Democrats. Republicans’ voter base tends to be white, and thus Republicans’ outsized influence in the Senate also means that the interests of white voters are overrepresented.

Republican lawmakers were particularly eager to restrict voting following the 2020 presidential election. Former President Donald Trump lost both the electoral and the popular vote to Joe Biden, yet instead of accepting the results, right-wing groups and some Republican lawmakers

alleged that they were the result of widespread voter fraud. The issue came to a head on 6 January 2021, when Trump supporters stormed the US Capitol to stop lawmakers from counting states’ electoral votes. Five people were killed and 140 wounded in the most violent attack on the building since the British burned it down in the War of 1812. No evidence of voter fraud has been found, and Trump has been indicted on criminal charges for his repeated attempts to overturn the legal outcome of the 2020 election. However, it took the legal system a very long time to indict Trump, even though it was obvious that crimes had been perpetrated (see André de Mello e Souza in this issue). The implication is that it may prove impossible to sentence Trump before the next election.

It is difficult to predict the future of democracy in the US. On the one hand, US Americans can take comfort in the fact that voter fraud is largely a fiction. On the other hand, confidence in election integrity has been eroded. Republicans seem increasingly inclined to challenge the validity of any election they lose. Trump has already attempted one coup. Barring a lengthy prison sentence, there is no reason why he could not attempt another.

Nevertheless, Biden cannot afford to alienate the entire Republican Party, just as he cannot afford to ignore countries that fall short of his democratic ideals. The Republican Party has evolved from an anti-slavery party in the 19th century to a champion of big business and small government in the 20th to an instrument of Donald Trump’s chaos in the 21st. Not all Republican officials or voters are happy about Trump’s influence, though. And while Biden has signalled his willingness to reach out to such people, the Democratic Party in general has done little to address the frustrations that propelled Trump to power in the first place. Countering the threat to American democracy will require both parties to acknowledge their failures, a process that would surely also boost the US’s credibility abroad.



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Bolsonaro and Trump 2019 in Washington.

AUTHORITARIAN LEADERS

Brazil defended democracy more effectively than the US

Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro adopted similar strategies, but Brazil offered a stronger and faster response against threats to presidential election results than the United States.

By André de Mello e Souza

As presidents, both Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro posed a threat to democracy in the US and Brazil respectively. However, analysts agreed that Brazil is far more vulnerable to such a threat than the US. Democratic political institutions of the latter are considered to be more established and stable.

Brazil has experienced several collapses of democratic rule, usually through military intervention. The latest lasted 21 years, from 1964 to 1985, so democracy is still relatively young at 38 years, and political instability was common throughout most of the 20th century.

But after both Trump and Bolsonaro lost their bids for reelection in 2020 and 2022 respectively, Brazil reacted much more quickly and forcefully to Bolsonaro than the US did to Trump.

The two leaders employed similar strategies during their time in office to mobilise their supporters and cast doubt on

election results. After they lost elections, both claimed the elections had been rigged.

In the US, a mob of Trump's supporters stormed the Capitol on 6 January 2021, in an attempt to overturn the Electoral College vote, resulting in five casualties and more than a hundred injured people. Meanwhile, Brazil witnessed a similar event on 8 January 2023, when mobs, donned in the country's colors, launched an attack on the Supreme Court headquarters, the Presidential palace and Congress in Brasília. Their goal was to violently overthrow the democratically elected President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who had taken office on 1st January. The ensuing chaos resulted in widespread vandalism and the destruction of several historical and artistic works.

THE SAME PLAYBOOK

The similarities between the two events and the strategies used by Trump and Bolsonaro are not coincidental. Bolsonaro has made no attempt to hide the fact that he deliber-

ately copied Trump's playbook. However, the consequences of their failed challenges to election results were quite different in the US and Brazil.

Although Trump is facing multiple federal and state lawsuits accusing him of paying off a porn star, appropriating classified information and business fraud, as well as trying to overturn the election, he is still the most powerful politician on the American right. Trump has pleaded not guilty to all charges and has repeatedly tried to portray himself as the target of political persecution. In doing so, he has effectively used his position as a defendant to galvanise his supporters.

More than two years after his first presidency, it seems like he is about to win the Republican nomination for president again, with a large lead in the polls. His renewed candidacy for president can be secured regardless of the outcome of the court cases pending against him – the American constitution does not disqualify individuals convicted of crimes from running for or serving as president.

Bolsonaro is the subject of numerous criminal investigations as well. In addition to the charges from 8 January, he is accused of publicly discouraging the use of face masks during the pandemic and linking Covid-19 vaccines to HIV/AIDS infections, embezzling jewels donated by the Saudi government, falsifying his own vaccination certificate, interfering with the federal police and leaking confidential information about the electoral court, among other things.

However, less than a year after his presidency, two rulings of the Brazilian Electoral Court rendered Bolsonaro ineligible to run for any political office for eight years. In June 2023, the court ruled that he had abused his power when he made unfounded claims to foreign diplomats about the reliability of Brazil's electronic voting system. In October, the court once again found him guilty of abuse of power when he used the celebrations to mark the 200th anniversary of Brazil's independence last year for election campaign purposes. Bolsonaro cannot run for president again until the 2030 elections, when he will be 75 years old. He says he will appeal to the Supreme Court, but it is highly unlikely that he will be able to overturn the two judgements.

The responses to the events in Brasília and Washington differed too. In Brasília,

more people were immediately arrested. According to the Brazilian Minister of Justice and Public Security, around 200 people were detained. The US Capitol Police counted at least 14 arrests in Washington.

HARSHER SENTENCES

In addition, the Supreme Court's judgements against the members of the mob that stormed the government buildings in Brasília were handed down more quickly and with much harsher sentences than the judgements against Trump supporters who were involved in 2021.

“The Brazilian electoral system also did a better job of preventing Bolsonaro and his supporters from waging a protracted battle over the election results.”

In the US, those convicted of conspiracy against democracy can appeal. In Brazil, it was the Supreme Court that convicted the conspirators, so there is no higher court to appeal to. The judgements handed down by the Supreme Court are final.

The reason for the different responses of the US and Brazilian institutions lies in the differences between the political and state structures of the two countries. In the US, elections are organised by the states, with different procedures for eligibility to vote and the way in which votes are cast and registered across the country. In contrast, in Brazil, the entire electoral process is centralised and governed by the Electoral Court, which usually decides, among other things, which candidates are eligible to run. Brazilian electoral law temporarily bars politicians who abuse their mandate from running for office, as in the case of Bolsonaro.

The Brazilian electoral system also did a better job of preventing Bolsonaro and his supporters from waging a protracted battle over the election results, as Trump did. In the US, the vote count was slow and delayed the announcement of the results by days. After that, the Electoral College process took another two months. In addition, elections and audits were conducted in every state.

Trump and his supporters therefore had more time and numerous targets to organise attacks on the electoral process. In Brazil, an electronic voting system counted the votes in just two hours and the central electoral authority, not the TV news channels, announced the winner that same evening.

The Brazilian system also allowed the authorities to crack down much more aggressively on anti-democratic fake news in the aftermath. The Supreme Court ordered searches, seizures and arrests.

Nevertheless, the measures in Brazil to combat electoral misinformation were not without criticism. The courts were accused of being disproportionate, e.g., against people who merely criticised the courts. The sentences for members of the mob that attacked the government buildings were also considered too harsh by several legal scholars.

Overall, analysts view Brazil's political system as potentially more susceptible to abuse. Because the Brazilian system places too much power in the hands of the seven judges of the Electoral Court rather than the voters and subnational entities, it allows for less checks and balances and less local oversight.

As a final note, the political aftermath of these anti-democratic challenges in the US and Brazil varies significantly too. In the US, a substantial portion of the Republican Party has embraced unfounded election-fraud claims, leading to the enactment of new voting laws and the election of extremist Trump-supporters to national and state legislatures, as well as to the leadership of the House of Representatives.

In contrast, in Brazil, the conservative political establishment has largely distanced itself from election fraud claims and Bolsonaro. Conservative leaders and voters appear more inclined to favour moderate candidates like São Paulo's governor, Tarcísio de Freitas, as promising presidential candidates from the political right. This shift away from extremism could potentially reduce political polarisation in Brazil and bring political disputes more in line with the constitution.



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Hamas abducted about 240 hostages on 7 October: billboard in Jerusalem in November.

GAZA WAR

“Focus on what is happening in the present”

The Hamas terrorism of 7 October was particularly cruel and atrocious. The perpetrators committed terrible crimes. Many Israelis, however, think their own government bears responsibility for the bloodshed that occurred on its watch. Susan Neiman, a Jewish philosopher, shared her views in a D+C/E+Z interview.

Susan Neiman interviewed by Hans Dembowski

What was unprecedented about the attacks of 7 October 2023?

They were intended to be as cruel as possible – and to be perceived as such too. The terrorists filmed their brutal crimes and posted videos online, following the example of ISIS, the Islamist militia that shared videos of executions on social media. Sad-

ly, we don't really understand how people are capable of such atrocious violence, but we should consider what they wanted to achieve. Hamas leaders are reckless fanatics, but they are not stupid. They knew that Israel would strike back hard with military means. What is happening now is a gift to them. In their eyes, every dead child in Gaza is a propaganda triumph that distracts attention from their own horrendous violence.

But mustn't Israel protect itself?

Yes, of course, but who says that terrorism can be defeated by military means? The US administration tried to do that in Afghanistan and Iraq after the 9/11 attacks on New York City and Washington DC. The wars did not end terrorism. Hamas is seeking a brutal, extensive and long war with as many

civilian casualties as possible. That would trigger maximum international disapproval of Israel and might drag other parties into the conflict – Hezbollah, for example, or even Iran. Hamas is not a liberation movement. They aren't interested in Palestinians' welfare. They oppress women, silence opponents and deliberately sacrifice their own people's lives. In their view, the number of supposed “martyrs” cannot become too large. Their goal is not to free the people, but to destroy Israel.

Israel's founders wanted to establish a state where Jews would never be helpless victims of pogroms. Today, Israel is a strong state with its region's most powerful military. Nonetheless, coordinated terror attacks proved feasible, with more than 1200 persons killed and about 240 abducted. What responsibility does Prime Minister Netanyahu's government bear?

Well, there is a lot I could say. Here are some important points:

- In the weeks and months before the attacks, many reservists of the Israeli Defence Forces refused to show up for drills in protest against the government's judicial reform plans, which are to use its small parliamentary majority to eviscerate the Supreme Court, ending the justices' power to review government action. The protest movement was broad-based and so strong that Israel was close to civil war.

- Hamas attacked on a Saturday morning. Mobilising the security forces was difficult because, thanks to the policy of orthodox coalition members, there isn't supposed to be any traffic on Shabbat. When it became obvious what kind of atrocities were being committed, reservists reappeared for service, but they weren't properly prepared for action and had to improvise without much coordination. In the summer, Netanyahu had actually refused to meet with the military leaders who wanted to warn him that the judicial reform agenda was affecting national security. For a long time, moreover, he had dogmatically been saying that Hamas was too weak to attack Israel.

- Therefore, his government had withdrawn three battalions from the Gaza border in order to provide better protection to Israeli settlements in the West Bank, which are illegal according to international law. The absence of the troops from the border made it easier for Hamas to attack.

- Netanyahu and his camp have been pitting Hamas against the PLO and the Palestinian Authority for a long time. He has said that anyone who wants to prevent the two-state solution needs Hamas. Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich has made similar statements. These people turned the word “peace” into a joke in Israeli politics, promised that military dominance would deliver long-term security. They openly supported Hamas while weakening the PLO, which had agreed to a peace process and is running the Palestinian Authority. This approach resembled the US policy of initially funding the Taliban in order to weaken communists in Afghanistan. It failed in Afghanistan, and now has failed in Israel too.

And that is why Netanyahu’s support is dwindling in Israel? Less than 20% currently approve of him in opinion polls.

Views certainly diverge widely regarding some of the points I just made. However, all Israelis now know that Netanyahu’s security promises failed. They also know that he built his coalition with right-wing extremists so his immunity as prime minister will continue to shield him from corruption trials. As befits a democratic nation, Israel’s courts have a track record of sentencing former office holders to prison if found guilty of crimes. Former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert was in prison because of corruption and former President Moshe Katzav because of rape. One reason Netanyahu wants to strip the legal system of its powers is his fear of a prison sentence. At the same time, right-wing extremists long to disembowel the Supreme Court because, though it did not ensure equal rights for minorities, it protected some of their fundamental rights. For instance, it recently ruled that there must not be any blanket prohibition of anti-war rallies. Moreover, it has sometimes protected Palestinians from dispossession.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, two major international non-governmental organisations, accuse Israel of apartheid. What do you say?

B’Tselem, an Israeli human-rights organisation, uses this legal term as well. It is a very clear concept which simply means that different laws apply to different national groups – and that is definitely the case in the West Bank. Israeli settlers enjoy full civil rights, are protected by the security forces

and vote in parliamentary elections. Palestinians, by contrast, live under occupation law. Their freedom of movement is sharply restricted. Their lives are not safe, nor is their land. Before the Hamas attacks, 179 of them had been killed this year, supposedly for security reasons, and violence has dramatically escalated since. Many Israeli civil-

crimination and violence that could erupt anytime. Today, about half of Israel’s population descends from immigrants from Arab countries where they couldn’t stay because of repression and persecution. It is absurd to claim that Jewish Israelis are somehow “white” whereas Palestinians are “persons of colour”. One cannot tell us apart by the



Protest against judicial reforms in Tel Aviv in the summer.

society groups oppose the injustice, which is also evident in abject poverty. To make room for new settlements, Palestinians are displaced from villages, which sometimes only consist of tents improvised from garbage bags. I have seen them. Israeli friends of mine who are peace activists have started to stay there overnight to protect the villages, because the settlers have come there threatening to kill them if they don’t leave. There are people in the government who speak happily of a second Nakba, the great displacement of 1948.

What about the term settler colonialism?

It is wrong if applied to the early settlement of Israel. Israel’s history differs completely from South Africa or Algeria, where white people, with the support of their imperialist countries, established huge land holdings and exploited indigenous people. Jewish migration from Europe to Palestine started in the late 19th century and it did not serve this kind of imperialist purpose. It was driven by experiences of marginalisation, dis-

colour of our skin. I’m afraid, though, that the term “settler colonialism” will apply to the West Bank, which was set aside for a future Palestinian state, if the settler violence continues.

What is the way forward for Israel/Palestine?

At this point, nobody knows. This is a moment of extreme crisis, in which people react to other people’s actions, and not all of the actors are rational, to put it mildly. I think it is essential to stop seeing things in the terms of a zero-sum game. Israel and Palestine coexist. It makes no sense to keep using terms like “pro-Israel” and “pro-Palestine”, as if it were a football match. We need peace and justice that work for all, but polarisation only serves the extremists on both sides.

I don’t think there can be peace unless masses of Palestinian youngsters see some kind of future for themselves. Will a tiny sovereign state do? It seems that something like an Israeli-Palestinian free trade area

would be needed right from the start, with people benefitting from existing links and leveraging synergies.

That would be nice, but we are not anywhere close, and it will not happen without serious international pressure and lots of international money. Israel's domestic policies will have to change. It wouldn't suffice to stop building settlements, existing ones will have to be removed in order to make sufficient space for a Palestinian state. That, in turn, means that more affordable housing is needed in Israel. Not everyone who lives in one of the settlements is a fanatic. Some people moved there because the homes are subsidised. With support for settlement expansion and other measures, consecutive Israeli governments over the years did what they could to prevent the two-state solution. They discredited all opponents who expressed an interest in peace and reconciliation as naive dreamers – as if it was wise to believe in permanent military dominance and treat the entire Palestinian population as one big security risk.

But is the Palestinian Authority a potential partner for negotiations? Its reputation is poor due to its corruption, inefficiency and close cooperation with Israel.

Well, the good news is that the majority of Palestinians do not support Hamas either, at least up to October 6, the last time there were polls taken. Only 27% supported them, because many fear that Islamist outfit, which hardly takes care of its own citizens. The last election was held in Gaza in 2006. For a peace process to work, there must be two willing partners. Neither Hamas nor the current Israeli government is one. The Netanyahu camp deliberately boosted Hamas and weakened the PLO. It made sure there was no partner – and said so explicitly in public.

In view of genocidal Nazi history, Germany bears a special responsibility for Israel. Mustn't we bear a special responsibility for the occupied territories as well?

Yes, of course. The lesson of Nazi history is not simply that Jews must have a special protected space. It is that violations of human rights on the basis of ethnic backgrounds is wrong. I understand that Germany feels a special responsibility for Jews, and that is a good thing, but the Nazis' murderous hate targeted other people too – the traveler com-



munities of the Sinti and Roma, people with disabilities, homosexuals and dissidents. A goal of Hitler's supremacist ideology, moreover, was to enslave the slavic nations, and his war claimed millions of their lives. But the bigger question is: does unconditional support for Israel's current politics actually make Israel safe? The vast majority of Israelis now say: the security policies that guided Israel since the Oslo Agreement was effectively ended completely failed on October 7. We need something new.

The German consensus is that the existence of Israel must be guaranteed unconditionally. I always wonder how to explain this to Palestinian youngsters who only ever saw Israel's government preventing a Palestinian state.

Reconciliation processes are difficult. It is necessary, first of all, to tell as much of the truth as possible. Anyone who emphasises Jewish suffering but ignores what is happening to the Palestinians cannot effectively fight anti-Semitism. The experience of young Palestinians matters. Unbalanced endorsements of Israel reinforce dangerous resentments. That doesn't mean that Israel's right to exist is up to negotiation. It must indeed be guaranteed – but so must Palestinians' human rights.

Who is in the position to define who or what is anti-Semitic? Some recent news has been bizarre. In Italy, people who are close to the right-wing government have accused Moni Ovadia, a prominent kippah-wearing Jewish actor and director, of anti-Semitism

because he is a long-standing opponent of the occupation. Like UN secretary-general António Guterres, he recently said that the Hamas attacks did not happen in a vacuum. Ovadia spoke of a "context of oppression". Things like that happen in Germany too. Who decides whether something is anti-Semitic, even if it is said or written by Jews? Last year, performances of the award-winning play "Birds of a kind" were discontinued after two Jewish students complained it was anti-Semitic. Its Lebanese-Canadian author worked in close cooperation with the great Jewish historian Natalie Zemon Davis, who, at the age of 94, wrote an op-ed in response. She insisted that the play was anything but anti-Semitic. It basically is an update of "Nathan the wise", Lessing's classic play of 1779. Then RIAS, Germany's supposed anti-Semitism watchdog, said that Davis was a supporter of the boycott-divestment-sanctions (BDS) movement even though she never had anything to do with it and was actively opposed to it. She considered going to court, but was already quite ill. Sadly, she passed away recently.

There was a tendency in Germany to accuse anyone who expresses criticism of Israel of evil anti-Semitism. What is your view?

In a democratic culture, it must be permitted to criticise a government. The German public understands that criticism of Donald Trump during his presidency did not result from anti-American feelings. It does not presume that anyone who speaks out against India's right-wing Prime Minister Narendra Modi or Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan hates those leaders' respective nation or faith. There is no reason to treat Israel's top leader differently, though he will declare any criticism to be anti-Semitic – that has been Israeli policy for a long time. I wish German policymakers would pay less attention to their guilt for past crimes, focus on what's happening in the present and let scholarship guide their approach to Israel.



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ELECTIONS

A crucial moment

The national elections in Pakistan, previously postponed multiple times, are now scheduled for February 2024. The prolonged delays have heightened political tensions in a country already grappling with uncertainty since the removal of the Imran Khan Government through a no-confidence motion in early 2022.

By Marva Khan

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) recently declared that the national elections are set for 8 February 2024. Given the signifi-

were changed twice. The electoral commission justified the adjustments by stating that more preparation time was needed, including the reorganisation of the electoral districts to take into account the data from the last census. However, political analysts and activists have consistently warned about the potential threats to the country's political stability due to ongoing delays in the electoral process.

Since the dissolution of the parliament on 9 August 2023, a caretaker government led by Premier Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar has been in charge. Ideally, as the legislature

inces like Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have had such an interim government since January 2023, adding to the ongoing uncertainty. Many fear that an indefinite continuation of the caretaker governments is wanted by the military. Previous governments were heavily criticised for being a constitutional representation of the military establishment.

POLITICAL EVOLUTION

Despite its difficult history, Pakistan has a multi-party political system in which there is no upper limit on the number of parties, provided they are registered with the Election Commission. The period from 2008 to 2018 witnessed the return of a parliamentary form of government with increasing provincial autonomy. During this period, Pakistan saw two smooth transitions of power through democratic elections – a first in the country's 71-year history. It was also a time when significant progress was made in advancing rights-based legislation, with a focus on gender-specific initiatives. In addition, a sense of optimism was inspired in the population, fuelling the belief that Pakistan was taking small steps towards becoming a functioning democracy.

However, the 2018 general elections faced allegations of vote rigging and political interference, raising concerns about the military's role. This election brought Imran Khan to power. Khan's term became a "hybrid regime", expanding the military's influence beyond security and foreign policy to include the economy, media and disaster management.

Khan then fell out with the Pakistani military and was ousted from the office of prime minister in April 2022 following a vote of no confidence. Public discontent with his mismanagement of the economy also contributed to his dismissal.

None of Pakistan's prime ministers have ever served a full five-year term, and only three of the 23 prime ministers, including Khan, have lasted four years. However, Khan's ouster was unique in Pakistan's history as he was the first prime minister to be removed through a constitutional process.

Shehbaz Sharif then took over for a year, leading a regime called Hybrid-2, marked by public outcry over legislation limiting fundamental rights and increased control by the spy agency, the Inter-Servic-



Supporters of former Prime Minister Imran Khan during a rally in May 2023.

cant role elections play in fostering political stability, this decision is anticipated to bring an end to an extended period of uncertainty, despite the nation facing multiple overlapping crises.

The path to this decision was not entirely straightforward. The election dates

nears the end of its five-year term, the constitution mandates the dissolution of the National and Provincial Assemblies and the appointment of a caretaker prime minister, provincial ministers and cabinets. However, the constitutional term of the caretaker government is a maximum of 90 days, but prov-

es Intelligence Agency. Shehbaz Sharif is the younger brother of former three-time Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who returned to Pakistan this year after a four-year self-imposed exile to make a political comeback.

The ongoing economic crisis, one of the worst in Pakistan's history, has seen soaring inflation, reaching the highest rate in South Asia with 36.4% in April 2023. It is primarily driven by escalating food prices. Sharif's government managed to avert a potential default but couldn't significantly improve the economy.

In the meantime, Khan actively campaigned for early elections and remained popular. This popularity poses a challenge to the military as it could translate into a victory in the general elections. According to Khan's Tehreek-e-Insaf party, the Sharif government dissolved parliament shortly before the end of the five-year term to avoid elections that could return Khan to office and installed a caretaker government that postponed elections. Around the same time,



Khan was jailed on corruption charges and expelled from politics.

SECURITY CRISIS

Amid political and economic crises, there has been a general decline in law and order. Acts of violence increased in 2023. According to the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies, August 2023 saw a sharp rise in militant attacks, with 99 incidents, the highest since November 2014. Most of

the violence is primarily related to the increased activities of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), a banned group ideologically linked to the Afghan Taliban.

Authorities in Pakistan have attributed a considerable number of attacks, for example 14 out of this year's 24 suicide bombings, to Afghan nationals, leading to a nationwide deportation operation targeting approximately 1.7 million undocumented Afghan refugees.

As the nation grapples with crises on several fronts, the upcoming 2024 elections emerge as a pivotal moment in Pakistan's history to forge a path towards a stable political future.



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Rally opposing social-protection cuts in Colombo in August.

SOVEREIGN-DEBT CRISIS

“Without debt relief, Sri Lanka’s economy will keep deteriorating”

Both poverty and political repression have been worsening in Sri Lanka since last year’s sovereign default. Here is the assessment of Ahilan Kadirgamar of the University of Jaffna.

Ahilan Kadirgamar interviewed by Hans Dembowski

Sri Lanka’s government defaulted in April 2022. How is economy doing today?

The situation is dire. Sri Lanka’s GDP contracted by 7.8% last year and is contracting this year as well. Some 500,000 formal-sector jobs have been lost. Another 1 million informal jobs were lost in the construction sector. Cost of living has risen by over 70% with the crisis. According to the World Bank, the poverty rate doubled to 25% last year, and the UNDP reckons that multidimensional poverty now affects over half of our people. Multidimensional poverty takes account of things like child mortality, nutrition, school attendance and consumption patterns.

Doesn’t the bailout your government agreed with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) help?

The problem is the austerity our government is imposing to fulfill its conditions. The government has cut social spending, including subsidies for basic goods. The rupee’s exchange rate has plummeted. The dollar went up to 360 rupees rather than 200 before the crisis. Fuel prices tripled. The central bank raised its lending rate from 6 to 16.5%. It is now 11%, but commercial loans reached as high as 30%, so credit-financed investments are not viable anymore. Austerity is exacerbating preexisting economic problems which were caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, a resulting drop in remittances and later, when Russia invaded Ukraine, rising food and energy prices.

What is the political situation?

The government is increasingly repressive. It has passed and is passing bills to curtail civic freedoms. The list includes a new anti-terrorism act, a new online safety bill and a new broadcasting bill. The authorities are restricting public dissent. Local elections were postponed because they were supposedly too costly. Presidential elections are due next year and parliamentary elections

in 2025. Will they take place? We do not know.

Last year, a broad-based protest movement toppled the right-wing populist government of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. Has the democratic momentum been lost?

Well, the protests initially did inspire hope, but the result was weaker, not stronger democracy. According to our constitution, the people elect the president and the parliament. After Gotabaya fled abroad, however, the parliament, in which his followers still dominate, chose Ranil Wickremesinghe as the new president. He is beholden to the Rajapaksa oligarchy. Gotabaya’s brother Mahinda, as you certainly know, is a former president himself. He and other brothers served in Gotabaya’s cabinet.

To a large extent, the debt that is crippling Sri Lanka was piled up by Mahinda. Is corruption the main problem?

Corruption plays a role, but its relevance tends to be overrated. This is Sri Lanka’s 17th IMF programme. The sheer number shows that we were never on a sustainable growth path. IMF policies did not solve Sri Lanka’s problems, they made them worse. Over the decades, our welfare programmes were weakened. Liberalisation led to education and healthcare becoming defunded and increasingly costly for the people. We have free universities in Sri Lanka that are now under threat, and now even our universal healthcare system is under attack. People’s lives are becoming more precarious.

On the other hand, market-orthodox policies encouraged speculative investments, and occasional spurts of growth facilitated new lending from abroad, both to the government and private entities. The pattern is that we may end up in another default when the debt burden eventually becomes too heavy, and then the next IMF bailout leads to yet more market-orthodox policies.

Private-sector creditors are much more important in many sovereign-debt crises around the world today than they were in the past. Moreover, China has issued huge loans too. Multilateral institutions and western governments are not the main players anymore. Western governments want all relevant parties to be involved in the kind of debt restructuring that Sri Lanka obviously needs. Do you see any progress in that regard?

Well, we only have rather vague public information. Our government says it is making progress, both in talks with the Chinese and foreign private-sector financiers. Information regarding China is slightly more precise, so negotiations with the private financiers probably look even less promising. India matters too, however. It has been supporting the Wickremesinghe government

“IMF policies did not solve Sri Lanka’s problems, they made them worse. Over the decades, our welfare programmes were weakened.”

with new investments and clearly wants to limit China’s influence. It would certainly like Indian investors to buy Sri Lankan infrastructure when relevant facilities – such as the port of Colombo, for instance – are privatised. Geopolitical interests matter very much.

Getting China and the private sector to agree to debt restructuring seems to be western governments’ top priority regarding sovereign-debt crises in many countries. China is a very difficult partner. In the case of Zambia, for example, it only agreed to limited debt restructuring and insisted that the government start paying again as soon as the economy improves enough for doing

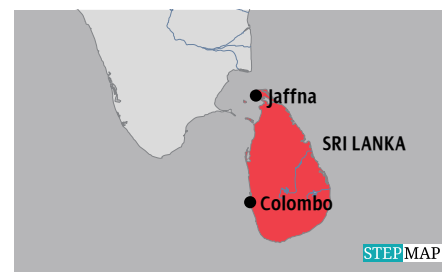
so. Zambia’s outlook thus remains much darker than it would be if the country were allowed to restart with a decisively reduced debt burden.

Well, China is making things difficult for Sri Lanka too. We are yet to hear any public commitment to restructuring Sri Lankan debt. We are a middle-income country, and the G20 Common Framework on Debt Treatment, which China endorses, only applies to low-income countries. Without debt relief, Sri Lanka’s economy will keep deteriorating. In the meantime, IMF demands are accelerating the downward spiral. The Fund wants Sri Lanka to achieve a primary budget surplus next year and increase it to 2.3% in 2025. This agenda is brutal. We had a primary budget deficit of 3.7% last year.

Sovereign default means that a country’s sovereignty is damaged. I always wonder how democratic self-governance is possible in nations that are tied down by an unpayable debt that was incurred by a former government.

An international mechanism for restructuring excessive sovereign debt would help. All countries have legal procedures to ensure that private insolvencies are resolved in ways that limit the economic harm. We need something like that to contain the impacts of government defaults. Such a legal mechanism would clear the slate, creating deliberative space for democratically elected governments. Since there is no such system, whatever government is in place in a heavily indebted country basically must negotiate bailout terms with the IMF. The democratic public is irrelevant. In our case, the IMF terms benefit Sri Lanka’s oligarchs, but hurt disadvantaged people. A wealth tax would make sense, for example. It would only affect the most prosperous families and bolster the national budget. The bailout programme actually foresees such a tax from 2025 on, but consumption taxes, which hurt low-income consumers, were raised immediately. According to the IMF, the wealth tax cannot be introduced faster because it is challenging in administrative terms. Somehow administrative worries do not matter when austerity measures affect masses of poor people.

Germany’s Federal Government has spoken out in favour of an international sovereign-default mechanism. I suppose you would



like it to promote the cause more forcefully. What else would you like it to do?

Well, there are several other things Germany could do. After China, Japan and India, your country is the distant fourth among Sri Lanka’s bilateral creditors. Together with Japan, your government wields considerable influence in the Paris Club of western creditor governments. The same governments dominate the IMF. Your government could question the prevalent market-orthodoxy, which has failed. Moreover, it could use its leverage to make the IMF impose measures that are less severe and more fit for purpose.

Are some measures counterproductive?

Yes, indeed. For example, the current programme absurdly frames that domestic creditors write off some of their debt. Since their bonds are denominated in rupees, that debt hardly matters. Debt denominated in foreign currencies becomes crippling when things spin out of control and the exchange rate deteriorates fast. International private creditors have demanded domestic debt restructuring. The way it has been implemented, moreover, will cause further hardship in the future. Our central bank shied away from imposing write-offs on Sri Lankan banks, because that might easily have triggered bank runs and, ultimately, the collapse of the financial sector. Instead, the central bank cancelled bonds held by the private retirement funds for formally employed people. Pensioners will therefore be worse off long term. Ironically, the central bank is the custodian of the provident funds. To meet IMF demands, it had to disregard its responsibility for safeguarding the pension system.



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GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

Cooperation that benefits developing countries

Low-income countries could benefit if China and western democracies found a way to cooperate in their interest. Experts are debating the impacts on democracy promotion.

By Isah Shafiq

As part of its new Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China has financed and constructed numerous expensive infrastructure projects in low- and middle-income countries in the past decade. This creates additional competition on the “global market for development” and improves the negotiating position of recipient countries, according to Pascal Abb from the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF). Abb explains, however, that western countries are concerned that China’s engagement is undermining democracy promotion. He points out that in contrast to western development policy, Beijing does not require that its partners practice good governance, which would include upholding human-rights and environmental standards.

Is China actively trying to undermine democratic structures in partner countries? Empirical evidence is lacking, argued experts from a variety of disciplines at a PRIF conference in October in Frankfurt. It is true that BRI loans have contributed to the current over-indebtedness problems in developing countries, and China has been hardly willing to restructure. Nevertheless, conference participants rejected the widespread accusation that China set debt traps, saying that there is not enough evidence for that claim, either.

On the other hand, western governments have been criticised for being too quick to toss out their values when geostrategy or realpolitik would seem to require it. Thus, cooperation with autocracies is “depoliticised” when it concerns critical areas like security or energy, says Hannes Warnecke-Berger from the department of international and inter-societal relations at the

University of Kassel. He argues that western governments withhold calls for democracy and human rights to avoid damaging relationships with autocratic countries.

EUROPEAN INCOHERENCE

Richard Youngs from the think tank Carnegie Europe is interested in the discrepancy between rhetoric and action in western policy too. He notes that while leading EU politicians like to talk about the conflict between democracy and autocracy, for years, most European cooperation has been with autocracies, for example in the areas of development aid, energy, climate, security and migration.

Youngs emphasises that nowadays autocracies are less dependent on cooperation with democracies than they were just a few years ago. Correspondingly they respond even more reservedly to calls to democratise. Democracy support is therefore going increasingly to grassroots organisations and, when possible, to democratic groups within authoritarian states. However, Youngs points out that many of these pro-

democracy civil-society organisations do not enjoy much support from local people.

Participants in the PRIF conference also discussed the risk that developing countries could suffer as a result of the systemic struggle between the west and China. According to Sinologist Marina Rudyak from the University of Heidelberg, German politicians are sometimes more interested in “solving our China problem” than in addressing common development tasks. Instead, she believes they must find ways to work together pragmatically in the interest of disadvantaged countries.

Besides, Rudyak argues that China and western states are not seen as systemic competitors in the global south. Each side offers something different, she says. Whereas China tends to focus on hard infrastructure like roads or harbours, the west is attractive especially when it comes to building social infrastructure like hospitals. According to Rudyak, both are equally needed.

LINK

PRIF Annual Conference 2023:
<https://www.prif.org/en/events/annual-conference/annual-conference-2023>



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Inspecting a train of the Mombasa-Nairobi Railway, a Chinese funded flagship project.

Investment in rural communities is urgently needed.

Page 6



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