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## SUDAN

Disastrous civil  
war deserves more  
international attention

## GAZA

Israel must fulfil  
its humanitarian  
duties

## PAKISTAN

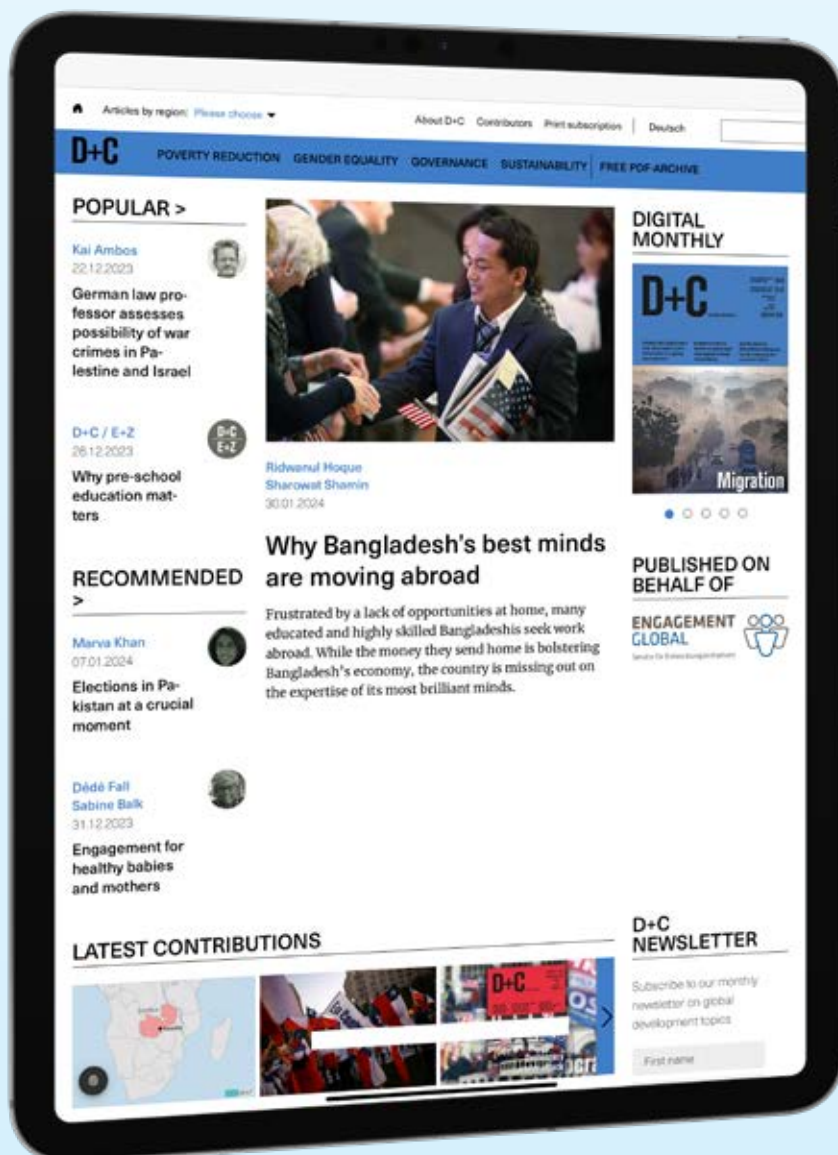
Huge challenges  
after controversial  
elections



# Re-imagining development

On our website you will find comments and background information from our international network of authors on various global development topics.

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### FOCUS

## Re-imagining development

Humankind is not on track towards achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The gaps are growing between countries with high and low incomes. Exploitation made former colonial powers prosperous, and they are still privileged. Conflicts and growing polarisation are making more difficult the kind of global cooperation that we need to safeguard global public goods and achieve global goals.

**Front page photo:** Nobel laureate Amartya Sen has inspired both the Human Development Index and the SDGs.  
**Photo:** picture-alliance/ASSOCIATED PRESS/Gretchen Ertl





Our focus section on re-imagining development starts on page 17. It pertains to the entire agenda of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which emphasise individual opportunity and global sustainability.

## Well-used official development assistance

In countries with high incomes, governments' spending on international development normally does not have a good reputation. Many conservatives and market-orthodox liberals tend to consider it wasteful, ineffective and dysfunctional. Their claims that official development assistance (ODA) really only causes dependency and corruption are misleading.

While corruption and dysfunction mark statehood in many countries that receive ODA, both phenomena are well known in countries with high incomes too. ODA critics also overlook that many developing countries made very good use of aid in the past. The most striking example is perhaps South Korea, which used to receive ample funding, developed dynamically and eventually joined the rich-nation club OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development).

Bangladesh is another example of donor governments' money being used

**“Perhaps the most important thing ODA critics in high-income nations love to ignore is that it is about much more than ‘helping’ poor people charitably.”**

sensibly. Considered a basket case when it became independent in 1971, it now beats India and Pakistan in terms of meeting development targets.

This kind of success is generally read a national triumph, with donor input being forgotten. Failure, by contrast, is attributed to ODA, but even that perception is often distorted. When global trends destabilise an entire world region, there is more at stake than flawed ODA policies. Consider the Sahel region, where global heating is

compounding aridity. Moreover, weapons became abundant after the fall of Libya's Gaddafi dictatorship in 2011 with the result of worsening Islamist violence. No, ODA did not suffice to trigger sustainable development in the region, but high-income countries have failed it in other ways too.

Perhaps the most important thing ODA critics in high-income nations love to ignore is that it is about much more than “helping” poor people charitably. Global public goods like climate mitigation and security matter very much, and a growing share of ODA serves those purposes. ODA is often dual-use money. Support for clean and renewable energy helps to get a grip on the climate crisis but also reduces poverty.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a valid agenda. They emphasise global public goods, but also stress individual opportunity, something conservatives and market fundamentalists normally appreciate. That they disparage aid, nonetheless, is basically a populist ploy. They want to attract voters by suggesting that tax money is being wastefully spent in faraway places.

This kind of rhetoric is irresponsible. The plain truth is that high-income countries must shoulder responsibility for global public goods. Obviously, they control more resources than less fortunate countries. Moreover, their prosperity is rooted in violent exploitation in the colonial era.

OECD members have a long history of unfulfilled promises. Shying away from global challenges will not help them win friends in the increasingly tense competition with China and Russia.

By the way, global statistics show that humankind did make stunning progress in recent decades. The number of people threatened by hunger has dropped below the 1 billion it was in the early 1970s even though the world population more than doubled to 8 billion. The global life expectancy has increased by two decades. ODA did not deliver these positive results on its own, but it did play a role – especially in the many developing countries that used it well.



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Sudanese refugees in Chad's desert.

#### HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCIES

## The forgotten war

**Sudan faces one of the world's most devastating conflicts. However, it is being utterly neglected in the crisis-ridden global political situation. April marks one year since war broke out, leaving more than 14,600 dead and over 10 million displaced. The country urgently needs humanitarian aid.**

By Roli Mahajan

On 15 April 2023, fighting broke out between the Sudanese army (Sudanese Armed Forces – SAF) and a rival paramilitary group, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), for control of the country. One year later, the war continues unabated.

Both warring parties have been targeting civilians. The army has bombed civilian targets and important infrastructure, while the RSF is accused of murder, rape and looting. Moreover, a food emergency is looming. The World Food Programme (WFP) warns that people are already dying of hunger.

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), 10.7 million people were forced to flee their homes by the beginning of the year. Most people are inter-

nally displaced persons. Chad is hosting the largest number of people who have fled the country.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights reports that almost half of the population – 25 million people – is in urgent need of food and medical aid. Around 80% of hospitals have been shut down.

At least 14,600 people had been killed and 26,000 others injured by March, as reported by the UN. Actual figures could be much higher.

### THE ONSET OF WAR

The collapse of order in Sudan in April 2023 has been a long time coming. In a Guardian article, Sudanese journalist Nesrine Malik traced the beginnings back to an uprising by ethnic minorities in Darfur (see box) 20 years ago. The then President Omar al-Bashir did not want to send his valuable army to fight for a region he anyway disregarded and instead chose the Arab militia Janjaweed to put down the rebellion. Gradually, the Janjaweed evolved into the paramilitary RSF.

In 2019, al-Bashir's 30-year dictatorship ended, leading to an uneasy power-sharing agreement between the civilian population and the military. This agreement ended with the declaration of a state of emergency by the leader of the Sudanese army, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, in 2021. Al-Burhan seized power by allying himself with the RSF, whose leader General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as Hemedti, backstabbed al-Bashir and became deputy.

In the following year and a half, however, tensions between the two factions increased. The main points of contention were the integration of the RSF into the regular army and disagreements over plans for a political transition. When RSF members were eventually redeployed throughout the country, the army saw this as a threat, and violence erupted on the streets of Khartoum. From the capital, violence quickly spread across the country.

At the beginning of the war, the RSF quickly gained control over large parts of Khartoum, with the exception of the military bases. They also took control of the cities al-Chartum Bahri and Omdurman as well as the western regions of Kordofan and Darfur. The army controlled most of the east and continued to direct its operations from the strategic centre Port Sudan.

In December, however, the RSF had advanced further east and captured Sudan's second largest city, Wad Madani. In February, after months of setbacks, the army was able to recapture part of Omdurman, marking the first significant territorial gain since the beginning of the conflict. According to Middle East Eye, it has also made breakthroughs in Khartoum.

Several ceasefires have failed. The most recent attempt was a call by the UN Security Council for a ceasefire during Ramadan, which began in March. This appeal was welcomed by the RSF but rejected by the army. Yasser al-Atta, a senior general in the SAF, declared that there would be no ceasefire until the RSF left civilian sites.

### GLOBAL DIMENSIONS

The conflict has global implications. Regional and international powers are interested in Sudan because it connects the Middle East and Africa and is rich in mineral resources.

Russia's mercenary group Wagner supports the RSF. The presence of Wagner

possibly explains Ukraine's involvement in Sudan. According to the Kyiv Post, Ukraine's main English-language newspaper, Ukrainian special forces are supporting the Sudanese army against the Russian Wagner mercenaries.

According to a Bloomberg report, Iran has supplied the Sudanese army with combat drones. Egypt and Saudi Arabia are also supporting the Sudanese army. The United Arab Emirates, on the other hand, which buys most of western Sudan's gold reserves, has supplied weapons to the RSF.

The United States had already been pushing for a civilian transition before the war. Now, together with Saudi Arabia, it has made several unsuccessful attempts to mediate between the warring parties. In December last year, the US formally determined that both parties had committed war crimes and that the RSF and allied militias had also committed crimes against humanity. Among other things, the Arab-led RSF is accused of carrying out an ethnic massacre against the Masalit in West Darfur.

One concern that the UN repeatedly emphasises is that the conflict could spread beyond Sudan's borders and threaten peace in the entire region.

The situation in Sudan is catastrophic, but it is competing for international attention with the wars in Gaza and Ukraine. According to the United Nations, current funding for humanitarian aid is woefully insufficient.

According to the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), 14 million children are in urgent need of life-saving aid. Many of them have no access to medical care, especially those who live in remote areas.

The country is well on the way to developing the world's worst hunger crisis. According to the WFP, almost 18 million people are affected by acute hunger. Moreover, nine out of ten of these people are stranded in areas that are largely inaccessible to humanitarian aid workers. In South Sudan, where 600,000 people have sought refuge, one in five children in the border transit centres is suffering from malnutrition, as the WFP reports.

The refugee camps are struggling to keep up with the pace of the new arrivals. In Adré, a Chadian border town near the state of West Darfur, the number of Sudanese refugees more than doubles the number of locals. With a local population of 68,000 people, Adré currently accommodates 150,000 refugees and barely has enough food and clean water for all of them. Aid organisations point out that more shelters, medicine and basic supplies are urgently needed. The WFP has announced that funding for food aid for Sudanese refugees in Chad could run out next month.

The already nightmarish situation in Sudan threatens to become even more catastrophic, but international attention is lacking.



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## Decades of ethnic violence

Darfur is a conflict-ridden region in Sudan that has been repeatedly ravaged by brutal fighting for two decades. The war in Darfur broke out in 2003 after Darfuri rebel groups revolted against the Arab-dominated government over the marginalisation of their region. What followed has become known as the first genocide of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Between 2003 and 2008, around 300,000 civilians were killed and some 2.7 million displaced.

The genocide against the Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa ethnic groups caused the International Criminal Court (ICC) to prosecute several people for crimes against humanity, rape, forced displacement and torture. Former president Omar al-Bashir is one of them.

Although the violence in Darfur has temporarily decreased in some years, the situation has never been truly peaceful. With the outbreak of another war in the whole of



Darfuri refugees in Chad.

Sudan in April 2023 and new ethnic mass killings (see main text), the situation took another drastic turn.

Many humanitarian organisations left Darfur when the new conflict erupted. Since then, many of their facilities have been looted or destroyed. Some have occasionally re-

turned to provide aid when the security situation allowed it.

The overall situation is devastating: a UN report states that babies are dying in hospitals, children and mothers are suffering from severe malnutrition, and camps of displaced people have been burned down. Refugees have given harrowing accounts of sexual violence against Darfuri women and girls, brutal killings and racially motivated crimes.

The ICC intervened again. In July last year, ICC Prosecutor Karim Khan launched an investigation into alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity in the region following the discovery of mass graves of the Masalit community supposedly killed by the RSF and associated militias. In a statement to the UN Security Council, he reported that more than 555,000 Darfuris had fled to Chad by December last year alone. RM

## AGRICULTURE

# Ghana's green gold

Neem seeds are supplementing the livelihoods of farmers in Ghana. They also benefit the environment by reducing reliance on chemical pesticides and fertilisers.

By Albert Oppong-Ansah

Harvesting and preparing the crop for storage is an arduous task. When this work is drawing to a close, farmers usually take a break.

For Nora Achiligabe, the work continues. Picking, cleaning and packing the seeds of the neem tree for sale will be her main off-season occupation. "I am paid 180 Cedi – almost \$ 15 – for every 50 kilogrammes, because my seeds are always clean. With the income from this project, we can ensure that we have enough to eat and cover the basic needs of our household," she says. "My highest consignment was 459 bags, which amounted to 82,620 Cedi, around \$6700. It is good business."

**"Chemical pesticides cause massive environmental damage, jeopardise biodiversity and harm human health."**

Achiligabe is a mother of four who lives in Sahanayili, a community in the Nanton District of the Northern Region of Ghana. Nearly 60% of rural Ghanaian women are employed as farmers, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

"Trading in neem seeds in the last two and a half years has solved many financial issues in my family. Maize and soy yields from our farm have reduced. This has had an impact on our food security, but the income from this new trade supplements the little we harvest," Achiligabe says. A World

Bank Group Country Climate and Development Report confirms that long periods of drought, flooding and rising temperatures as a result of the climate crisis are affecting yields in Ghana.

Achiligabe is just one of over 581 women in three cooperatives spread throughout the Northern, Upper East and West Regions supplying neem seeds to Ghanaian agribusiness ventures.

## ORGANIC PESTICIDES AND FERTILISERS

Kingsworth Farms in Ghana's capital Accra is one of the companies that uses neem seeds to produce organic pesticides and fertilisers. Their products are in high demand locally and internationally. Neem has an essential active property called azadirachtin, which makes it an organic insecticide, fungicide and miticide.

Research studies on the efficacy of neem show that biopesticides are promising and could be used as part of an integrated pest-management strategy for many crops. Scientists at the University of Ghana proved for example that neem-seed extract is effective for controlling the diamondback moth, which attacks cabbage. It kills other crop pests too, including armyworms, aphids, whiteflies and fungus gnats.

Kingsworth Farms began as a small company three years ago. It has since gone through the regulatory process and received approval from all government authorities to produce and sell the biopesticide.

"We are currently one of the biggest factories in the country, with a production capacity of three tonnes per day. It is our medium-term plan to increase to 18 tonnes and expand marketing outlets to neighbouring countries and abroad to provide decent work, especially for women," says James Quartey, the company's Chief Executive.

To ensure sustainability of supply, the company has cultivated 600 hectares of neem seedlings on degraded land at Dadieso, in the western part of Ghana, and is preparing to replant about 2000 hectares beginning next year, Quartey reports.

## THE COST OF CHEMICAL PESTICIDES

Biopesticides are urgently needed. Copperfield Banini, Deputy Director of the Pest and Disease Control Department of Ghana's Plant Protection and Regulatory Services



Neem leaves can be used to obtain an organic pesticide.



Directorate (PPRSD), fears that the rise in temperature due to global heating will create a favourable atmosphere for pests and diseases. This would encourage the use of more chemical pesticides. They can cause massive environmental damage, jeopardise biodiversity and harm human health.

Civil-society organisations are concerned that a majority of farmers in Ghana are reliant on chemical pesticides. Some of the unauthorised pesticides used in Ghana

contain active ingredients that are classified as very hazardous by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the European Union (EU) due to the damage they cause to soil, water and biodiversity.

Stakeholders are now encouraging the government and the private sector to invest in research into alternative pest-control methods such as biopesticides.

### CLIMATE-SMART TECHNOLOGY

Ken Okwae Fening, the Sub-regional Coordinator of the African Regional Postgraduate Programme in Insect Science at the University of Ghana, thinks neem products are a solution. Pests cannot easily develop resistance to them as they have multiple mechanisms of action.

Furthermore, even though neem products are not free from side effects, they are considered to be less harmful to some beneficial insects than many synthetic agrochemicals.

Fening supports the idea of growing more neem trees, especially on degraded land, to serve as carbon sinks while providing clean air. “It is the seeds and leaves that are used, leaving the tree intact. It is available, accessible and affordable,” says the agricultural entomologist. “Apart from that, collecting neem seeds is an income-generating activity, especially for women.”

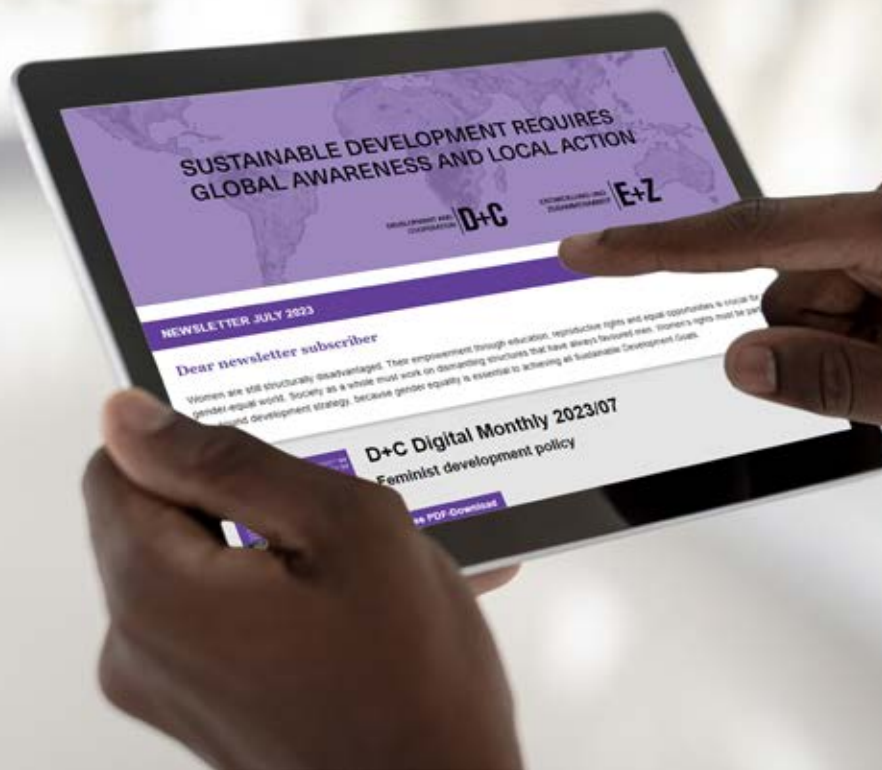
Fening states that the production of agro-inputs from neem seeds is an example of a climate smart technology that will boost crop production, contribute to food safety and serve as an alternative livelihood venture. It will furthermore help to strengthen resilience to the climate crisis at the local level.



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Activists participate in a demonstration for the loss and damage fund at COP28 in Dubai.

#### INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

## Global climate finance: an update after COP28

Several countries announced contributions to different climate funds at the UN climate summit in Dubai last year. However, their commitments are not nearly enough to cover the costs of adaptation, loss and damage. Meanwhile, growing geopolitical tensions continue to divert attention.

By Larissa Basso and Eduardo Viola

Ever since the inauguration of the international climate-change regime, high-income countries have pledged to provide developing countries with funding to tackle global heating. They renewed this promise in 2009 when they committed to jointly mobilise \$100 billion per year by 2020 to this end. At the 2015 climate summit in Paris, they agreed to extend that goal until 2025 and to set a new collective goal of at least \$100 billion per year for the period after that.

In a previous contribution, we assessed to what extent rich countries meet

their obligations (D+C/E+Z Digital Monthly 11/2023, p. 4). We concluded that they largely fail to do so. In this essay, we check what changed after the most recent UN climate summit in December 2023 in Dubai (COP28).

At COP28, new pledges were made to different climate funds that help poorer countries to take action on climate. First, at the opening of COP28, a fund covering loss and damage was formally established. Following suit, several countries announced pledges to the fund. France and Italy made the largest commitment (\$108.9 million each), followed by Germany and the United Arab Emirates (\$100 million each). In total, pledges so far have reached about \$661 million.

UNFCCC members had decided to establish the Loss and Damage Fund at COP27 in Sharm el-Sheikh in 2022. The aim was to compensate vulnerable countries for climate-induced harm which already occurred or no longer can be avoided, and which goes

beyond what people can adapt to. However, despite this decision, negotiations on how the fund would operate continued through 2023. Finally, stakeholders agreed that the fund will be administered by the World Bank, via a board of 26 directors representing both industrialised and developing countries. The fund should receive both public and private contributions.

“Should Donald Trump win the election in November this year, American and international climate policy might suffer tremendously.”

Second, Dubai saw additional funding for the Green Climate Fund (GCF). The GCF was created in 2010 to provide developing countries with funding for both mitigation and adaptation. The fund accepts contributions from UNFCCC countries, public, non-public and alternative sources, including countries not party to the UNFCCC and private foundations. A total of \$9.3 billion were confirmed for the initial resource mobilisation from 2015 to 2018, while \$9.9 billion were confirmed for the first replenishment period from 2019 to 2023.

The second GCF replenishment period is running from 2024 to 2027. Previous to COP28, countries had already pledged to deliver \$9.3 billion during that period. In Dubai, an additional \$3.5 billion were announced. If all contributions are confirmed, the GCF will receive at least \$12.8 billion in the period.

Third, several countries made pledges to the three UNFCCC funds dedicated to adaptation. All funds were established in 2001. Concerning the Adaptation Fund, the countries pledged a total of \$192 million. Germany promised the largest sum (\$65.7 million). The Adaptation Fund is dedicated to providing financial resources for climate adaptation in countries which are not mentioned as advanced countries in UNFCCC Annex I – and especially the most climate-vulnerable ones.

The Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) and the Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF) focus on adaptation in the areas of agriculture, water and nature-based solutions as well as early warning and climate

information systems. In Dubai, pledges to the LDCF totalled \$141.7 million, while those to the SCCF amounted to \$32.5 million. Both funds are operated via the Global Environmental Facility. While the LDCF focuses on the urgent and immediate adaptation needs of least-developed countries, the SCCF supports all developing countries with a special focus on climate adaptation in small island states.

### KEEPING THINGS IN PERSPECTIVE

According to an OECD report, in 2021 the total climate finance provided amounted to \$89.6 billion (OECD 2023). Based on preliminary data, OECD finds it likely that the \$100 billion goal was met in 2022. Without a doubt, the pledges made in Dubai are an important step towards fulfilling the goal in the medium term.

However, the good news should be taken with a grain of salt for at least three reasons. First, \$100 billion per year is only a small fraction of what is needed to fund adaptation and loss and damage in developing countries (see box).

Second, the burden for the \$100 billion/year goal continues to be unevenly distributed. The World Resources Institute (WRI), an independent think tank based in

Washington D.C., assessed how much each developed country should contribute to the goal based on their GNI and population. According to the WRI, only very few countries contribute their fair share, and the pledges made in Dubai did not change that.

Third, some of the most important reasons why developed countries fail to keep their promises have not been successfully addressed in Dubai. For example, not complying with climate-finance pledges remains unsanctionable.

### GROWING GEOPOLITICAL CHALLENGES

Meanwhile, geopolitical conflicts keep diverting attention and resources away from climate financing. Western countries have increased their military budget since Russia's attack on Ukraine. This money cannot be spent on other objectives, including climate action. The Gaza war is a major source of instability too. Hostilities have escalated since Hamas attacked Israel on 7 October 2023, and there is a considerable risk of the war spreading across the Middle East. Animosities between the US and Iran are a sign of concern, as is the strategic competition between the US and China.

The outcome of the US presidential elections is likely to impact climate finance

too. Under Donald Trump as president, the US withdrew from the Paris climate agreement in 2017. President Joe Biden returned his country to the agreement after entering office in 2021. Should Donald Trump win the election in November this year, American and international climate policy might suffer tremendously.

#### LINK

**OECD, 2023: Climate finance provided and mobilised by developed countries in 2013-2021.**

<https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/e20d2bc7-en/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/e20d2bc7-en>



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## Huge gap

During the UN climate summit in Dubai (COP28) in December 2023, high-income countries announced commitments to different climate funds to help developing countries tackle global heating. Additional \$3.5 billion were announced for the Green Climate Fund and a total of about \$1 billion for the new Loss and Damage Fund, the Adaptation Fund, the Least Developed Countries Fund and the Special Climate Change Fund (see main text).

While these are steps in the right direction, they are not nearly enough to meet the

challenges the poorest countries are facing. The UN Environment Programme's (UNEP) Adaptation Gap Report 2023 estimates that the costs of adaptation for developing countries range from \$215 to \$387 billion per year in this decade. These costs are expected to increase substantially by 2050 due to growing climate risks (UNEP 2023).

Taking into account \$21 billion of international public adaptation finance in 2021, UNEP expects the adaptation finance gap for developing countries to be around \$194

to \$366 billion per year. This implies that needs are 10 to 18 times as great as international funding, and at least 50% higher than previously estimated, UNEP points out.



Failure to adapt, however, will lead to more loss and damage, increasing the amount needed in this sector. Optimistic estimates find that at least \$20 billion per year by 2030 and \$100 billion per year by 2050 are needed to cover the costs of loss and damage in developing countries. Other calculations suggest that a considerably larger amount is required.

So even if all the pledges made in Dubai are confirmed, they are far from enough. LB, EV

#### LINK

**UNEP, 2023: Adaptation Gap Report 2023.**

<https://www.unep.org/resources/adaptation-gap-report-2023>



Homeless children have lunch distributed by volunteers in Brasília, Brazil, 2020.

## CHILD POVERTY

## Harsh fate of homeless children

**Homelessness is a considerable problem in Brazil. Very young children are affected too, and their rights are massively violated.**

By **Thuany Rodrigues**

More than 281,000 homeless people lived in Brazil in 2022 according to a study by the Institute of Applied Economic Research (Ipea). The number has increased by 38% since 2019, following the Covid-19 pandemic. While the majority are adult men, young people are affected too. According to official statistics, about 6000 of Brazil's homeless people are under 18 years old and more than 2000 of them are under five years of age. It is estimated that there is a considerable number of unreported cases for both adults and children.

People living on the streets not only have to cope with cold, hunger, violence, poor hygiene and a lack of structure on a daily basis. They also face social stigmatisation. For large parts of Brazil's society, homeless people are invisible.

Young children living on the streets often lack an intact family life. They may have experienced heavy conflicts, breakups or neglect. For example, when single mothers choose to take to the streets with their

small children, they often do so to escape domestic violence, including sexual abuse. Drug abuse plays an important role too. Moreover, a disproportionately high number of homeless people are Black, reflecting Brazil's colonial past and the resulting structural racism.

Poverty is the common denominator that unites the life stories of homeless children. Their families often lack a decent income and access to social security benefits. Others have been displaced by natural disasters. Covid-19 had a massive impact too. When the pandemic hit Brazil's already struggling economy, many people lost their jobs and had troubles paying their rent. A significant number fell through the social safety net. Social organisations saw the number of homeless people skyrocketing, among them families with young children.

Many homeless children live in urban areas. In Brazil's largest city, São Paulo, a census carried out by the City Hall in May 2022 revealed that there are 3700 children and adolescents living on the streets. According to the survey, 73% of them beg for money or work to survive. The majority of them finds an indoor place to sleep at night. However, about 10% have to spend the night on the streets.

Obviously, having to live under such conditions comes with massive violation of these children's rights. This was confirmed by a survey published by the NGO Visão Mundial (in other parts of the world known as World Vision) in 2017. It was carried out with 586 children and adolescents between two and 17 years who were cared for by various organisations.

The study analysed issues like well-being, nutrition, abuse, child labour, early contact with drugs and criminal acts. The

**"Poverty is the common denominator that unites the life stories of homeless children. Their families often lack a decent income and access to social security benefits."**

data showed that more than half of the children between the ages of two and six experienced an extreme violation of their rights. Of the children aged between seven and 11, more than a third stated that they had suffered some kind of violence.

Among other things, the study concluded that the children and young people

- were subject to physical and psychological abuse,
- had easy access to drugs,
- suffered from child labour exploitation and
- were out of school in some cases.

## INEFFECTIVE POLICIES

Nancy Amaral is a social worker and guardianship counsellor working with the Reference Centres for Social Assistance (CRAS), a state-owned service providing basic social protection. According to her, the main factors why children are living on the street in Brazil include poverty, violence, abuse and dysfunctional families, but also ineffective economic policies and a lack of educational support and monitoring by the state.

Amaral points out that very young homeless children suffer from delayed physical and psychological development caused by hunger, exploitation, drug use and high levels of stress, among others. “Due to the psychological, social and educational impacts, these children will have a lifelong trauma,” she says. At the same time, many of them exhibit an astonishing degree of resilience. “Even though they live in a condition of extreme vulnerability, they seem to be able to visualise a future and manage



to build ways of relating to the world,” says Amaral.

In December 2023, the Lula administration launched a national plan to assist the country’s homeless. The programme is designed to allocate about one billion Brazilian real (about \$200 million) to provide food, healthcare and housing, among other things. It also includes campaigns against discriminating homeless people and projects to integrate people into the labour market. Regional and municipal governments

as well as civil-society organisations are to be involved.

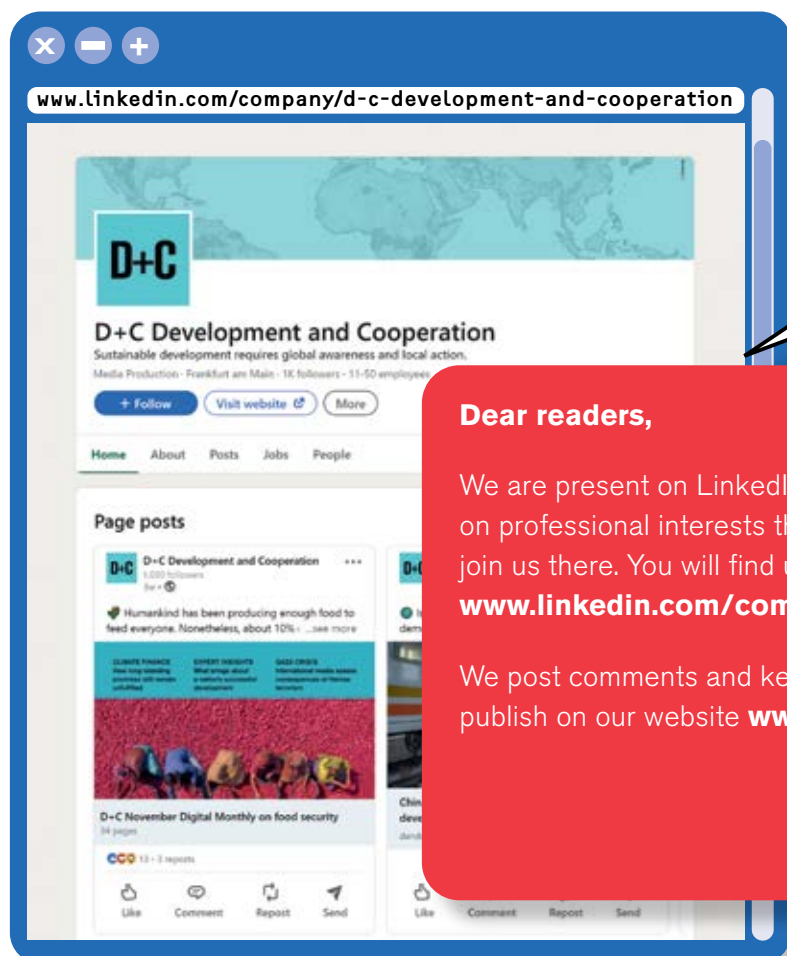
However, critics bemoan that the government’s plans do not properly address the reasons why Brazil’s homeless ended up in such dire circumstances in the first place. To significantly reduce the number of children living on the streets, the Brazilian state needs to step up its preventive efforts, social worker Amaral says. More families need to be included in social security programmes and have access to housing and education.

According to Amaral, the state should also do a better job of collecting reliable data on homeless children, so that more effective actions and policies can follow to ensure that these children receive the care they deserve.



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## Kenya's female mountain climbers

Mountaineering has become popular among Kenyans in the last couple of decades. According to experts, there are surprisingly more female climbers than males. Women mostly climb for leisure whereas most men climb only because they are helpers for the mountaineers.

Kenya has the second highest peak in Africa and has always been a popular mountaineering destination for foreign tourists. Traditionally, most Kenyan climbers used to be men who worked as helpers for foreign tourists.

Stella Kaburu, popularly known as the "mountain goat," has over the last decade earned the respect of the mountaineering community. Although her parents had wanted her to take up nursing, Stella, from a very young age, knew that she wanted to be in the mountains.

"I was born at the foot of Mount Kenya and woke up every morning to look at it. My grandfather was one of the first climbers to do portage for some of the earliest foreign tourists. My uncle followed in his footsteps, and it was he who held my hand when I started climbing and would take me with him to the mountain."

Stella, a Kenya Wildlife Service honorary warden, a certified safari guide, mountaineer and a martial artist now co-directs a tour company, Mara Expeditions, with her husband. "Being a woman

mountaineer has never really been an issue, except the initial fear of being in the wilderness with male strangers. I only had trouble once with a translator who tried to attack me, but I handled him quite well."

She is one of the few female guides, which is the main reason she is sought after. "I understand female problems, and this has come in very handy with female clients. When people hire me as a guide, it is because I am a woman." Stella is also a mentor to the new crop of female climbers and guides. She just finished doing a documentary on the less travelled places in Kenya.

Wandia Maina, a psychologist, on the other hand, never set out to be a mountaineer. "I call myself an accidental mountaineer." She was looking for something to do away from the city, so she joined her mountaineer brother in Ngong Hills. "I was immediately hooked, even though that first climb took the whole day instead of a few hours."

Wandia would spend every Saturday of the next six months going up and down the seven hills of Ngong Hills. Turning mountaineering into a career happened by sheer accident. Her city friends, wondering why she was absent from their parties, asked to join her in her new hobby.

"I ended up organising the climbs. Pretty soon, I became very good at it. Once a month, there would be a climb somewhere, every month, the numbers increased. The biggest group I handled had eighty climbers."

It was all going well, until one time a hiker broke a leg, and she realised she was not trained to lead excursions. "I was lucky though, because three of the hikers were doctors who had their emergency kits." That incident was her turning point. She went for training and is now a qualified mountain guide and a wilderness first responder.

Both Wandia and Stella hope to keep inspiring the next generation of female mountaineers.



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Sustainable development requires global awareness and local action.

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Humanitarian airdrops to Gaza in March.

#### RULES-BASED WORLD ORDER

## Children dying of hunger

**The current humanitarian disaster in Gaza is unprecedented. Under Israeli occupation, masses of people are on the brink of starvation.**

By **Riad Othman**

In the northern Gaza Strip, 15.6% of children under the age of two are now suffering acute malnutrition. The consequences include rapid weight loss, muscle atrophy and significantly weakened immune systems. Death by disease or sheer starvation eventually follows. Some infants have died already.

In the past five months, famine in Gaza has been advancing at an unprecedented pace, according to the Global Nutrition Cluster. The Israeli army claims to be in control of the area affected worst. According to international humanitarian law, Israel must therefore take care of people's basic needs.

On 26 January, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) passed a binding order emphasising this fact. It told Israel to "take all measures within its power to prevent" any acts that could constitute genocide under

the respective convention. Even Aharon Barak, the Israeli judge in the matter, agreed that humanitarian aid must be delivered with "unimpeded access" to Gaza and that Israel must prevent and prosecute the use of genocidal rhetoric.

Nonetheless, what is happening in Gaza now very much resembles to what Defence Minister Yoav Gallant announced in early October. He said Israel would cut Gaza off from electricity, water, food and fuel in a "complete siege". While it is true that the complete siege did not last long, far too few aid trucks have been allowed into the territory.

Before the war, some 500 to 550 trucks per day delivered vital supplies to the Gaza Strip. That number has dropped to approximately 100 per day in February. Indeed, things even became worse after the ICJ order. As soon as the hearings were over, the German government called the case initiated by South Africa "baseless".

US President Joe Biden has stated clearly that Israel must alleviate the situation, but he refuses to draw a red line. Israel

still enjoys unconditional US support. The White House has ordered airdrops of aid supplies to Gaza and plans to deliver aid by sea as well. The German government has declared its support for both.

For several reasons, this approach does not make sense. The people in Gaza need food now, but it will take sixty days to build the provisional pier that Biden has promised. Air lifts are very expensive while they provide very little goods and cannot secure the delivery to those most in need.

For humanitarian agencies, airdrops are only the last resort when supplies must be brought to areas that are totally inaccessible by land, for instance after an earthquake or heavy flooding. The Gaza disaster, by contrast, is unfolding only a few kilometres away from Israel and Egypt where supplies are abundant. Israel has the means to stop this disaster, and the legal obligation to do so.

It is a war crime to weaponise hunger. Collective punishment is a war crime too, and so are the wanton destruction of civilian infrastructure (including universities, schools and hospitals) and the abduction, arbitrary imprisonment and torture of civilians from Gaza.

Of course, Hamas is guilty of war crimes too. They include the murder, torture and abduction of Israeli civilians on 7 October and the random firing of rockets into Israel. War crimes by one side, however, do not allow the other side to perpetrate such crimes too.

Those who supply arms to Israel could put more pressure on the country's government. If Israel's closest allies want the killing, suffering and dying to end, it will. Instead, they are making meagre efforts to provide humanitarian aid, distracting attention from what Israel must urgently do.

If we want a rules-based world order, we must apply existing law. Bending the rules means double standards, erodes the credibility of the multilateral system and undermines universal human rights.



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Angry supporters of Imran Khan in Rawalpindi in mid-February.

#### PAKISTAN'S ELECTIONS

## Results matter, not rhetoric

Political violence has overshadowed Pakistan's elections on 8 February. Some claim, moreover, that there was manipulation and cheating. Nonetheless, a new coalition government has taken office. It faces huge challenges, especially regarding the stabilisation of the economy and better disaster preparedness.

By Marva Khan

The new coalition logically resembles the previous one, which was considered weak. Once more, Shehbaz Sharif is the prime minister. He is the brother of the more charismatic Nawaz Sharif who has served as head of government several times. Their Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) has again forged an alliance with its archrival Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and several smaller parties. The leader of the PPP is Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, the son of Benazir Bhutto, Pakistan's only female prime minister, who was murdered during the 2007 election campaign. Asif Zardari, the co-chairperson of PPP, has been elected as the country's President for the second time.

This awkward alliance had a tough time in the recent campaign. Though pop-

ulist ex-Prime Minister Imran Khan was found guilty of corruption and breaching governmental secrets, he is still quite popular. The Supreme Court decided candidates of his party PTI (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf) could not run under its name because it had failed to conduct internal bolts properly. They therefore ran as independents and won a sizeable number of seats in three of four provincial assemblies.

Immediately after the election, various parties and foreign governments expressed criticism. Khan's PTI organised protests and claimed it had been hurt by cheating. Several participants were arrested and rallies were stopped. Some of those arrested are prominent personalities. The Free and Fair Elections Network, to which several civil-society organisations belong, has also expressed doubts, stating, for example, that results were published too slowly.

The mandate of the new parliament is weak as voter turnout declined by another five percentage points to not quite 47%. One reason is that the government had shut down the internet and mobile-phone networks on election day, so people who rely on digital services like Uber found it more difficult to get to polling stations.

The fragile security situation certainly contributed to low voter turnout as well. Before the election, terrorist attacks had claimed lives in the provinces of Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Some were perpetrated by the terror militia ISIS, which wants to undermine Pakistan's democratic development. More violence followed during the election. An influential policy-maker of the party National Democratic Movement (NDM) suffered serious injuries, for example.

Security is only one of the topics which the new government must urgently tackle. It must also get a grip on inflation and stabilise the economy. Moreover, it must prepare the country for the heavy monsoon rains which will start soon. Disaster preparedness and power supply must improve, as Pakistan is increasingly exposed to unpredictable climate impacts. Especially in major urban areas, air pollution is a huge problem too. The country's infrastructure is poor, not only in the fields of health and education.

In its platform, the PML-N promised better electric-power supply, economic reforms and support for various sectors including IT, agriculture, tourism and electric vehicles. The PPP emphasised education issues and renewable energy. However, there is reason to doubt that the coalition parties can fulfil such expectations. Indeed, the new government has already fallen short in regard to putting women in positions of leadership. Only one woman is among the 21 members of the new cabinet. The provincial cabinets fall short on gender parity too.

Pakistanis have been suffering serious hardship due to the economic crisis and various natural disasters. At a time when devastating flooding is again submerging large parts of Baluchistan, they are tired of hearing nice political rhetoric on the news channels. The government must rise to the huge challenges. Otherwise, it will fail to inspire new trust in democratic institutions. Achieving that is arguably its most important task in view of the deep frustration of masses of citizens.



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## CLIMATE CRISIS

# Looming domino effect

**Zambia's government has declared a national disaster because of the current drought. It results from extreme weather conditions and has far-reaching implications, concerning energy supply and agriculture, for example.**

By Charles Chinanda and Hamlet Mukuwe

The availability of sustainable energy is key for driving development, since electric power is a prerequisite for important economic objectives. Zambia's government has been making efforts to provide access to everyone, but much remains to be done. The national average access rate is only 31%. The figure for urban areas is 67%, but only four percent in rural ones. According to the governmental Zambia Development Agency (ZDA), electricity demand is growing by an annual three percent.

By the end of June last year, Zambia's national electricity capacity stood at slightly above 3800 MW. That was not quite 15% more than 12 months earlier. The increase was due to new power generation facilities.

Hydropower is of crucial relevance in Zambia, accounting for about 83% of generation capacity. However, drought reduces those capacities. At this point, we have eight hours of load-shedding every day. Moreover, the Zambian Electricity Company is forecast to lose revenues worth the equivalent of \$35 million.

Failing electricity supply can start a domino effect in the economy. Many businesses are set to experience significant disruption of their operations. Power outages interrupt production and diminish productivity. Some businesses will have to incur additional costs to sustain operations, for example, when they buy fuel for small-scale generators.

The cost of living is set to increase across the nation moreover, not least because the drought is hurting farms. Food becomes more expensive when less food is produced. The staple crop, maize, is of particular concern. Rising prices strain household budgets, especially for low-income

families. Their food security is at risk and poverty is getting worse.

At the same time, Zambia's debt situation remains difficult in spite of the reforms undertaken by the government. Its compro-



**Grocery shop in Lusaka: small businesses need electric power too.**

mise with creditors means important payments have been postponed and interest rates reduced. That means that immediate debt services have declined by about 40%, creating more fiscal space. That enhanced space is nonetheless still too small in view of the harsh ecological crisis the country is suffering. Whether macroeconomic objectives are attainable is uncertain.

There is a need to prioritise renewable energy investments to diversify the energy portfolio and reduce reliance on large-scale hydropower. Further urgent tasks include strengthening climate resilience and promoting sustainable agriculture.

Over the past decade, climate change and its impacts have gained increasing

global attention. Indeed, the environmental challenge is undermining economies and threatening global stability. Nations must re-evaluate their roles in mitigating the impacts and adapting to them.

Zambia has made efforts to rise to the challenges of climate change. This is evident, for instance, in the adoption of the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and the implementation of the National Adaptation Plan (NAP), as required by the Paris Agreement of 2015. Fiscal bot-

tlenecks, however, are slowing down climate action.

Zambia has not caused the climate crisis. Our nation deserves support for dealing with its impacts.



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First aid course for Kenyan kids: health and education are top priorities.

FOCUS

## Re-imagining development

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## MULTILATERAL AGENDA

# Walk the talk on SDGs

**The Sustainable Development Goals add up to a sensible agenda. To achieve them, the international community needs a coherent policy framework. It must spell out how exactly human development can be promoted without depleting the environment. It must also ensure governments have the funds required for related action.**

By Praveen Jha

When international-development efforts began after World War II, the focus was on per-capita growth. The idea was that, if there was enough domestic resource mobilisation, or donor countries' aid triggered growth somewhere, society as a whole would prosper.

It soon became obvious that the distribution of incomes and wealth matter very much, however. Masses of people in newly independent states lacked basic necessities, and economic growth as such did not make a real difference. Unmet needs included food, safe drinking water, basic education and basic healthcare. Accordingly, development thinkers began to promote the basic needs approach.

Over the decades, the paradigm was further developed. In 1999, Amartya Sen, the economist and Nobel laureate, published a book with the title "Development as Freedom". Its message is that development must empower all people to take their fate into their own hands. In Sen's eyes, social justice matters very much because, even in a prosperous society, poor people are largely denied important opportunities regarding education, employment and healthcare. Technological progress has opened up unprecedented perspectives to individual people, but persons from disadvantaged communities hardly have offers for escaping poverty.

Sen left his mark on development theory. Earlier work of his had inspired the Human Development Index (HDI), which the UNDP (UN Development Programme) launched in 1990. The UNDP has since kept publishing an annual update, while widen-

ing the scope of indicators. The HDI does not only rely on GDP statistics, but also on health and educational statistics. It is the most elaborate measure of development we have, and the methodology has been improved continuously over the years.

In 2000, the UN adopted the Millennium Development Goals, which were clearly inspired by Sen and his associated such as late Mahbub ul Haq. They largely focused on health and education targets.

## PERSISTENT GROWTH FUNDAMENTALISM

Nonetheless, the international community never really abandoned growth fundamentalism. Mainstream economists, stock markets and the business press still celebrate growth as such. Questions of distributional justice are typically considered an afterthought at best. Whoever raises those questions is often accused of wishful, but harm-

ful thinking, which, if acted upon, would only reduce public welfare.

Part of the problem is that private-sector investors expect to thrive most where growth rates are high. Governments around the world want to attract them. The conventional wisdom is that low taxes are good for growth. Government spending is generally assumed to be wasteful.

It bears repetition that this neoliberal ideology is empirically wrong. North America and Western Europe experienced the fastest growth in the decades after World War II when taxes were high, and governments spent generously on hard and soft infrastructure (including healthcare and public education). Social protection-systems improved, and social disparities narrowed.

In recent decades, market orthodoxy has dominated policymaking around the world, nonetheless. The influence of large multinational corporations has grown, and the superrich have been claiming an ever-larger share of all major economies' GDP. This trend is incompatible with human development as conceived by Sen because only the personal freedom of a tiny minority increases – and it does so at the expense of all others.



**Good times for oligarchs: Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg attending prenuptial festivities of Anant Ambani (right), the son of Indian billionaire Mukesh Ambani, in March 2024.**

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of dollar billionaires in India increased by almost two thirds to 166. At the same time, masses of Indians suffered greatly. Indeed, HDI-data turned out worse in many countries.

While oligarchic interests are becoming stronger around the world, the climate crisis is escalating fast, causing serious hardship among masses of poor people in India and elsewhere. Things are likely to become worse in the future. Our species may lose our planet. We must not allow that to happen.

Multilateral institutions are fully aware of the environmental danger. UN conventions have been put in force to get a grip on global heating, the erosion of biodiversity and the expansion of deserts. Other environmental challenges are being discussed in global negotiations too. Moreover, the UN adopted a follow-up agenda to the MDGs which explicitly includes ecological targets whilst re-emphasising human-de-

velopment targets. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) re-iterate many good intentions.

Unfortunately, sensible rhetoric is regularly followed up only by half-hearted action. In doubt, policymakers always prioritise business interests. Governments around the world have a pattern of under-investing in both social justice and environmental protection. This is a route to disaster. National interests cannot be served by depleting the global common good.

The SDGs are a meaningful agenda but cannot be achieved unless the international community creates an appropriate policy framework. It must do two things:

- spell out how governments can achieve better development results without destroying the natural environment and
- ensure funding is available for related action.

Quite obviously, national governments must assume responsibility. However, there are limits to what a sovereign state

can achieve. On the one hand, issues like global heating exceed its national jurisdiction. On the other hand, market-orthodoxy quite radically limits governments' fiscal capacities because it prioritises corporate interests. In particular, low-income countries have precious little scope for independent action.

Humankind needs more and more effective cooperation. The sad truth is that we are unlikely to get it. Cooperation requires consensus or at least compromise. Increasing polarisation, especially between the two superpowers China and USA, is making both more difficult to achieve. Sadly, neither of the two nor their most important allies are setting the kind of example we need (see box).



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## The lack of global leadership

People in Asia, Africa and Latin America are tired of western leaders' double standards. We are told we have a rules-based world order, but when it pleases US President George W. Bush to invade Iraq, he forges an "alliance of the willing" and simply bypasses the UN Security Council. According to the international rules, it is the institution that decides whether military force may be used or not.

We hear again and again that we need good governance. But when a poorly de-regulated financial sector in the US indulges in flimsy real-estate speculation and triggers a global financial crisis, hardly a private-sector manager is held accountable. Things aren't different when German carmakers are found guilty of

cheating systematically regarding fuel emissions.

Because many promises made by high-income countries never materialised, trust has suffered. The OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) is the club of high-income nations. Its members pledged to spend an annual 0.7% of gross national income on official development assistance in the 1970s. Since then, they never even paid half of that share.

When multilateral trade talks do not go the way Europe or North America want, western leaders change their approach and start seeking agreements in bilateral negotiations in which their position is stronger. One reason why the climate crisis has escalated is that policymakers of high-

income countries are better at bemoaning emissions than cutting them. The list of let-downs goes on.

Disappointment in western governments makes China and the loose BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) alliance attractive. It also matters that China has become a crucially important provider of development finance.

Many Beijing-supported projects are meaningful indeed, but they often do more to facilitate commodity exports, which China needs, than to promote inclusive human development (see main story). Other projects serve national leaders' vanity. The biggest problem, however, is that many Chinese-sponsored projects have proved unaffordable. In debt restructuring talks, the People's Republic of China regularly turns out to be a particularly tough creditor.

The BRICS do not share a strong agenda apart from op-

posing the west, as I have argued before on this platform. It is hard to see how the expansion that was decided last year will lead to more coherence. Saudi Arabia and Iran are set to join, but they are regional adversaries, not allies. Ethiopia and Egypt, the two new African members, are involved in a long-standing dispute over Nile water. Argentina was accepted as a new member, but the country's new president immediately declared he will opt out. It is also peculiar that the BRICS aspire to speak for the global south and then choose to include the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, two high-income countries, in their group.

For humankind to rise to huge global challenges, we need better global cooperation. Both the established economic powers and the large emerging markets must act more responsibly.



Svenja Schulze, Germany's federal minister for economic cooperation and development, visiting a boarding school in Burkina Faso in March.

#### DEVELOPMENT POLICY

## Improving everyone's welfare

Germany's federal minister for economic cooperation and development elaborates why international-development policy has become an essential component of international political realism in today's multipolar world. It does not only serve partner countries, but benefits people in Germany as well.

By Svenja Schulze

Huge disparities have long marked human coexistence on Earth. For centuries, there was a clearly visible power imbalance, which apparently split humankind into rich and poor countries, into the powerful and the powerless. There were those who passed orders and those who obeyed them, “the west” and “the rest”.

History was cynical in the sense of one part of the world's development model being based on the other part's exploitation. The impacts are still felt around the world, and they directly shape people's lives.

The dichotomy has deep roots in Europe's colonial history. Inequitable econom-

ic and political structures became deeply entrenched over the centuries. The power imbalance caused economic dependency and led to the dominance of the western narrative. The west as narrator of human history.

It fits long-standing European modernisation theory to distinguish developing countries from industrialised ones, with some societies being considered “traditional” and others “modern”. Only the latter were deemed worth emulating. The dichotomy was Eurocentric, based on the notion that Europe or “the west” was ideal and should thus serve as yardstick of progress.

### WESTERN PROSPERITY IS BASED ON COLONIALISM

Colonialism, however, was obviously not a side effect of history. Rather, it was the base of European prosperity and western wealth. Even today, people in the global south are the first in line when it comes to paying the price for an economic model that

has massively exceeded planetary boundaries for quite some time. The world as we know it is marked by the long-standing power imbalance.

One result is that, where the most precious natural resources can be mined, people work in the worst conditions. It is the legacy of colonial times that, in supply chains, added value increases in later stages on the way from the global south to the global north. Why is this so, and what can we do about it? What can Germany and Europe contribute? And what do we want to contribute? These questions arise not only for policymakers in the field of development, but to western societies in general. Belonging to the global north, we bear a responsibility to understand that the situation is untenable and to support change in ways that improve matters.

Development circles, by the way, have been discussing for several years whether the terms “global north” and “global south” actually make sense. Related questions are: What exactly is a developing country? What is the global north, and which countries belong to it? Are these distinctions really clear?

The full truth is that there are huge differences between countries of the global south. Both Brazil and Laos are in this category, but in many ways Brazil actually resembles Germany more than Laos. Some governments make manipulative use of terms like developing country or global south. China for example has a pattern of sometimes claiming to belong to the categories or denying it does.

The word “to develop” clearly demands that countries change in a predefined direction. It also suggests that there is a hierarchy of developed and not-quite-so-developed countries. The west is generally considered to be paradigmatic.

No doubt, some world regions face particularly great challenges today. What must not be ignored is that those problems are the results of global history. They do not mark world regions per se. The difference between developed and less-developed places is nothing natural. It is the result of human (inter)action. The two perceived opposites depend on each other, and the west has always played a crucial role. Colonial legacies have led to post-colonial continuities, which still mark the international community.

Therefore, it makes sense to reconsider to what extent the categorisation of different countries is useful and to what extent it only introduces a new division of the world, distinguishing “us” from “them”.

## MULTIPOLAR WORLD ORDER

A clear binary hierarchy no longer exists, as we have been living in a multipolar world for quite some time. Today, we have multiple, interacting centres of power. Their policies, interests, goals and values diverge.

Many developing countries have become assertive economic and geopolitical players on the global stage. Many countries of the global south are demanding equal opportunities and equal rights, and they grasp alternatives when they arise. What unites them, however, is often not much more than not belonging to the west.

Because of these changes, international-development policies are changing too. Thinking in terms of “we are helping them” has been outdated for a long time. That is equally true of “supportive interventions at eye level”. Development policy is increasingly about balancing interests. It has become a fundamental component of international political realism and has a bearing on economic and security affairs. The point is to lay the foundations for cooperation and partnership, and not only addressing our traditional partners.

Of course, old ties of friendship matter – for instance between Europe and the USA,

Germany and France, or the EU and NAFTA (North American Free Trade Association). However, there are many other relationships, some of which are ad hoc and others long-term. To some extent, we in the global north are only noticing some of them now, or – even worse – only beginning to take them seriously. South-south cooperation between South Africa and Vietnam or between Brazil and India, for example, is mak-

“Germany’s international-development policy is improving the lives of people in partner countries like Peru, Mauritania and Bangladesh. At the same time, it serves people in Germany.”

ing a difference. Regional organisations like the SADC (Southern African Development Community) or interest groups like the BRICS+ (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and United Arab Emirates) and the V20 (launched as The Vulnerable 20 in 2009 and comprising 58 countries today) are becoming increasingly important counterweights to western multilateral organisations. These links are not one-dimensional. They can serve the interests of all.

I share our Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz’ often expressed conviction: Germany needs strategic partnerships, as is true of all other actors as well. One reason is that we need lithium from Mali or Nigeria to manufacture solar cells in Germany and manage our transition to sustainable energy. We depend on robust supply chains from South Asia so we can keep buying reliable antibiotics in German pharmacies. We need conflict areas to be surrounded by stable countries, because otherwise conflicts would easily spread. Moreover, stable countries can take in refugees. Good examples are Jordan and Mauritania, which are including in their societies refugees from Syria and Mali respectively.

## INVESTING IN DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Germany wants to stay relevant and contribute to shaping the emerging global order. A strong and progressive EU too can make a difference on the global stage, especially at a time when the political future of the USA looks uncertain. As a matter of course, Germany and the EU must invest heavily in development policy, so further cuts are unacceptable. It does not make sense to withdraw into a cocoon, and doing so would be counterproductive for people in Germany.

Germany’s international-development policy is improving the lives of people in partner countries like Peru, Mauritania and Bangladesh. At the same time, it serves people in Germany, not least by contributing considerably to their security and prosperity.

In recent years, some of the greatest challenges people in Germany had to face were the Covid-19 pandemic, floods in the Ahr Valley and Lower Saxony, high energy prices, shortages of antibiotics and diabetes medications in pharmacies, drought in Brandenburg and many small and mid-sized enterprises’ unmet demand of skilled labour.

Development policy that is based on partnerships helps to solve these problems because it tackles root causes. The result is improved welfare for everyone.



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The climate crisis is global – recent flooding in the German state of Hesse.

## GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT

# Empower the people

**Stark inequality marks most so-called developing countries. Large numbers of people are being left behind. One explanation for this trend is the lack of public accountability. While African policymakers excel at second-guessing donor wishes, their nation's true needs are often only an after-thought. Too many projects are thus planned in ways that fit the pre-defined modalities of donor institutions, but do not serve African people's actual needs.**

By **Baba G. Jallow**

In many African countries, living conditions have not substantially improved – or even deteriorated – since the colonial powers left. Even where economic growth and other formal yardsticks look good, everyday life remains extremely difficult for masses of people.

This is so even though governments regularly come up with development plans that contain all manner of goals. They typically focus on human-development issues such as food security, health and education, which prominently figured in the UN agenda of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (see box).

The idea behind African governments' development plans is always to improve the standard of living. It is unlikely, however, that this is what policymakers really intend when they draft such documents. It is not far-fetched to argue that cash-strapped governments use such plans to secure development funds. They know what donor institutions want to read in proposals. The old adage that “beggars can't be choosers” fits quite well. If African people's real needs are considered at all, they typically remain an afterthought.

Many projects indeed do not respond to actual needs. Using a huge Chinese loan, for instance, to build a multi-million-dollar conference centre does little to improve the lives of local people. No matter which bilateral or multilateral institution provides a credit, development funding is often not well spent. The construction of expensive,

state-of-the-art hospitals does not make much sense when it is obvious from the start that there will be too few qualified doctors and nurses, drugs will stay in chronically short supply and neither water nor power supply can be relied on.

Most African policymakers' priority is to get money. They do what they can to gain access to loans and grants. Whether a project can be implemented successfully is of

international economic system works. People neither know on what terms loans and grants are secured, nor do they comprehend that their nation as a whole will ultimately be held responsible for repaying debts.

Because of wide-spread ignorance, institutions of formally democratic governance cannot work properly. Education must improve if government corruption and the mismanagement of public funds are to be curbed in Africa. Formal schools, the media and civil-society campaigns can all contribute to improving economic and political literacy.

Every African country needs a civic culture that empowers people to hold officialdom accountable. Donor institutions



**Gambian students in 2020: unless political literacy improves considerably, African governments will stay able to largely avoid accountability.**

secondary relevance. Politicians know that, once they secure funding, they can squander billions. They can also literally get away with some of that money ending up in their own pockets. At the same time, huge projects systematically increase the debt burden that African nations are shouldering.

## EDUCATION AND PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY

The depressing truth is that African people often have no way of holding their political leaders accountable. The vast majority lack even a basic understanding of how the

would be well-advised to do much more in support of related efforts. As things are, recipient governments tend to focus on lining their pockets.

Donor institutions should back off from the tailor-made, policy-centred development guidelines that are drafted in their capital cities and are motivated both by geopolitical interests and profit motives. The focus must be on the immediate needs of target populations in poor world regions.

While we cannot expect pure altruism from donor countries and multilateral agencies, it is worth pointing out that more strin-

gent monitoring and evaluation would help them achieve their goals.

In past decades, there has been much talk about the participation of target groups in development action. The ownership of developing countries has been emphasized too. Nonetheless, programmes and projects are still largely marked by what foreign experts at donor institutions believe to be appropriate.

There are, of course, well-intentioned policymakers in Africa too. However, the way things are organised, they struggle to make a difference. Too often, formal democracy does not result in true representation of the people. The big challenge is to draft development plans that are fit for purpose and can be implemented in a sustainable manner. An understanding of what is going on at the grassroots level is essential.



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## Misleading dichotomy

From the beginnings of development policy after World War II to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the guiding idea was always that disadvantaged countries should catch up with the richest nations. The SDGs, however, are different, highlighting that high-income countries too must change.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were adopted by the UN in 2000. The agenda focused on issues such as food security, health and education. It included targets for child and maternal health as well as for school enrolment, for example. The targets were not achieved in many places, but the experience showed that they did help to focus policymakers' minds and thus contribute to making some progress. Relevant targets are thus still part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the UN's follow-up agenda.

The MDGs' most important impact was perhaps to spell out clearly that economic growth is not all that matters. For a long time, economic yardsticks such as GNP got all attention. This was particularly after the so-called Washington Consensus became paradigmatic in the 1990s. It suggested

that "underdeveloped" nations could thrive by providing goods and services to the world market if they adopted prudent macroeconomic policies. The idea was that a gradual process of growth would progressively make them more like "developed" western nations.

While the MDGs were less focused on business issues, they were still based on distinguishing developed and underdeveloped countries as though there was something like an ideal state of development, which some countries have attained, and others should follow their example.

As least-developed countries depend on development hand-outs from richer nations, they are forced to adopt those nations' standards. Countries have thus become engaged in an expensive – and largely fruitless – culture of mimicry. Instead of bringing relief to their societies, it sunk them deeper into debt and chronic dependency. We are now at a point where governance by begging is the fearful reality in many African countries. Without a regular infusion of foreign aid, many African governments would collapse within months.

Development debate has changed over the dec-

ades, but this polarity persisted for a long time. International development efforts started in the 1950s. Development theory emerged in the post World War II period, as Gunnar Myrdal, the Swedish economist, noted in the 1970s. Myrdal defined development as "the movement upward of the entire social system," which includes economic, political, educational, health and other facilities designed to improve the human condition. His idea was one of "circular causation," meaning that development in each of these areas affects development in others. One might argue that the MDGs reflected his vision. It is clear, however, that Myrdal's generation of development experts expected linear progress would follow



**German windfarms are climate-friendly, motorways are not.**

once the development process was set in motion.

One of the great pitfalls of all linear ideas of progress, however, is that they ignore contextual realities. What worked in Europe or North America in the distant past is not necessarily a template for what will work in Africa today. Moreover, we face global challenges such as climate change, new diseases and risks to the financial architecture that require global rather than national action. Least developed countries must certainly build capable and responsible statehood, but until they do so, they cannot contribute much to improving global governance. If on the other hand, global risks are not kept in check, recurrent crises are likely to overwhelm poorer countries.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are interesting in this context. They spell out a multilateral vision of eradicating poverty internationally by 2030 as well as maintaining our planet's environmental health in the long run. The premise is that change is necessary in all countries. While poor ones basically still need to achieve MDG targets, the more prosperous ones must do more to ensure that they stop harming the planet and enable the international community to safeguard global public goods. **BJ**



Disease control is a global public good: Covid-19 test in São Paulo in early 2022.

#### GLOBAL AGENDA

## Unmet needs

**Simplistic notions of development have been abandoned, but the international community is still not addressing urgent global challenges adequately. Sadly, the geopolitical context is becoming increasingly difficult.**

By André de Mello e Souza

Though widely used in academic and policy circles as well as by the general public, “development” is difficult to define. It stands for some kind of social progress, but can have several different meanings depending on context, and dominant meanings have changed over time. The term also inevitably contains a normative component.

Development became an issue of international politics as numerous European colonies in Africa and Asia became independent after World War II. Initially, development was conceived in strikingly optimistic, if ethnocentric, terms. “Underdeveloped” countries were expected to “take off” economically, fast abandoning backward traditions and undergoing profound transformations. They were supposed to follow the example set by European and North American countries (and, to a lesser extent,

Japan). Development was to be triggered by high volumes of financial aid, as the USA had spent on reconstruction in Europe and Japan.

In the competition with the Soviet Union, western leaders hoped to export their development model to the so-called “third world”. The Alliance for Progress launched by the US in Latin America sought, for instance, to prevent other countries in the region from following Cuba’s example after the 1959 revolution.

The UN designated the 1960s the first “development decade”. Donor governments’ policies, however, remained driven by geostrategic considerations. Development, moreover, proved a more elusive goal than expected. Aid efforts fell short of the objectives.

Accordingly, Latin American dependency theorists denounced the ethnocentric and self-interested concept endorsed by the west. They pointed out that the international economic system was unjust and biased against late comers.

Latin America’s larger economies adopted policies to produce the industrial goods they needed so they could import

fewer of them. Moreover, they opted for large infrastructure projects, many of which attracted World Bank funding. Displaying high growth rates initially, these countries seemed to be “taking off”.

However, high inflation and sluggish growth (“stagflation”) marked the 1970s, and a debt crisis followed in the 1980s. The promise of Latin American development had clearly not materialised. In spite of some industrialisation, dependency on foreign finance and multinational firms had grown. Social, economic and regional disparities remained huge.

### ASIAN TIGERS

The 1990s witnessed not only the end of the Cold War, but also the economic miracles of the so-called Asian Tigers: South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong. With clever combinations of market-oriented reforms and well-targeted state interventions, they managed to catch up with high-income nations. Large investments in education and systematic improvement of state capacities were important. The Tigers made use of significant volumes of western aid, sustaining economic growth and reducing social and economic inequalities at the same time. Their empirical success clearly did not confirm free-market ideology, but it showed that inclusive, endogenous and enduring development was possible.

At the same time, international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank kept imposing tough conditionalities for the provision of loans to developing countries. These conditionalities were usually associated to a set of free-market policies known as the Washington Consensus and were particularly important when a country was hit by a financial crisis. By the turn of the Millennium, it had become obvious that the ‘structural adjustment’ the Fund and the Bank wanted to see did not bring about the desired results. Debt relief became inevitable.

For these reasons, development began to be re-conceptualised as a process that goes beyond economic dimensions. The World Bank adopted poverty reduction as its main goal. Inspired by Amartya Sen, the Indian economist, the UN Development Programme had earlier begun to focus on “human development” which emphasises education and health as preconditions for



people becoming able to live the lives they desire (see Praveen Jha on p. 18). In both perspectives, social inequality is considered a challenge.

Nonetheless, scepticism with development cooperation persisted. Critics argued that aid efforts had little or no effect. Authors like William Easterly even claimed it was counterproductive, generating dependence relations and being based on misguided premises. Spending on international development remains controversial in high-income countries.

Currently, the axis of economic development is shifting from the North Atlantic to Asia. China presents a model of sustained economic growth and impressive poverty reduction, based on aggressive use of its domestic market, unhindered state interventions in the economy and smart integration into international value chains. The rise of Asian economies has rendered the so-called “global south” a much more heterogeneous category, with some claiming the term itself is no longer useful.

China is now a significant source of development finance but does not adopt the conditionalities imposed by the west. Its loans have been gladly taken up by many southern countries, especially in Africa. After the IMF and World Bank failed to involve big emerging markets as demanded, the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) created their own financial institutions, the New Development Bank – meant to invest in infrastructure in the global south – and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement. The multilateral Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, which China launched with many partner countries, including from Europe, is relevant too.

South-south cooperation has emerged as an alternative to western development aid. It is supposed to abandon the paternalistic, top-down and self-interested nature of the latter. However, there is no widely accepted definition of south-south cooperation. It is striking, moreover, that China is now perhaps the most difficult creditor country when debt-restructuring is needed in debt crises.

As argued above, however, development is about more than economics. Today, gender justice, human rights and environmental preservation are considered to be very important. Moreover, the relevance of “global public goods” is being recognised

too. They include the mitigation of climate change, disease control and international peace and stability. Rather obviously, the high-income nations, which have the most capacities, must do much more on this front.

By their very nature, global public goods can only be safeguarded in international cooperation. Nation states cannot bring them about. For example, the international community has a stake in protecting primary forests, but in forest-rich nations like Brazil, deforestation makes economic sense in the short term. Global cooperation is needed.

Much of this is reflected in the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They include global public goods but also reiterate the need for better education, healthcare and infrastructure in developing and least developed countries. However, the SDGs are not binding.

The recognition that SDGs will not be reached at current trends is growing. Countries dispute who must take up the finance burden of the SDG agenda. Some western experts want the private sector and philanthropy to contribute more, but they fail to explain two things:

- How can profit-driven corporations provide revenue-free public goods?
- And why should super-rich philanthropists understand what the common interest really demands?

In the meantime, new metrics for measuring and assessing development cooperation have been proposed. One is called Global Public Investment (GPI). It would bridge the north-south divide, aiming to create a permanent fund for development. Countries would contribute according to their capacities and receive money according to their need.

Unfortunately, history shows that governments normally prioritise security concerns. The wars in Ukraine, Gaza and elsewhere are ominous. Polarisation between the US-led west on one side and Russia and China on the other is growing. Higher military spending means less resources for sustainable development. Moreover, so-called development money is likely to serve major powers’ geostrategic interests again as was the case during the Cold War.

What we would need instead is global cooperation and decisive action to achieve all SDGs. Peace, by the way, is an important global public good – and it features in SDG16.



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Global versus local interests: forest fire near the Brazilian town of Porto Velho.

## GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT

# Cooperation for future

**If the international community splinters into multiple orders, we will lose the race against climate change, social polarisation and biodiversity loss. Today's policymaking will decide whether constructive cooperation stays possible in a multipolar world.**

By Anna-Katharina Hornidge

Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) was established in 1961. Back then, many partner countries had just become independent while others were fighting for it. Since then, the bipolar order of the 1960s to 1989 has given way to a more complex and dynamic world. Besides the historical powers such as the US, Russia and the EU, leading economies, such as China and India, and regional powers, such as Brazil, Indonesia or South Africa, are shaping economic and political interdependencies.

The possibilities of how future might look like – in economic, social, environmental and cultural terms – are more diverse. It is the interplay and amalgam of many different 'sustainable futures', each a contextualised version of the necessary foundations for human life on earth and within our planetary ecological, social, political and economic boundaries. Together these different imaginaries of future guide actors in their decisions and steps taken towards them.

The democratically organised market economy sees itself in opposition to a multitude of different political regime types. Wars are destabilising world regions. Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine continues. The Gaza war may yet spread across the whole Middle East. Violent strife is destabilising entire societies as in Ethiopia, Yemen or the Sahel region.

At the same time, debt crises in a number of low- and middle-income countries and the climate and biodiversity crisis are leading to a lack of social security. People's ensuing desperation makes them susceptible to authoritarian agitation. The recent collapse of political order in Haiti is ominous.

In this difficult context, it is worth revisiting: What is 'development'? How and by whom can it be brought about? And what institutional landscape does multipolar cooperation require?

## 1. THE MEANING OF 'DEVELOPMENT'

Development understood as sustainable development and thus the promotion and safeguarding of the global common good was defined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the UN 2030 Agenda in 2015. It is centred on every human being's right to self-determination, for example, the emancipatory freedom to act. It is a challenge that is particularly daunting in countries with low per capita incomes, while the obligation to safeguard our planet's health rests especially with those countries that have a track record of endangering it.

Germany's system of international cooperation for sustainable futures is founded on providing support and shaping reciprocal partnerships amongst equals, with equal rights and common but differentiated responsibilities. These are partnerships with countries of all income groups, including the OECD, and neither characterised by an

attitude of helping, nor geared to a logic of 'othering' and boundary drawing. Instead, they are focused on devising and pursuing sustainable futures within our planetary boundaries. Partnerships and collaborations are founded on human rights and, ideally, shared democratic and liberal values.

Development does not follow on automatically from economic growth or fighting poverty. It emerges from processes of building sustainable futures. In other words, development is not possible until absolute poverty has been eradicated and social, political, economic and cultural participation made possible.

And while futures differ depending on context, they are only possible, if human life on earth and within our planetary boundaries is ensured. Development thus must be sustainable. This universal challenge has implications for global cooperation and global governance. Both must be shaped in ways that enhance opportunities at the local level and facilitate sustainability at the global one – in a socially just manner.

## 2. HOW TO BUILD SUSTAINABLE FUTURES

Making these futures sustainable, as set out in the United Nations' 2030 Agenda and the German Sustainable Development Strategy, is a cross-scalar, multi-sectoral mandate that spans internal and external policy fields, civil societies and public and private sector actors. It can only be achieved through close collaboration between the



South Africa is transitioning away from fossil fuels with international support: high-school students with solar panel.



**Civil society matters:** activists demanding action from G20 in Jakarta in 2023.

various ministries and decision-making levels (local, regional, national, global) and the spheres of policymaking, the economy and society.

Policymaking for sustainable development and futures in the 21<sup>st</sup> century thus has to adopt a planetary and collaborative perspective and foster dialogue with local communities on a transregional scale. The aim is to protect the global commons, including, for example,

- social equality and the eradication of poverty,
- peace and political participation,
- healthy ecosystems and a stable climate,
- pluralism and cultural diversity.

Key political levers include: a sustainable structure for the financial markets; robust social security, food and healthcare systems; strengthening education, science, research and innovation development, including institutions for global social cohesion; an international rules-based order; and promoting regional and multilateral cooperation and peace.

Development policy and international cooperation in itself cannot operate all of these levers alone, but instead utilises them and contributes to their effectiveness. Ideally, the focus here lies on transformative structural policymaking for sustainable development with a focus on building the institutional, technological and infrastructural preconditions for mid- to long-term change.

The focus of the international cooperations at hand is typically determined via government negotiations beforehand. Then agencies that specialise in international co-

operation implement measures, accordingly, relying on a broad range of formats and instruments.

Current policy examples include the “Just Energy Transition Partnerships,” which Germany and other donor governments have concluded with South Africa and Indonesia, among others, providing support for “transitioning away from fossil fuels”, as agreed on at the climate negotiations in Dubai 2023. Germany is also involved in finding political solutions to the conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza and the Sahel region. That is obviously most difficult, but nonetheless results in agency mandates for action, for example regarding the provision of humanitarian relief or supporting civil-society organisations – especially where state-based cooperation is becoming increasingly difficult.

### 3. GLOBAL GOVERNANCE AND MULTILATERALISM

Our world is characterised by global crises ranging from the climate and biodiversity crises to debt crises, war, social polarisation and political autocratisation processes in countries of all income groups and on all continents. The international order is shifting.

Today’s policymaking will decide whether constructive cooperation stays possible in a multipolar world. The dangerous alternative is fragmentation, with the international community splintering into multiple, competing orders.

Yet, we only have one planet. Its health determines our future. We therefore need a multilateral system in which difference

can be voiced, compromise sought and consensus built, so the international community will find joint answers to our most pressing global challenges. Germany, the EU and the world are well advised to invest – politically, financially and intellectually – in multilateral institutions, ranging from the UN to the multilateral development banks and from the World Trade Organization to the G20 as platforms of geographically diverse representation.

At the same time, the existing multilateral structures were largely set up after World War II. Reforms are needed to make them fit for today’s purposes. Their governance structures typically do not mirror the reality of our multipolar world. This has to change in order to assure full acceptance of the structures by all, as well as the ability to stand united where global challenges hit. The only alternative, a world fragmented in multiple and competing orders, is a world that loses the race against climate change and biodiversity loss, social polarisation and political autocratisation.

In addition, non-state forms of international cooperation gain further importance in a world where democratic governance systems that ensure freedom of expression and speech are at risk. These include international cooperation between civil-society organisations and science systems. Examples for the later include the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), Belmont Forum and Future Earth or the Think20 group of think tanks.

Development policy and international cooperation is indeed about cooperating in a world in which the forces at hand are divisive rather than uniting. It is about the desperately needed transformational pathways towards many locally contextualised and realised sustainable futures and one common future – united in diversity – for human life on earth.



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Indigenous leaders rally to protect the Amazon rainforest ahead of the Amazon Summit in Belem, Brazil, in 2023.

GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

# “We must have faith in drivers of change at the local level”

International aid efforts are still marked by neocolonial patterns, according to Pirmin Spiegel, who leads the Catholic development agency Misereor. To support sustainable development in recipient countries, he says, donor governments and institutions must consider the perspectives of grassroots communities – and they must also focus more on cooperation than competitiveness.

Pirmin Spiegel interviewed by Jörg Döbereiner

**How do you define development?**

Development is not merely about economic success, gaining power or technological innovation. It must serve the common good, solidarity and justice by assisting four distinct kinds of beneficiaries:

- People who suffer hunger or have been pressed into poverty,
- disadvantaged communities such as indigenous peoples,

- God’s creation, nature and the planet and, finally,
- future generations.

To borrow from South Africa’s Ubuntu philosophy, we can only develop together, not without others or even against others.

To judge by the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), every country is a developing country. Not a single one has achieved all goals. Each one must learn. However, developmental goals may differ from country to country and even from locality to locality.

**How do industrialised countries have to develop?**

They must learn to listen more closely. Global affairs are shifting. Regarding Russia’s war in Ukraine and the war in Gaza, we see governments which belong to major alliances like Mercosur, the African Union or the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation not automatically siding with the so-called west. We

should take their doubts regarding Europe and North America seriously. We must ask whenever we do not understand something. All too often we feel as though we were great universalists even though we are mostly focused on the crises and global issues that directly affect ourselves. If donor governments want to promote governability, they must not only raise defence spending, as they are currently doing, but also invest more in global cooperation. The changes we are witnessing offer opportunities and grasping them can lead to bouts of development.

We must also learn that our European view does not take account of everyone’s welfare. There has never been only one version of history with us at the centre. We must consider the history of the vulnerable of the colonised. They deserve to be heard and understood. Although migration is a much-discussed topic in Germany, many people here still do not know that most displaced people around the world are internally displaced within their home countries.

**The half-time assessment of the 17 SDGs showed that the international community is not on track to achieve them by 2030. Are they really a coherent agenda that can guide government action, or are they more like an unachievable ideal?**

Well, many people in the so-called global south perceived the preceding agenda of

the eight Millennium Development Goals, which were supposed to be achieved by 2015, as a European or northern project, but not as their own. In this sense, the SDGs are better. They do not reflect a given perspective but are more integral and offer guidance as they broaden our horizons. In Misereor's view, the SDG motto of "not leaving anyone behind" is especially important. The poor, the vulnerable and nature itself must be prioritised. Their perspective must be part of the debate, and we can contribute to making them heard.

### **But won't national and regional interests prevail over ambitious global goals in a time of growing geopolitical tensions?**

In 2023, the UN agreed on the High Seas Treaty to protect maritime biodiversity. That showed that multilateral cooperation

**"For the sake of the planet and its people, we must think more in terms of cooperation than competition. Cutting red tape and reducing risks for private-sector companies must not be done at the expense of human rights."**

is still feasible in spite of trendy nationalism. We cannot rise to global challenges without global cooperation. At the same time, industrialised nations have made promises that they didn't keep, not only on aid spending. We must not only speak of solidarity. Our words must be followed up by action. That means we must dare to do more for cooperation, not least in order to stabilise our planet's environment.

### **What is the role of developmental civil-society organisations like Misereor?**

We are responses to an unequal and asymmetric world. We result from the lifestyles of the global north in the past 200 years. The core job of Misereor is to defend aid, criticise aid and make aid redundant. We must defend it where people in need urgently require it. It is their human right. On the other hand, we criticise aid when it causes new dependencies. Finally, we want to make aid superfluous because all people should be ena-

bled to take their fates into their own hands. Our job is to support the vulnerable now, but we want to make the aid system redundant in the long run.

### **How does one prevent new dependencies in countries that receive official development assistance?**

Because our projects must not result from outdated colonial donor attitudes, our cooperation always follows project applications initiated by local partners. We only start measures after partners explicitly express demand for them. Our Protestant sibling, Bread for the World, does so too, by the way. This approach fosters dialogue and leads to good results. Whether the quality of a project is appropriate is determined by both the partners and us. This is not merely about higher standards of living. Ownership matters very much too. The people and groups concerned know they are in charge.

### **Critics also often point out that many development projects are not sustainable. Once funding ends, the progress made tends to be undone. Are there lasting results?**

In my experience, it is important to pay attention to cultural dimensions, rather than to focus only on social, economic and ecological facts. We need to understand what is special about a region and how the people tick at the local level. Otherwise, any attempt to introduce systemic change must fail. While it may deliver short-term benefits, there will not be any sustainable results. We must have faith in local drivers of change and their competence. We can encourage them and support them, but we cannot simply export our models. We see Misereor as a learning organisation. By discussing projects, we get to know our partners and vice versa.

In our head office in Aachen, we have staff from 19 different countries. I was just in a meeting, in which we discussed colonial legacies and decolonisation. Persons from Senegal, Burkina Faso and Bangladesh elaborated how neocolonial thinking has become systemic and is passed on from generation to generation. One example are international trade agreements. They reflect the asymmetric relations of commodity exporters and commodity importers. It would be better if they served the interests and needs of our partners better. Accordingly, Misereor has endorsed the EU's new Corpo-

rate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD). It will make supply chains more transparent and give disadvantaged groups legal tools to fight exploitation.

### **The majority of EU members has recently passed the new law, after long debate and considerable resistance, especially from Germany.**

Our Federal Government's stance was disappointing. We tried to exert influence with the means we have, but the opposing lobby groups proved stronger. Many German businesses actually endorse the new law, but there are also powerful players and political parties who argue it is too bureaucratic and might dent German competitiveness. Such thinking only makes sense in a short-term business perspective. For the sake of the planet and its people, we must think more in terms of cooperation than competition. Cutting red tape and reducing risks for private-sector companies must not be done at the expense of human rights. Otherwise, we will only serve short-term interests, but not get sustainable development. Others would have reason to accuse us of not being true to our values, applying double standards and behaving in a sanctimonious way.

### **Can well-targeted aid serve the interests of both recipient and donor countries?**

Long-term development is important. Representatives of western countries like to argue that we need to act faster than China in certain world regions. Indeed, cooperation has geopolitical relevance. I personally observed that in regard to the Amazon region when it came to passing the EU-Mercosur trade agreement. There are geopolitical concerns, but what matters most is the Amazon itself, the indigenous peoples and the planetary system. Should the rainforest collapse, neither China nor Europe will benefit. We cannot afford to disregard what science and our system of values tell us. The challenge is to assume responsibility for the Earth, for cooperation and for values-based interaction. That is the only way to build a liveable future, and that is what we must do today.



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POST-COLONIAL MISERY

## Whose development?

**“Global development” is a standard term in international affairs. It roughly stands for improving people’s standard of life. Scholars and policymakers in former colonies, however, like to ask the question: “Whose development?” The point is that the former colonial powers are still privileged.**

By Sundus Saleemi

The divergent trajectories of “developed” and “under-developed” economies have historical reasons. Contemporary developed economies, post-colonial scholars argue, accumulated wealth by extracting resources from their colonies, profiting from slavery and forced labour and using military power to monopolise trade. While these processes helped the economies of the colonising nations to develop, they sabotaged the development of their colonies.

Inequality in terms of economic and political power persisted after the colonies gained independence. The former colonial powers continue to be more prosperous and more influential in international affairs. In other words, they may have lost their colonies but did not lose their privileged status.

As the scholars Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson argue in “Why nations fail”, Europeans created extractive institutions in many of the regions they colonised. These institutions maximised the extraction of resources to siphon them off to the imperial powers. These institutions largely remained in place when colonial rule formally ended.

The post-colonial critique of development also questions whether the achievements of contemporary developed nations can really be termed progress. While they have indeed advanced in terms of some metrics of human well-being, this came at the cost of other peoples and the environment.

The climate crisis is an example. It is the biggest challenge humanity faces, and it is the direct result of the rapid industrialisation following the European and North American model. The long-established economic powers are home to only a small share

of the world population, but they account for the bulk of carbon emissions in history.

There is much disagreement on what governments, development agencies and policymakers can do to improve the life quality of a nation. To judge by the trajectories of the high-income members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), an interplay of historical, geographical, institutional and socio-economic factors matters. Many of these countries industrialised early, during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, relying on technological innovations as well as access to natural resources.

The industrial revolution dramatically accelerated economic growth and urbanisation. Favourable geographical conditions at home mattered. They included fertile land for agriculture, navigable waterways for trade as well as access to commodities such as coal, iron and timber. But as post-colonial critics have noted, the expansion of European empires from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century gave them access not only to additional resources, but also to new markets and more labour.

Imperialism was thus the base of industrialisation. It is no coincidence that England’s industrial revolution happened at a time when the sun did not set on the British empire because its territories spanned the entire globe.

Other countries that have achieved high-income growth in the 20<sup>th</sup> century have followed other paths. For example, resource-rich countries in the Middle East generated wealth by developing oil economies. East Asian and South-East Asian countries transformed agriculture and used export opportunities to industrialise fast. Some of them – including China in particular – are building knowledge economies benefiting from innovations, not only in the services sectors.

### SCIENTIFIC PROGRESS AND INSTITUTION BUILDING

Technological innovation was important too. The wealth of European countries and the USA allowed for investment in scientific research at that time, leading to further advancements in industries such as manufacturing, transportation, communication and healthcare. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, industrialised countries had established universities that focused not on basic research, but on technological applications.

Joel Mokyr, a prominent economic historian, argues that intellectual develop-



Political activism matters: trade-union protest in Seoul in 2023.



**The industrial revolution led to new institutions and infrastructure: Liverpool-Manchester railway line in early 19<sup>th</sup> century.**

ments and cultural shifts laid the groundwork for industrial growth. Mokyr suggests that the scientific revolution of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which promoted empirical observation, experimentation and rational inquiry, combined with the diffusion of knowledge, provided the intellectual foundation for technological advancements. Institutions such as universities, scientific societies and academies played a major role in promoting the exchange of ideas and the creation of new knowledge.

Industrialisation in many countries was accompanied by institutional change. Urban planning was introduced, and infrastructure was built – including railways, roads, water pipes and eventually electricity networks. Primary and later secondary school became compulsory. To fund these things, taxes were raised. Social-protection systems evolved. Forms of representative government became more important. Innovations in the financial sector allowed capital to flow efficiently.

What led to the creation of these institutions? In “Power and progress”, Acemoglu and Simon Johnson show that while breakthroughs in technologies led to increasing productivity and more wealth, prosperity was spread where political movements ensured that gains were distributed. Trade-union activism was important for the improvement of working-class lives. The two scholars show, however, that progressive activism was repressed in many places. In the southern USA, for example, slave-owners entrenched brutal inequality. Acemoglu

and Johnson show that institutional change was driven by collective political action.

After World War II experts equated development with economic growth. The idea was that economies grow when they shift from the production of basic agricultural commodities such as food and raw materials towards the production of high-value products. What was neglected was what kind of institutions are needed to deliver the desired results.

The focus on growth has been criticised for various other reasons. For example, gross domestic product is unconvincing as a measure of improvement in the quality of life. It is defined as the total value of all goods and services newly produced in an economy in a certain time, so it does not take into account a range of unpaid goods and services that matter very much. They don’t include food produced in subsistence farming, for example, as well as household-related care services for children and the elderly.

Furthermore, GDP does not count important non-market aspects of a good life either. They include clean air, green spaces, knowledge, interpersonal relationships and freedom from violence. On the other hand, GDP does include tools, weapons and technologies that may have a negative impact on human life.

Moreover, GDP does not capture the distribution of value generated in an economy. Whether a few individuals accumulate most of the benefits or whether it is shared broadly by the people is not assessed at all.

Environmental and social costs of value creation are not taken into account either.

The big question is how to create sustainable and broad-based human welfare in disadvantaged parts of the world. The obvious shortcomings of the growth paradigm led to the reconceptualising of development in a broader sense. Relevant issues include individual freedom, but also environmental sustainability and social equity. Amartya Sen, a Nobel laureate, famously articulated a vision of human development which focuses on expanding opportunities for all individuals to lead lives they value (see Praveen Jha on p. 18). Both the Human Development Index, which combines measures of education, health and income, and the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are strongly influenced by Sen’s ideas.

The trajectories of contemporary developed countries do not provide one single pathway towards development, according to Esther Duflo and Abhijit Banerjee, two more Nobel laureates, but a key lesson can be learned. It is essential to invest in people. In particular, this means providing the infrastructure and institutions to foster their health and education. Quality education and a skilled workforce enhance productivity, innovation and adaptability to technological change. Efficient infrastructure, including transportation networks, energy systems and telecommunications, enables the movement of goods, people and information, enhancing productivity and competitiveness.

As Sen aptly notes: “Development requires the removal of major sources of unfreedom: poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities as well as intolerance or overactivity of repressive states.”

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**Drought in Afghanistan: income opportunities in agriculture are disappearing.**

that can no longer be offset. Germany has pledged \$100 million. It should ensure that a fair share of these resources reach people in crisis areas and encourage other countries to contribute to the fund as well. This is a start, but international efforts cannot cease here. Other initiatives such as the Women and Climate Security Initiative of the UN Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund, which finances local women's organisations in countries threatened by climate change, also deserve further financial support.

In addition, risk analysis must improve. The focus should not only be on economic impacts of climate shocks. Political and social consequences play a role as well. Analysts should investigate, for example, how existing conflict dynamics are changing, and which groups are particularly at risk. Without such knowledge, funding and aid programmes cannot be directed where they are most urgently needed. Instead, they end up where measures are easiest to implement.

One thing is clear: the climate crisis and its impacts will require a great deal of resilience and adaptability. The resilience of communities in particularly affected countries must be strengthened. Many organisations are taking innovative approaches, yet still shy away from conflict regions and fragile states. But these are the contexts in which long-term change is especially necessary. It can only be achieved by working directly with affected communities.

Acting with foresight can help families continue to farm and thereby secure their food base. In Syria, the International Rescue Committee is working with farmers to test which seeds will produce reliable yields even in extreme droughts. In Nigeria, we have supported the creation of a decentralised digital early warning system that predicts flooding. It relies both on local experts and satellite data.

Germany's Federal Government can take a leading role with its new climate foreign policy strategy. Ultimately, success will be measured by whether the resilience of threatened communities is strengthened.



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CLIMATE FOREIGN POLICY

## The climate crisis is exacerbating hardship in conflict areas

**The climate crisis is severely impacting vulnerable groups. In areas dominated by violent conflicts, the situation is particularly grave. At the same time, these regions are receiving minimal support. Sustainable development that includes solutions for climate adaptation is therefore especially necessary.**

By Corina Pfitzner

The German public associates Afghanistan with instability and war. On my trip there in late 2023, however, I witnessed how climate change is exacerbating an already very difficult situation. "Many people moved away this year because of the drought," Abdul Haq, a 30-year-old shepherd in the province of Baghdis, told me. Every day he searches for fodder and water for his sheep. He supports himself, his wife, his six children and his parents from the sale of lambs.

"Before the drought, we cultivated grain and wheat," he says. That source of income is gone.

The climate crisis is worsening poverty and conflict in several countries such as South Sudan, Somalia and Syria. Emergency aid helps in the short term, but people need long-term prospects too. For that reason,

peacekeeping measures can no longer be accompanied merely by humanitarian aid and sustainable development projects. Because of global warming, adaptation and stronger resilience must figure in all projects.

At the end of 2023, Germany's Federal Government published its strategy on climate foreign policy. It rightly identifies the climate crisis as "one of the greatest security risks of the 21<sup>st</sup> century". Unfortunately, the strategy does not offer specific guidance on how to support affected people in crisis areas.

According to the UN Development Programme (UNDP), conflict-affected countries only got a third of what other developing countries received in terms of average per-capita climate finance in 2020. The more fragile a state is, the less climate funding flows into its programmes. Moreover, international climate finance primarily focusses on reducing emissions, so 90% goes to middle-income countries. Low-income countries emit few greenhouse gases but suffer severely from climate impacts.

The new Loss and Damage Fund that was agreed to at the COP28 climate conference in Dubai at the end of 2023 is important. It is intended to compensate low-income countries for climate-related damage



## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

# Disparities are getting worse

**How countries around the world are developing has become increasingly unequal, according to the UNDP. One result is more political polarisation. However, humankind needs more cooperation.**

By Anna Sophie Schmitz

The Human Development Index (HDI) is compiled every year by the UN Development Programme (UNDP). This year, it has hit a record high at the global level, but it is nonetheless below what was forecast before the Covid-19 pandemic. The UN experts bemoan that development has been unequal and fragmented.

The title of this year's Human Development Report is „Breaking the gridlock: Reimagining cooperation in a polarized world“. The document shows that the world has not entirely recovered from the many crises of recent years. 18 of the 35 least-developed countries that saw their national HDIs decline have still not returned to the levels of before 2020. By contrast, each member of the OECD (Organisation for Eco-

nomic Co-operation and Development), to which countries with high and upper-middle incomes belong, now ranges above its pre-pandemic levels.

Diverging development means that disparities between countries are widening. According to the UNDP, the poorest are being left behind. Wars in places like Gaza, Ukraine and Yemen are said to have reversed progress made over many years. To assess a country's human development, the UNDP not only relies on income statistics, but also uses data regarding education and health.

Setbacks in Afghanistan and Ukraine are particularly striking, as the UNDP figures show. Afghanistan's HDI is again where it was 10 years ago, and Ukraine's HDI resembles the one of 2004.

Until 2019, the international community was on course to achieve a very high HDI on average. According to the UNDP, that was in line with achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), but they look increasingly out of reach. Though the global HDI has risen above the pre-pandemic level, the progress made is considerably

below what international trends promised before the coronavirus disruption.

The UNDP report states that the responses to the pandemic were inadequate, that climate action is progressing too slowly and that geopolitical tensions are increasing. It warns that the failure of collective action at the international level is exacerbating polarisation and slowing down human development.

The UNDP authors speak of a “democracy paradox”. They consider it to be an obstacle to international cooperation. Though 90% of the people surveyed internationally are in favour of democracy, more than half of them support governments that are undermining both democracy and multilateralism. This trend is said to be evident in northern as well as southern countries. Around the world, political parties which are attacking the foundations of democracy are becoming more influential. According to the UNDP, this is a short-term response to grievances, but will lead to stagnation and dysfunction long term.

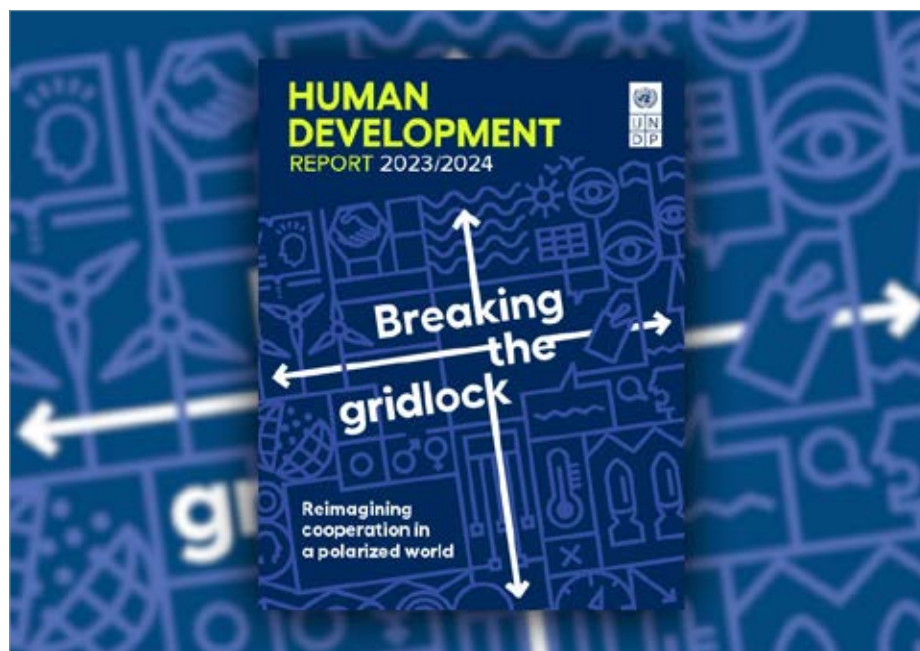
Polarisation thwarts cooperation, the UN experts argue. People increasingly see those they disagree with as enemies. The implication, according to the UNDP, is that people increasingly believe they can only achieve their goals by excluding others in situations that actually require cooperation.

Differences between countries will not disappear, admits Pedro Conceição, the main author, who heads the UNDP's Human Development Report office. He insists, however, that international cooperation must amount to more than financial support for poorer countries. Multilateralism, in his eyes, is indispensable for rising to the challenges of our era, including the provision of global public goods.

The report proposes to reconceptualise multilateral cooperation and to focus on global public goods in the four crucial areas of planetary stability, digital fairness, financial mechanisms and governance reforms. To achieve high levels of human development, the UNDP argues, polarisation and disinformation must be overcome.



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<https://hdr.undp.org/content/human-development-report-2023-24>



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