D+C

Development and Cooperation

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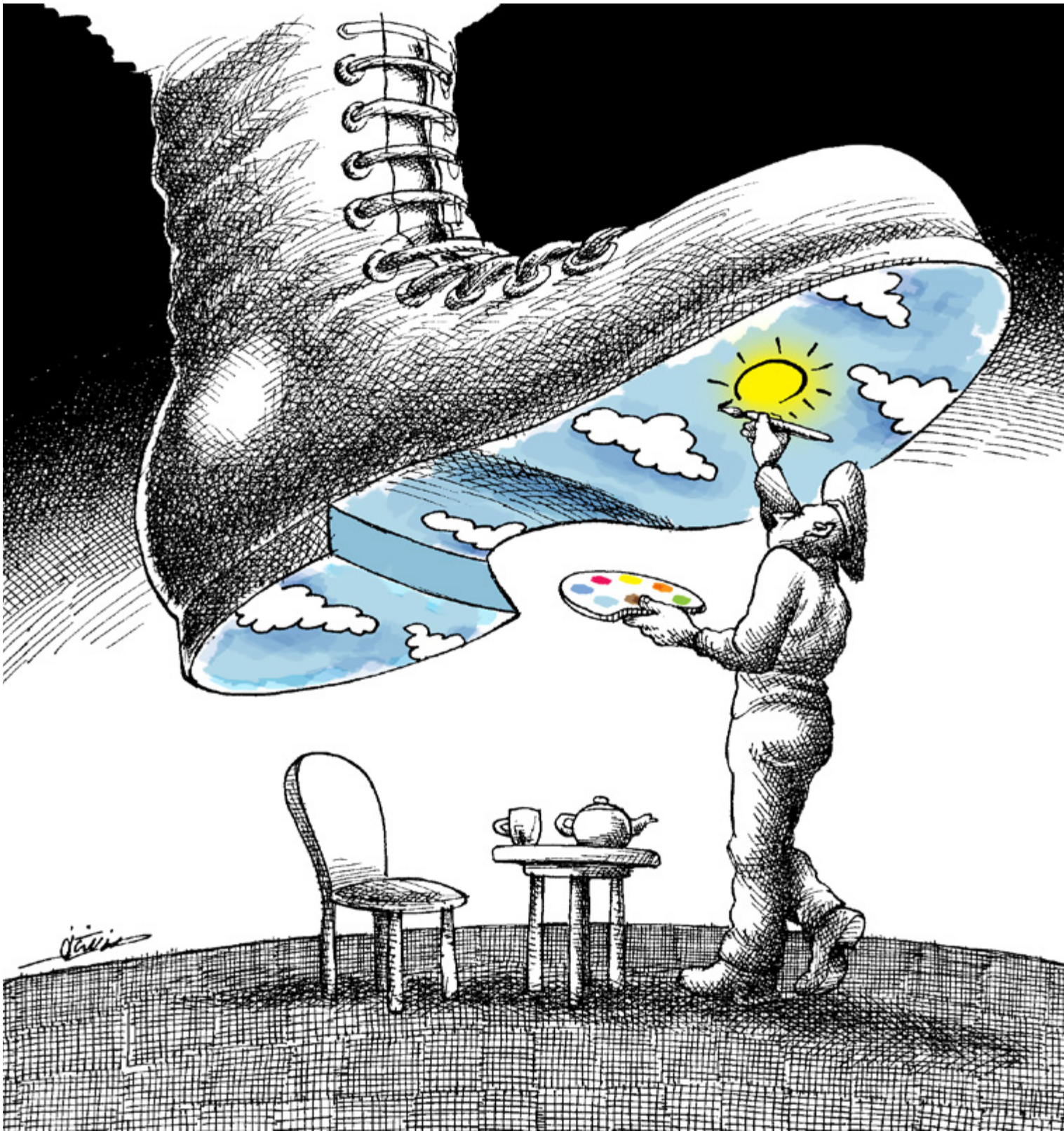
04|2025

The power of humour

Focus: Political satire in times of changing media **Opinion:** Rwanda must be held accountable for war crimes and human-rights violations in the DRC **Around the world:** Female students in Algeria fight against stereotypes



The conflict in the DR Congo continues, p. 5

Photo: dpa / Belga / Timon Ramboer

"Many fast-track services in Africa operate as corrupt systems."

Hafte Gebreselassie Gebrihet, p. 8

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Photo: dpa / Hans Lucas / Jean-Francois FORT

Improving supply chain monitoring can help foster food security in Africa, p. 21.

28 Focus The power of humour

All over the world, satirists courageously stand up for democratic values, often under extremely difficult conditions. Through their art, they create spaces for freedom and challenge authorities. On the other hand, extremists use humour for their political purposes too: They ridicule those who dissent and make fun of democratic values. It is not helpful that political debates are increasingly taking place in digital spaces that lack transparency and fair rules.

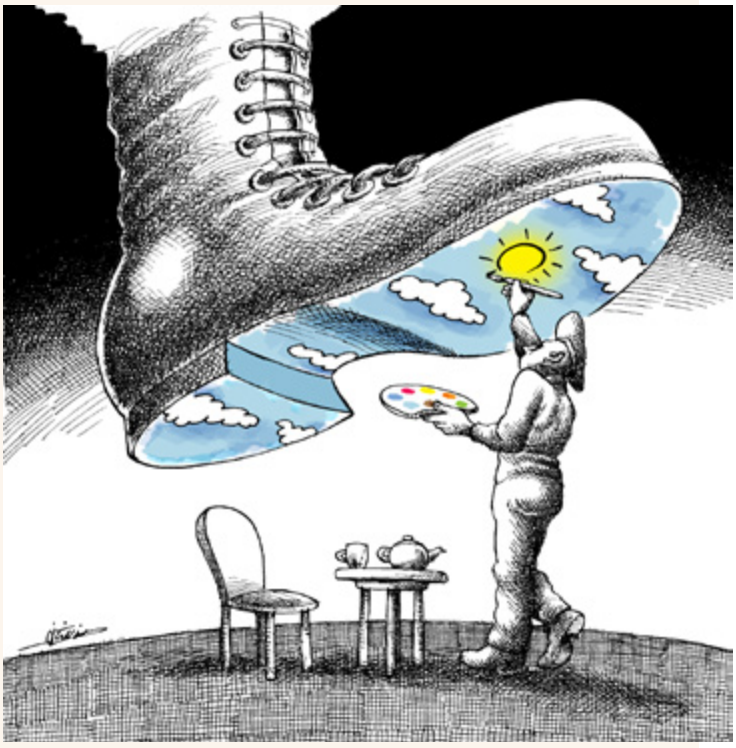


Photo: Mana Neyestani

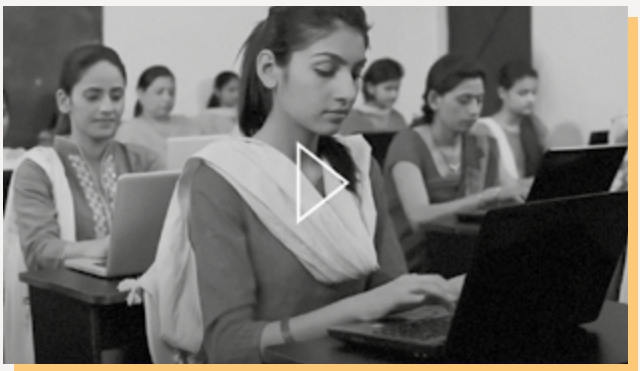
Cover: Drawing by Iranian cartoonist Mana Neyestani (see interview, p. 43).

40%

of the global population live in countries where governments spend more on interest payments than on education or health. The BRICS+ are increasingly presenting themselves as advocates of such countries. Brazilian economist André de Mello e Souza has taken a look at their actual role – and new opportunities – for our focus on development finance.

The good news

A last-minute but successful outcome: **Around 200 countries agreed on a multi-year financing plan and a monitoring mechanism for the protection of nature and biodiversity** at the 16th UN Conference on Biological Diversity (COP16) in Rome at the end of February. Enviromental organisations are satisfied. Four months after the first unsuccessful attempt in Cali, Colombia, this is a glimmer of hope – multilateral cooperation obviously does work productively without the USA.



Why nations fail if they fail women

This video on The Economist's YouTube channel reflects on our February focus topic: **The state of women's rights is a barometer of free societies, and nations that fail here tend to fail in general.** On the other hand, societies that empower women are more likely to do better – for example, higher levels of female political participation are connected to a lower risk of relapse into conflict. Be sure to watch.

How can the private sector promote a country's development? We discussed this topic with the entrepreneurs Helmy Abouleish, Richard Rugendo, economist James Shikwati as well as the former chairman of the European Development Finance Institutions, Bruno Wenn. This quote from Richard Rugendo has been one of the most popular on our Facebook channel recently:

> "A healthy, well-educated population is a prerequisite for boosting productivity and innovation."

RICHARD RUGENDO
entrepreneur and founder of Kevian Kenya Limited

Photo: dpa / Belga / Timon Ramboer

The mineral resources that are the cause of the conflict in the DRC are indispensable for the global economy – as neighbouring Rwanda is well aware.

CONFLICT

Rwanda must be held accountable

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has long been a scene of conflict, with the eastern regions being particularly affected by violence and exploitation. At the centre of the current turmoil is the involvement of neighbouring Rwanda. The regime of Rwandan President Paul Kagame is seizing the DRC's rich natural resources, deliberately creating instability by supporting rebel groups and committing serious human-rights violations.

BY DENISE ZANEZA

The DRC has vast mineral resources, including coltan, gold and other valuable minerals that are essential to the global industry. However, instead of serving as a bedrock for national prosperity, these resources have become a source of strife, largely due to external exploitation.

Numerous reports have highlighted Rwanda's involvement in the illegal extraction and trade of these minerals. A United Nations Group of Experts has documented Rwanda's links to the illegal mineral trade and found that Rwandan-backed rebel groups, in particular the March 23 Movement (M23), have taken control of mining areas in the eastern DRC. These groups smuggle minerals across the border into Rwanda, where they are integrated into international supply chains. This illicit trade not only deprives the DRC of vital revenue, but also fuels the ongoing conflict as armed groups fight for control of resource-rich areas.

Rwanda's official export figures raise further suspicions. Despite rather limited domestic mineral reserves, the country has reported a significant increase in exports of minerals such as coltan. This discrepancy suggests that a significant proportion of these exports originate from the DRC and are laundered through Rwandan channels to disguise their true origin.

Rwanda's support for rebel movements in the eastern DRC is a deliberate strategy aimed at destabilising the region in order to maintain influence over resource-rich areas, facilitating the extraction and smuggling of minerals. By supporting groups such as the M23, Rwanda is creating an ongoing instability that undermines the DRC's ability to establish effective governance and secure its territory. As a result, Rwanda can continue its exploitation with minimal resistance and benefit economically while the DRC is mired in conflict.

The human cost of this conflict has been severe, with the civilian population bearing the brunt of the violence. Groups supported by Rwanda, in particular the M23, are accused of serious human-rights violations, including systematic sexual violence.

STRATEGIC RAPE

Reports from organisations such as Human Rights Watch and UNICEF have documented numerous cases of rape and sexual assault by armed groups in the eastern DRC. In a single week, health facilities reported 572 cases of rape, over 170 of which involved children. These atrocities are used as a weapon of war to terrorise and subjugate the population. The frequency of such acts underscores the brutal tactics used by these groups.

The international community has increasingly recognised Rwanda's involvement in the ongoing crisis in the DRC. During his recent visit to the country, the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), Karim Khan, emphasised that individuals involved in international crimes in the DRC would be held accountable.

In February, the European Parliament adopted a resolution calling on the European Union to freeze direct budgetary support to Rwanda. It also called for the suspension of agreements with Rwanda on the supply of strategic minerals until Rwanda stops interfering in Congolese affairs. In mid-March, the EU finally imposed, among other things, sanctions against Rwandan army commanders, high-ranking members of the M23 and the head of the Rwandan mining authority.

Earlier this month, Germany suspended new development funds for Rwanda. The United Kingdom also suspended its bilateral aid to Rwanda. Canada announced several measures, including the suspension of export licences for controlled goods and technology to Rwanda, the suspension of new business relations between the governments and the re-evaluation of participation in international events hosted by Rwanda.

> "It is time to act decisively to end the exploitation by the Kagame regime and ensure lasting peace in the region."

These developments have a significant economic impact on Rwanda. The country generated considerable income from the export of raw materials. Rwanda's debt to GDP ratio has increased and the aid cuts and economic sanctions will further destabilise the country's economy.

In addition, the DRC has called on international organisations and companies to reconsider their involvement in Rwanda. For example, the Foreign Minister has urged Formula 1 to cancel its plans for a Grand Prix in Rwanda, highlighting the ongoing conflict and Rwanda's role in perpetuating the violence.

Rwanda's involvement in the DRC is a complex interplay of economic interests and strategic manoeuvres, all at the expense of human rights and regional stability. The exploitation of natural resources, the deliberate fuelling of instability and the perpetration of human-rights abuses have maintained the cycle of conflict and suffering in the eastern DRC.

Paul Kagame and his regime must be held accountable for war crimes and human-rights violations through international justice mechanisms. The international community must stand by the DRC in its efforts for peace and by the Rwandan people in their struggle for genuine democracy. It is time to act decisively to end the exploitation by the Kagame regime and ensure lasting peace in the region.

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CONFLICT OVER RESOURCES

No Congo, no phone

For decades, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has been ravaged time and again by war and conflict. The main culprit is its wealth of resources, which hugely benefits technology and the global economy – just not the country itself.

BY KATHARINA WILHELM OTIENO

Photo: dpa / Middle East Images / Mouneb Taim

Without raw materials from the DRC, many of us would not have smartphones.

In February, protesters took to the streets in The Hague to demand an end to the fighting in the eastern DRC. One of the images taken at the demonstration particularly caught my eye – a poster reading "No Congo No phone".

These four words should force everyone who has so far failed to take sufficient notice of the catastrophic humanitarian situation to look again. The ongoing conflict in the region concerns us all. The DRC produces 30 to 40 % of the global supply of coltan, a vital component of every computer and smartphone. Surprisingly, however, it is not the DRC but Rwanda that is currently the largest exporter of coltan.

Rwanda is now widely believed to be supporting the M23 rebel group, which smuggles tonnes of illegally mined coltan across the border. The ore is then officially placed on the global market in Rwanda.

The west long viewed Rwanda as a model African partner. The previous British government wanted to send refugees there, and major European football clubs also recommend "Visit Rwanda" on their jerseys. It has taken a while for the industrialised nations to notice – or perhaps care – that Paul Kagame's regime is engaged in foul play. Meanwhile, sanctions and condemnations are piling up for Rwanda.

DRC VERSUS APPLE

At the same time, the criminal case brought by the DRC against Apple in December is still ongoing. The American tech giant's French and Belgian subsidiaries are accused of taking resources illegally extracted from mines operated by armed groups and smuggling them out of the conflict region into Rwanda. Once there, the resources – and by extension Apple's supply chain – can be deemed "clean". Donald Trump looks set to appoint his daughter's father-in-law as special envoy to the Great Lakes Region, which is testimony to how important this region's treasures are to global markets.

The current escalation of the conflict in the east of the DRC has ethnic dimensions too – groups like the Tutsi-led M23 emerged in part because the Tutsi minority suffers discrimination in the DRC. However, the battle for resources is the primary reason why the region has been plagued by unrest for decades.

The world's insatiable appetite for natural resources creates a system in which rich countries and local elites profit. The Congolese people pay the price.

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GOVERNANCE

Fast-tracking inequality

Around the world, basic services are marketed as premium or fast-track options for an extra charge. Especially in societies with high poverty rates, for example in many countries on the African continent, this model exacerbates the socio-economic divide. It creates a two-tier system in areas where equality should be the standard, such as government services or healthcare. Corruption in the respective authorities or service providers exacerbates the problem.

BY HAFTE GEBRESELASSIE GEBRIHET

Photo: dpa / NurPhoto / Marc Fernandes

Travelers wait with their documents at the airport in Addis Ababa. In many places, fast-track options make it easier to obtain visas, at least for the wealthy.

So-called "premium services" allow those with financial means to bypass long queues for vital needs such as healthcare, education or government services, leaving behind those who cannot afford the additional costs. This creates a system in which wealth, rather than need, determines accessibility.

A prime example are visa or passport procedures, where not only dubious third-party agencies exploit citizens' need for fast processing of their visa applications with high fees for "fast-track options". Government agencies have also started to offer premium services to wealthy citizens. The Ethiopian Immigration and Citizenship Service, for instance, has introduced a special passport process. With this two-tier system, wealthier citizens can apply for a passport in a fast-track process by paying 25,000 Ethiopian Birr (approximately $ 210), while the standard service costs 5000 ETB (approximately $ 42). The standard fee is twelve times the country's minimum wage for the public sector of 420 ETB (approximately $ 3.51) per month.

> "These payment models deepen the socio-economic divide, reflect the nature of current inequalities and foster frustration with public institutions."

In the education sector, some universities offer accelerated processing of applications for an additional fee, which further increases inequalities in access to educational opportunities. Private insurance and hospitals in the healthcare sector are a premium service that has long been accepted by society and leads to faster and better treatment for the wealthy, while others have to accept longer waiting times and less services. This can have serious consequences.

AN ETHICAL DEAD END

The ethical problem of such services goes beyond the inconvenience to the individual and concerns the profit motive of these companies and institutions. By enabling people with financial means to bypass the usual service processes and tying up resources to do so, the facilities generate revenue at the expense of overall quality and efficiency for the general population.

These payment models deepen the socio-economic divide, reflect the nature of current inequalities and foster frustration with public institutions. It perpetuates the impression in some places that these institutions serve the needs of the wealthy and are tailored to them at the expense of everyone else. It is therefore not surprising that trust in government and public services is waning in many African countries.

This is not least because many fast-track services in Africa are not tied to structured fees or an official payment system – rather, they operate as corrupt systems where those cases that play by the rules of secret cash handovers or mobile transactions to the people handling their matter are processed faster.

When service providers prioritise profit over equitable access, they perpetuate a cycle of disadvantage that counteracts initiatives for development and poverty eradication. Marginalised groups often bear the brunt. The model hinders the efforts expressed in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), for example, to reduce inequalities and promote peace, justice and strong institutions.

It is vital that policy makers and civil society challenge these unjust practices and the systems of corruption that enable them. If wealthier citizens want a special service, this should at least not be at the expense of existing services. Service providers must ensure that premium options do not compromise the quality of standard services because capacity or resources are prioritised to the former. This can be achieved by investing in better infrastructure, hiring more staff and streamlining processes to improve efficiency for all, regardless of income.

If such systemic improvements are not possible, institutions should reconsider the legitimacy of offering premium services as a whole. The aim must be to create systems that serve everyone equally and not just those who can afford to pay for a better and faster service.

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USAID

Better health for less money

Much of USAID funding for Africa was channelled into health projects. That is over now. African nations must invest in health – and German development cooperation is needed too.

BY RALPH ACHENBACH

Photo: Amref Health Africa/Amaru Photography

Health Worker during an outdoor community health outreach in central Malawi.

The world of development cooperation has been knocked off course, and health cooperation as we know it is largely in tatters: The US decision under President Trump to discontinue USAID funding and withdraw from the World Health Organization (WHO) is having a massive impact on the African continent's health systems. Around a third of US development aid was pumped into Africa over the last five years, with much of this money being invested in the health sector.

Africa's largest health NGO Amref Health Africa is also reeling from the abrupt cuts. Amref trains specialist personnel and makes basic medical care available to almost 20 million Africans each year. A fifth of its entire budget for the current year has suddenly evaporated and 15 vital health projects have had their funding terminated overnight. 5000 young people in Ethiopia have lost their training and employment promotion programmes, 20,000 pregnant women in Malawi are at risk of passing HIV on to their children and 500,000

tuberculosis screenings now won't be carried out in Tanzania, which will facilitate the spread of this disease. The funding freeze is directly jeopardising human lives.

A WAKE-UP CALL

Many are calling the US withdrawal a wake-up call, one that raises a number of fundamental questions: Was this funding system ever sustainable if it is so dependent on decisions taken in far-away Washington? And what is going to happen next? Other donor countries are hardly going to step into the breach, that's for sure. The Netherlands and the UK have already announced sweeping cuts to their development cooperation budgets, and the course that Germany's future government will take is not certain either.

In early March 2025, leading representatives of Africa's health sector gathered in the Rwandan capital Kigali to attend the Africa Health Agenda International Conference (AHAIC) hosted by Amref, the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention and the WHO African Region. Delegates saw the current situation as an opportunity to initiate some important changes. This is what they believe needs to be done now:

1. Responsibility: African governments must take responsibility by stepping up their health expenditure and viewing this as an investment in their future. They must improve production and supply-chain capacities and fund research. This will require public-private partnerships. After all, even if all the signatories implemented the Abuja Declaration and spent 15 % of their national budgets on health – which currently only two African countries are managing to do – this would not be enough. The countries of sub-Saharan Africa have a combined gross domestic product of around $ 2 trillion. With an average tax rate of 15 % and a population of about 1.2 billion people, this translates into a per-capita health expenditure of below $ 40. The equivalent figure in countries like Germany is around $ 4000.

2. Solidarity: African governments need to reform their taxation systems to generate more money for healthcare. This alone will not be sufficient, however: According to the latest UNDP report, interest payments exceed 10 % of total revenue in 56 developing countries worldwide. Currently, around half of Africa's countries spend more on debt servicing than on health. Debt relief seems to be the only possible solution, especially for countries with low economic output. Where international support is still required in the meantime, such funding must no longer be handled by organisations in the global north but must go directly to African civil-society organisations that can define priorities on the ground. This would also avoid colonial continuities.

Photo: Amref Health Africa / Genaye Eshetu

A temporary community health unit set up by Amref in Chifra in northern Ethiopia.

3. Systemic change: More money for health is not enough per se – it also has to be deployed efficiently. Rather than concentrating solely on funding expensive acute care, what is needed above all is a prevention concept based on a robust system of primary care. Focusing on infectious diseases is no longer appropriate either: Non-communicable diseases such as high blood pressure and diabetes are on the rise in Africa and already account for half of hospitalisations and over a third of deaths in sub-Saharan Africa. Factors such as education, income levels and extreme weather events likewise affect health. Responsibility lies not only with health ministries, in other words – measures to address climate change also have a beneficial impact on health, for instance.

Implementing these changes will not be easy and will take time. Time that many people in Africa don't have. Everyone involved has a huge responsibility to tackle the necessary reforms with resolve and determination. It's not merely for reasons of humanity and solidarity that Germany and its future government must also step up – it's a global necessity: Risks have to be dealt with at the local level to achieve global health security, and this requires resilient health systems. Germany needs to support African healthcare actors in this reform process – including financially.

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

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WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Harmful impacts of stereotypes about Algerian female students

In Algeria's conservative society, clichés persist that portray female students as sexually available and unmarriageable. The consequences for young, aspiring women are devastating.

BY KHADIDJA KELALECH

Come, everyone! Listen to what's happening with "Houari," the ambulance driver! His (Houari's) ambulance is always parked outside the female university halls, ready to transport the "girls" from campus to the cabaret!" These lyrics from a popular song on Youtube echo a stereotype about Algerian female students that has persisted since a sensationalised report aired on Algerian television in 2013. The report, provocatively titled "When seekers of knowledge turn into prostitutes" (translated from Arabic), accused female students in university housing of feigning illness to sneak out at night. In this narrative, an ambulance driver named "Houari" would secretly transport them after curfew – not to a hospital, but to a cabaret to meet intimate partners.

In conservative Algerian society, such behaviour is seen as a severe moral breach, and the report's claims quickly fuelled a damaging stereotype. Online platforms like Facebook then hosted additional defamatory content, while more songs on Youtube vilified female students. The then-Minister of Higher Education, Mohamed Mebarki, publicly condemned the report, denouncing its claims as baseless and asserting that it unfairly maligned Algerian female students. He also pledged legal action against the channel responsible for the broadcast.

This incident highlights entrenched patriarchal norms in Algeria, where public spaces are seen as male and private spaces as female. Social media has since become a battleground where these stereotypes are continuously generated and amplified, impacting students' self-image, security and educational experiences. I interviewed thirteen Algerian female university students to understand their perspectives on how these stereotypes affect their safe access to higher education.

> "The path to educational equity in Algeria will require concerted efforts from individual Algerian women, feminist activists, scholars and policymakers."

STEREOTYPES ABOUT ALGERIAN FEMALE STUDENTS

My interview partners, who speak anonymously in this text, frequently encounter three main stereotypes on social media, which portray them as morally suspect, unmarriageable and opportunistic.

1. Sexual availability: Many believe that young women in university accommodations are "sexually available", a stereotype rooted in the notion that they sneak out to meet inintimate partners. Maria, one of my interviewees, explained

Photo: dpa / AA / Mousaab Rouibi

Students at the University of Algiers.

that this perception poses a real threat to female students' safety, as men sometimes loiter near dormitories, harassing female students and compromising their sense of security in spaces meant for learning and growth. Another interviewee, Sunflower, noted that gender-based harassment is often normalised in Algeria, where public spaces are largely regarded as male domains. This perception, according to Sunflower, makes it increasingly difficult for women to access their educational institutions safely.

2. Unmarriageability: Social-media comments often suggest that women in student housing lack the domestic skills or "honour" expected of a prospective wife. Interviewees shared stories of potential suitors discouraged by family members from pursuing relationships with female students solely because they study or reside away from family oversight, reinforcing the stereotype that female students are unsuitable for marriage. This narrative imposes a false choice: Women must decide between education and marriage, limiting their right to pursue both.

3. Instrumentalisation for success: Female students are also accused of using their perceived "sexual availability" to gain academic or career advantages, implying that their success is unearned and undermining their hard work.

EDUCATION AS A PATHWAY TO PERSONAL AND SOCIETAL GROWTH

The impact of these stereotypes extends beyond university life, affecting women's wellbeing by making them feel devalued and frustrated. Aya, one of my interviewees, described how these stereotypes diminish the value of women's contributions, often leading to feelings of anger and hopelessness in the face of societal disrespect.

The women I interviewed see education as more than academic success: it represents a path to financial independence, informed choices and active engagement in social and professional life. Financial independence, which my interviewees view as a result of gainful employment after education, empowers them to break away from male control in a society that maintains the male-provider/female-nurturer paradigm. Tulip, another interviewee, called education a "weapon" against patriarchy, highlighting how financial independence brings security and choices, allowing them to navigate life on their own terms and resist limitations imposed by traditional gender roles.

The path to educational equity in Algeria will require concerted efforts from individual Algerian women, feminist activists, scholars and policymakers. Feminist activists, in particular, must recognise the urgency of this issue and ask: Where is the Algerian feminist movement that once stood against French colonialism, the restrictive 1984 Family Code and the civil war in the 1990s (see box)? Why is it not now confronting a phenomenon that threatens women's education, touted globally as the world's best investment?

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ALGERIAN FEMINIST MOVEMENT

Progress and setbacks

The women's movement in Algeria has made significant progress, yet there is still much work to be done to attain true gender equality. Women in leadership roles continue to face substantial challenges.

Photo: dpa / Farouk Batiche

Algerian anti-government protest held on the occasion of the International Women's Day 2021.

BY KHADIDJA KELALECH

While it is widely acknowledged in Algeria and globally that women's education is a powerful tool for empowerment, harmful stereotypes persist both online and offline (see main text). They undermine the achievements of the Algerian feminist movement, which dates back to the 1940s. During the country's struggle against French colonial rule, Algerian women played a vital role in the National War of Liberation, enduring targeted colonial violence. Following independence in 1962, the Algerian government recognised women's contributions to the liberation struggle in the 1976 Constitution.

However, the introduction of the 1984 Family Code, which reinforced traditional norms and established male authority over women, spurred a new wave of feminist mobilisation. Organisations such as the Association for Equality of Rights between Women and Men, founded in 1985, emerged to demand civil laws ensuring gender equality, laying the foundation for a resilient movement that persisted through the political instability of the 1990s civil war.

From the early 2000s onwards, sustained feminist advocacy led to significant legal reforms. Key milestones included amendments to the Family Code in 2005 and 2015, which introduced stricter penalties for domestic violence and street harassment, marking notable victories for Algerian women. Complementing these legal advancements, the government launched the Joint Programme for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Algeria in 2010, aiming to boost female participation in leadership roles and the economic sector. These efforts contributed to substantial progress: By 2012, women held 31.6% of parliamentary seats, the highest representation in the Arab world at that time (Tripp 2019).

Nevertheless, despite this progress, gender equality in the workforce remains elusive, and women in leadership often face significant social backlash. A recent and widely discussed example is the case of Zahia Benkara. In 2017, she was one of only four women elected as Mayors in Algeria. While her achievement was celebrated both nationally and internationally, she faced intense local opposition. This backlash included misogynistic and offensive comments on social media, where online critics mocked her appearance and compared her to a man. This incident underscores the ongoing challenges Algerian women face in their pursuit of equality, reflecting the complex and fluctuating history of their struggle against entrenched patriarchal norms.

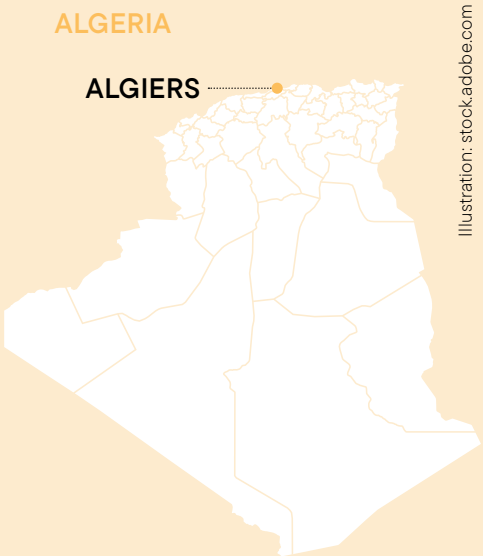

Illustration: stock.adobe.com

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GLOBAL TRENDS

Inequality regarding happiness is deepening

Divergences in regard to life satisfaction have recently increased in all age groups but tend to be greater among older age groups. According to the World Happiness Report 2024, holistic, people-centred policies are conducive to a nation's sense of cheerfulness.

BY KHUSHBOO SRIVASTAVA

The pursuit of happiness is a constant endeavour, but what happiness means exactly varies. It depends on a person's stage of life, socio-economic status and demographic position.

The World Happiness Report 2024 (WHR) sheds light on related issues. The report is an annual exercise that involves Gallup, the Oxford Wellbeing Research Centre and the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network as well as different scholars who are the publication's co-authors. The first one was published in 2012.

This year's WHR analyses links between life satisfaction and age, takes into account regional dynamics and socio-political factors. It also presents a global ranking of countries and assesses global trends.

Scandinavian nations maintain their top rankings. Generally speaking, happy nations are marked by holistic, people-centred policies. They provide strong social protection, low corruption, economic stability, work-life balance and a focus on citizen well-being, creating environments where individuals can flourish. Since the years 2006 to 2010, Central and Eastern Europe have shown the largest happiness improvements, while South Asia and the Middle East have seen declines. North America has experienced a notable drop in youth happiness. Afghanistan ranks in the last place.

> "Whether people have political freedom and the financial opportunities to make choices matters very much."

The scholars use six key factors to model national happiness: GDP per capita, healthy life expectancy, the level of social support individuals enjoy, freedom to make life choices, generosity of a persons' social environment and freedom from corruption. Globally, social protection is strongest in the high-income countries of Western Europe, Australia and New Zealand. It is lowest in South Asia.

Income and health have obvious impacts on happiness. However, they do not fully explain emotions. Social variables are very important, according to the WHR. Whether people have political freedom and the financial opportunities to make choices matters very much. Accordingly, social environments with strong support and low corruption further enhance happiness.

GROWING GAPS

The WHR notes that what they call "happiness inequality" has grown in the past 12 years, only remaining steady in Western Europe. Divergences in regard to life satisfaction have increased in all age groups, but tend to be greater among older age groups. They are particularly evident where other social disparities are pronounced too. As the gaps between privileged and disadvantaged people have grown in Latin America, Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, so did happiness inequality. Western Europe has lowest disparities across all age groups. Generally speaking, greater happiness equality is associated with higher overall well-being, highlighting the importance of income, education and social protection.

A core topic of the WHR is how happiness changes with age. In particular, it considers the situation of two vulnerable social groups. One is children and adolescents, the other is the elderly. In high-income nations, life satisfaction among adolescents has been declining in recent years, and girls were affected in particular. Covid-19 exacerbated the downward trend.

Internationally, youth aged 15 to 24 nonetheless generally report higher life satisfaction than older adults. This gap is narrowing in Western Europe and even reversing in North America, Australia and New Zealand.

The report acknowledges that many societies are aging. By 2050, the global population of individuals aged 65 and older is set to double. One implication is that there will be a significant rise in dementia cases worldwide. This disability is a good example of how social settings matter. Research shows that access to education, good healthcare and screening for symptoms help to prevent dementia.

The WHR acknowledges that global trends and international events have impacts on people's sense of happiness. Examples include extreme weather disasters due to global heating, war or the ramifications of evolving technology. It does not delve deeply into these matters, however. The focus is on issues that are comparable across cultures and time.

LINK

World Happiness Report 2024
happiness-report.s3.amazonaws.com/2024/WHR+24.pdf

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SOVEREIGN DEFAULT

Ghana's persistent economic challenges

After a sovereign default in 2022, Ghana currently depends on IMF support. The government implemented debt restructuring with domestic creditors. The principal outlines of a restructuring deal with external debtors have been agreed on, but not finalised yet. The country's public-finance system remains in deep crisis. Our author expects Ghana's government to finally rise to its responsibilities.

BY J. ATSU AMEGASHIE

Ghana is currently under a three-year IMF programme. It will receive $ 3 billion emergency lending in the years 2023 to 2026. The money is helpful, but insufficient for an economy with an annual GDP of about $ 80 billion.

Since November 2021, the government has been unable to borrow money from the international Eurobond market. It is also struggling to borrow money domestically. In September 2024, it once more missed its target for selling domestic treasury bills.

The debt remains unsustainable with interest rates on treasury bills of about 25% or higher. Making things worse, high interest rates also haunt the private sector. Ghanaian banks are unable to offer corporate loans at rates below 30%, and in some cases, interest rates are as high as 50%. When credit is expensive, investments are expensive too, and that slows down the economy.

Inflation has fallen from more than 50% three years ago to an annual rate of around 20%. Growth is slowly improving, but it remains fragile. The output of cocoa – Ghana's major export good and thus foreign-exchange earner – has been falling in the past three years. Part of the problem is that illegal mining is destroying and polluting both water bodies and lands.

This is only one of many governance challenges Ghana is facing. The government must:

- cut frivolous expenditures,
- significantly reduce corruption in public procurement,
- eliminate fiscal waste (for instance by not abandoning projects and beginning new ones) and
- boost domestic revenues.

If it fails to do these things, debt problems will keep recurring. Given the tight fiscal space, the dysfunctions listed above reduce the government's ability to help the poor through subsidies for healthcare, education and fuel. It will also remain unable to boost economic growth with the provision of reliable infrastructure. EEG, the deeply indebted state-owned electricity company, for example, is known for power failures. To understand the situation, it is important to consider how the sovereign default of 2022 came about.

ASSESSING PAST FAILURE

In the decade up to 2020, Ghana's economy grew by about 6.6% per year. Poverty went down, though inequality did not. The country's international reputation was comparatively good, and it gained access to the Eurobond market.

Photo: dpa / Xinhua News Agency / Seth

Commodity prices have fallen, and cocoa production is declining: Ghanaian farmer spreading out cocoa beans to dry in the sunlight.

For several reasons, however, the economy was more fragile than the growth rate suggested. Core issues included:

- It was not diversified, with exports depending heavily-on cocoa, gold and oil.
- Agriculture and the informal sector accounted for most livelihoods, even though the service sector's share of employment had been growing slowly.
- The economy was not managed well, which was evident in periodic power failures known as "dumsor".

In spite of these long-standing problems, inflation mostly remained in the single or low double digits for most of the 2010s. Ghana depends on imports, and the Cedi, the national currency, kept depreciating. Containing the upward pressure on prices was thus a noteworthy macroeconomic achievement.

From 2000 to 2008, Ghana had benefited from multilateral debt relief in the context of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative. In 2008, it achieved the status of a lower middle-income country as its annual per-capita income rose over $1000. From that point on, Ghana was not eligible for the same amount of grants from multi- and bilateral development agencies.

Unfortunately, the country proved unable to keep government budget deficits and sovereign debt under control. Its fiscal deficits kept getting worse. The IMF reckons that they increased by over three percent of GDP each year on average in the past 12 years of the three most recent electoral cycles. As a matter of fact, the government had even needed support from the IMF's Extended Credit Facility (ECF) from 2015 to 2019.

In 2021, the debt-to-GDP ratio increased to more than 100 %. In November, the government lost its ability to raise new private-sector credit in the Eurobond market. Eight months later, the government had to turn to the IMF for assistance once again.

In December 2022, the government defaulted on much of its domestic and external debt. It launched Ghana's Domestic Debt Exchange programme, restructuring domestic credit worth about approximately 137 billion Cedis (the equivalent of about $ 10 billion). Ghanaian holders of sovereign debt lost at least 30 % of their money.

This "haircut" set the stage for international action. In June 2024, Ghana reached an agreement in principle with its international bondholders on restructuring $ 13 billion of external debt. That deal has not been finalised, but it would impose a haircut of up to 37 % on bondholders.

CAUSES OF GHANA'S DEBT PROBLEMS

Ghana's persistent fiscal deficits were driven by excessive state spending, weak government revenues and – especially in election years – fiscal indiscipline. Rising oil revenues only mitigated the impacts to a limited extent.

From 2015 on, government revenues stayed stagnant. Tax collection was too weak. Over the past two decades, Ghana's tax revenue amounted to about 13 % of GDP, and that share was below the sub-Saharan African average of 15 %, according to the IMF.

The tax system actually bypasses most people entirely. In 2017, the Ghana Revenue Authority had disclosed that only 1.2 million of 27 million Ghanaians were paying income tax. In other words, only 10 % of the labour force were taxpayers. The informal sector, which employs about 90 % of the working population, contributed less than five percent to the total tax revenue.

Official development assistance (ODA) was dwindling moreover. In 2008, grants from donor agencies had amounted to two percent of GDP. That money evaporated fast after Ghana's rise to lower middle-income status. By 2018, its share had dropped to a mere 0.3 % of GDP.

While government revenues stagnated, state spending became increasingly misguided. Historically, investment in infrastructure was the biggest component of Ghanaian state expenditure. However, wages and salaries for the bloated public sector became increasingly more important. As early as 2013, the finance minister disclosed that the government had spent 70 % of its total revenue on public-sector staff in the first half of the year.

Various forms of corruption played a role. Government agencies' staff lists, for example, included ghost names. Moreover, too much money was used for vanity projects or inflated government contracts.

UNHEEDED WARNING SIGNS

It is tempting to blame Ghana's debt problems on the Covid-19 pandemic, which began in March 2020. While the pandemic certainly had an adverse effect on the fiscal performance, the plain truth is that the debt burden had become unsustainable before this global health crisis set in.

It was telling, for example, that Ghana had found it increasingly difficult to access private-sector funding. The government ended up paying increasingly higher interest rates for new bonds. In 2015, it needed a World Bank guarantee worth $ 400 million to raise $ 1 billion of private money.

A debt sustainability analysis which the IMF carried out in 2018 showed that Ghana was at a high risk of external debt distress. Various scenarios showed that both the depreciating exchange-rate and the declining exports were likely to make the debt burden unsustainable.

In the same year, Ghana's Ministry of Finance also did a debt sustainability analysis. It showed that two important indicators (the ratio of debt service to government revenue and the ratio of debt service to export revenues) were above the thresholds that signal shaky liquidity. Another warning sign was that both ratios were set to stay elevated.

Contrary to IMF advice, moreover, the government did not include the debt owed by state-owned enterprises in public debt. The IMF had also bemoaned that the government was running some operations off-budget. Such practices reduce transparency, make oversight and management of the debt more difficult and increase the scope for corruption.

The moment of truth came on 24 November 2022 when the restructuring of domestic debt was announced. The Ministry of Finance suddenly admitted that total public debt – "including that of state-owned enterprises" – exceeded 100 % of GDP. Only 11 days earlier, it had been declared as only 75.9 %. Later IMF analyses showed that the Cocoa Board in particular had accumulated a large debt.

CONCLUSION

Unfavourable events like the Covid-19 pandemic and falling commodity prices had an adverse effect on Ghana's fiscal position. To a very large extent, however, Ghana's fiscal crisis was homemade. The government did not act in the necessary responsible manner. The country needs prudent and holistic fiscal management. Sound macroeconomic management helps a country stay resilient when hit by external shocks by minimising negative impacts. Developing countries must solve their own fiscal problems. Given that high-income countries face serious budgetary deficits, any resources from the OECD, the IMF, World Bank et cetera will be meagre, not more than small drops in a messy fiscal ocean.

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AFRICAN FOOD SYSTEMS

Significant knowledge gaps

In many African countries, the road to food security is riddled with serious knowledge gaps. They make innovations that would strengthen food supply chains very difficult. More research is needed. In a time when spending on official development assistance (ODA) is being cut, the big challenge is to ensure that developing countries' research systems can nonetheless operate better than they did in the past. The CGIAR Science Week in Nairobi in April should rise to this challenge.

BY HANS DEMBOWSKI

Photo: dpa / Hans Lucas / Jean-Francois FORT

In Africa, supply chains are less well monitored than in Europe: Yam wholesale market in Accra, the Ghanaian capital.

In many African countries, food security cannot be taken for granted. Three distinct trends are making matters worse:

- The climate crisis is rendering traditional farming practises increasingly unviable.
- Populations are growing, so countries will need more food in the future.
- Dependence on grain imports mean that macroeconomic problems fast compound food insecurity, malnutrition and hunger.

In theory, countries can rise to these challenges by modernising their food systems. It is well understood that the productivity of African farms is quite low and should be increased. It is equally well known that a lot of food rots before it can be consumed. The reason for post-harvest losses is that produce is often not stored properly, not processed fast enough and not distributed to consumers efficiently.

What needs to change is thus quite obvious. Innovations along the entire supply chain would help. Nonetheless, it is often very difficult to take action accordingly.

WHY TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE IS SUBOPTIMAL, BUT DOMINANT

The worst bottleneck is probably the over-arching lack of evidence-based knowledge. In sub-Saharan countries, masses of people – as a rule of thumb around 80 % of the population – depend on subsistence farming and informal economic activity. These people are largely guided by traditions and habits. In many cases their knowledge is passed on from person to person and from generation to generation. It is not necessarily wrong, but it is typically suboptimal and incomplete.

Poor people stick to the established patterns because they are risk adverse. They are not stupid and certainly see that other options might deliver better results. Most smallholder farmers and petty traders, however, are so poor that they cannot afford any losses. To them, the safest way to feed their families is to stick to what has worked in the past.

How they operate is mostly not documented. That is equally true of their revenues, expenditures and profits. To a considerable extent, moreover, the nutritional components of food items remain unknown too. Some may not be safe to eat because of various kinds of contamination. Poor farming practices – misuse of agrochemicals and inadequate storage, for example – may also render food unsafe.

AN OVERARCHING LACK OF EVIDENCE AND DATA

Many aspects of the entire supply chain – from rural fields to urban markets – remain under-researched. These knowledge gaps hamper development. They make it difficult to draft professional business plans or to design targeted policy interventions. It compounds the problem that infrastructure is typically inadequate or even non-existing in the remote regions of developing countries.

The situation is totally different in high-income countries where value chains are thoroughly monitored. In the EU, for example, there are reliable statistics regarding farm inputs, agricultural productivity, storage, processing, distribution, supermarket sales and food safety. Thanks to a host of professional researchers, there is abundant data regarding every step. Fundamental research and some applied research are typically done by universities, while government agencies collect monitoring data and private-sector companies employ experts for marketing statistics as well as for research and development.

> "The plain truth is that decisions on research funding tend to be taken in high-income countries and are not owned by African experts."

Prosperous economies are fast turning into knowledge-based economies. Their multilayered markets rely on similarly multilayered research systems. In spite of huge complexity, decision makers have a clear and data-based idea of what is going on.

In most African countries, by contrast, that is not the case. Entire nations and their ecosystems are under-researched. It is striking, for example, that Africa's traditional staple foods have largely given way to globally used crops – in particular rice, wheat and maize. However, the dependence on these cereals has serious implications for health, the ecology and macroeconomic stability (see box).

To modernise African food systems as necessary, more research is needed along the entire supply chain. The capac-

ities of universities and research institutions, however, are weak and overstretched. African nations typically have far fewer academically trained people than high-income countries. Accordingly, government agencies and private companies also do less data collection, information processing and evidence-based planning. Even if they want commission research to plug information gaps, they typically struggle to find competent applicants.

> "Strong national research systems are necessary. The fewer elements of a country's food system are thoroughly understood, the harder it is to introduce innovations."

DONOR-DRIVEN RESEARCH

It also matters that African researchers, who want to focus on a specific part of the food system, face a challenge their counterparts in more prosperous world regions would find irritating. In Europe or North America, different kinds of institutions make funding available for specific kinds of fundamental or applied research. Some of these institutions are private and profit-oriented, some are charitable foundations and some are even government-sponsored entities. Researchers apply for funding from those agencies depending on what exactly they want to do.

African research systems are not diversified in that way. The funding options are quite limited. Indeed, scholars mostly depend on multilateral and bilateral development agencies which do not specialise in research. Two implications are quite important:

- The persons who decide, do not have a mandate to fund research as such. Their job is to identify development projects that will deliver tangible outcomes, in terms of 30,000 smallholder farmers having been trained, for example, or 20,000 slum children receiving healthy food for a year.
- The decision makers are typically not based in Africa. They live overseas and are not familiar with African daily life. They may fail to notice interesting aspects of a proposal that would be obvious to people in Africa.

Project designs often reflect what donor agencies believe to be important, deviating from what Africans would prioritise. For funding reasons, moreover, African researchers often find themselves doing work that tackles the entire supply chain, rather than focusing on their specific field of expertise. Plant geneticists, for example, may thus be expected to tackle business challenges such as the distribution of processed items or to make consumers aware of health issues. On the other hand, they keep hopping from one short-term project to the next.

Strong national research systems are necessary. The fewer elements of a country's food system are thoroughly understood, the harder it is to introduce innovations. To create a business environment that is conducive to innovation, it is essential to plug as many knowledge gaps as possible as fast as possible. Interaction with stakeholders such as venture-capital funds or farmers' organisations will help to focus on relevant issues. The past years have seen a proliferation of many isolated projects.

The plain truth is that decisions on research funding tend to be taken in high-income countries and are not owned by African experts. "He who pays the piper, calls the tune," goes an old saying. For much research on African food systems, it remains valid.

THE WAY FORWARD

In the current geopolitical setting, ODA will obviously not increase, but is set to decrease substantially. Spending ODA money well is thus becoming yet more important. The silver lining is that a rethink is going on internationally. Donor agencies today are increasingly taking more interest in issues such as forgotten foods.

The CGIAR (Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research) must rise to the situation. It is funded by donor governments, multilateral organisations and philanthropic foundations. It is well known for its centres of excellence such as IFPRI (the Washington-based International Food Policy Research Institute), IRRI (the Manila-based International Rice Research Institute) or CAP (the Lima-based Centro Internacional de la Papa / International Potato Center).

Instead of prioritising these institutions, the CGIAR could – and should – do more to boost national research systems in developing countries by involving national actors in its research programmes. Too often, its capacity building is

limited to individuals. They should strengthen institutional capacities. In many cases, CGIAR centres have indeed weakened such capacities by poaching researchers from national systems.

The CGIAR Science Week will take place in Nairobi from 7 to 12 April. The conference will discuss the agenda for the next years. It will be dominated by severe funding cuts. Several thousand jobs are at risk. In this worrisome scenario, a fundamental rethink is needed. The big challenge is to ensure that national research systems can operate well.

The author would like to thank several international experts, mostly Africans, he has interviewed for this essay. As some of them do not wish to be named, he has decided not to name anyone to make sure that no one attracts the scorn of a donor agency.

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AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

Neglected foods deserve more attention

Some traditionally used plant varieties have been ignored by scholars, governments and professionally-run businesses. African societies are paying a high price.

BY HANS DEMBOWSKI

Africa's traditional crops tend to be among the "forgotten foods", which are also called "neglected", "underutilised" or "orphan crops". What these cultivars have in common is that people historically depended on them and often still do. Related terms are "minor foods" or even "poor people's food", showing that it is more prestigious to consume other goods.

Some warn that there is even a category of "vanishing foods". Examples are berries or mushrooms that people have traditionally collected in forests. Deforestation means that some relevant plant and animal varieties are disappearing even before biologists have properly assessed them. The lack of data makes it impossible to estimate in precise numbers what this loss of genetic diversity means. Knowledge gaps, of course, mark food supply chains in Africa more generally (see main story).

THREE FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEMS WITH GLOBAL CROPS

Humankind's most important staple foods today are rice, wheat and maize. They are not indigenous to Africa but have become essential components of African diets. They are cultivated in many African countries, but typically not in the quantities that would make them self-sufficient. The shift away from traditional foods has serious downsides:

- Dietary change is one reason that diabetes and other chronic diseases are becoming more common in Africa.
- Traditional crops and livestock tend to be well adapted to the environment they have been bred in, so they are more likely to cope with environmental change. It would make sense to breed varieties that are resilient to heat, drought, storms and flooding.
- The less food a country imports, the less likely food-price inflation is. When world-market prices soar, import prices go up too, and rising costs for food hit poor people hard. Because forex reserves are used for grain imports, moreover, the exchange rate of the national currency declines, further exacerbating inflation.

Because the globally used plants are well understood, new and better performing varieties can be bred fast. By contrast, there is a lack of high-yielding varieties of traditional crops such as cassava, yams or fonio in West Africa. It would be possible to develop such varieties and even breed diversity, but it would take longer and require more resources.

Moreover, it might prove difficult to market the new seed. Commercial African farms generally prefer to grow the global crops. Subsistence farmers, on the other hand, use their own seed. The masses of women who do the field work would have to be made aware of other options once they arise. Many of them might still shy away from the risk, and others would not be able to spend any money on improved seed and related inputs.

On the upside, digital technology is making it easier to reach out to poor rural people even if they are illiterate. Smartphones have become quite common, and agricultural advice services are making good use of instructive video clips. However, while video tutorials can promote innovations, they are not a substitute for them. What must come first is the scientifically solid work that leads to better approaches to using traditional plants.

Photo: dpa / Anadolu / Emmanuel Osodi

As international inflation made wheat more expensive, many West Africans once more opted for cassava, which some consider to be a poor person's food.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Illegal fishing threatens Kenya's economy and environment

Overfishing is putting Kenya's fishing industry at risk, threatening both livelihoods and biodiversity. Experts call for better regulation and support for local communities.

BY JOSEPH MAINA

Kenya is home to vast inland freshwater bodies and a rich coastline along the Indian Ocean. These waters provide fish that are popular both locally and internationally. However, a rise in illegal fishing is now putting the sustainability of the country's fishing industry at risk.

Illegal fishing refers to activities carried out by national or foreign vessels in a country's waters without official permission or in violation of existing laws and regulations. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the impact of illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing extends beyond financial losses. It contributes to overfishing, the destruction of marine habitats and the loss of biodiversity.

ECONOMIC LOSSES AND HEALTH RISKS

For generations, communities living around Lake Victoria and along Kenya's coast have relied on fishing as a primary source of income and food. As government regulations and controls have increased, some fishers feel their traditional fishing practices are being restricted. Thus, more needs to be done to raise public awareness about the dangers of IUU fishing – not only for the environment but also for local livelihoods.

Experts warn that IUU fishing has serious economic consequences. Kenya loses an estimated Ksh 45 billion (€ 330 million) annually due to illegal and unregulated fishing, according to marine specialists. These losses stem from

missed revenue that could otherwise be collected through licenses and proper regulation.

Illegal fishing also poses health risks, particularly when carried out in contaminated waters. In Lake Nakuru, for instance, fishing has been banned following scientific findings that fish from the lake contained dangerously high levels of heavy metals, making them unsafe for human consumption. Despite government efforts to combat illegal fishing, the practice persists across many parts of the country.

TACKLING SOCIAL CHALLENGES TO STOP ILLEGAL FISHING IN KENYA

Observers point out that poverty is a key driver of illegal fishing, particularly in inland waters. Many people turn to fishing without proper authorisation because job opportunities are limited, and demand for affordable food is growing. David Kilo, chairperson of the Lake Naivasha Boat Owners' Association, links the rise in illegal fishing to high unemployment. "The national and county governments should find ways to empower unemployed youths through alternative job opportunities," Kilo told local media.

If fishing without proper regulation continues, fish stocks could become severely depleted, experts warn. In the struggle to survive, some fishers even catch juvenile fish, threatening the long-term survival of the entire species.

Kilo stresses that illegal fishing also harms the livelihoods of law-abiding fishers. "We support the government's efforts to regulate fishing. As painful as these restrictions may be, they are meant to ensure that we all benefit in the long run," he says.

At the same time, enforcement of fishing regulations must be carried out lawfully and with respect for human rights. Kenyan law enforcement agencies have faced criticism in recent months for heavy-handed crackdowns on illegal fishers. Some individuals have reportedly sustained serious injuries during arrests, while others have gone missing after being arrested.

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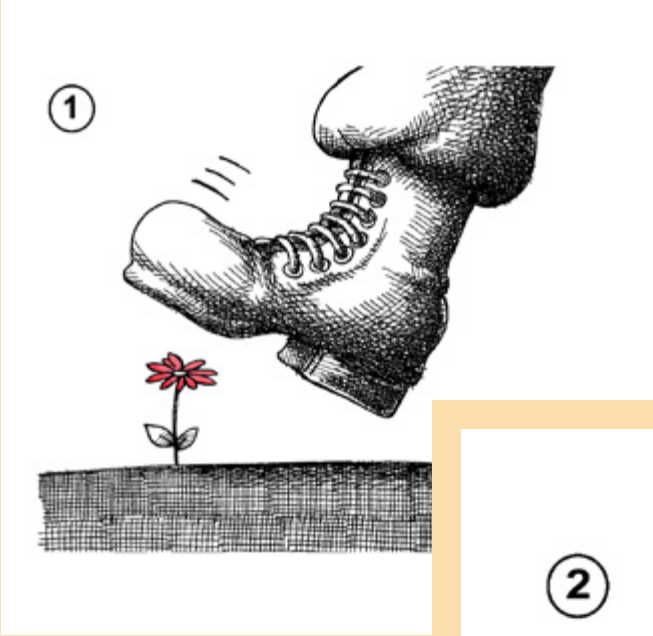
POLITICAL SATIRE

The power of humour

Illustration: Mana Nayestani



OUR VIEW

Political humour serves both freedom and extremism

Around the world, satirists draw, write and film for freedom, often under repressive conditions. But not every political joke promotes democratic values: Extremist forces use humour for their ends, too.

BY JÖRG DÖBEREINER

For forty years, Wong Kei-kwan drew socially critical cartoons for Ming Pao, a Hong Kong newspaper. In May 2023, the paper stopped publishing his work in response to complaints by multiple government officials of the special administrative region. Observers saw the case as another nail in the coffin of Hong Kong's critical media landscape under the authoritarian influence of China.

The state of political satire in a society is an indicator of freedom of expression: It gives oppressed people a voice and playfully questions authority. As a result, rulers in many countries try to silence satirists, like in the case of Wong Kei-kwan. They threaten and punish them, have them disappeared, or drive them into exile.

But other forces limit the free expression of satire, too. Social-media algorithms, for example, marginalise undesirable content. Ultimately the platforms themselves decide what is allowed to reach the broad masses – often according to non-transparent criteria. Sudanese cartoonist Khalid Albaih told D+C that Meta, the parent company of Facebook and Instagram, erased many of his cartoons. Renowned cartoonist Ann Telnaes left The Washington Post early this year after the paper refused to publish one of her works. The cartoon criticised the behaviour of tech billionaire and Washington Post-owner Jeff Bezos leading up to the inauguration of US President Donald Trump: A draft showed Bezos kneeling before a statue of Trump, alongside other grovelling tech and media executives. Clearly such criticism is not possible in The Washington Post under Bezos's leadership.

HUMOUR WORKS IN BOTH DIRECTIONS

Satire generally directs its humour from the bottom up: The ruled laugh at the rulers. Yet humour can be used not only to question power, but also to reinforce it. A prime example is Donald Trump, who, as president, intentionally mocks political opponents and dissenters.

Extremism, too, can be fought or made more acceptable with the help of comedy: In political discourse on social media and elsewhere, extremists ridicule democratic values, deride disadvantaged people and stoke fear and prejudice. Criticism is quickly labelled "humourless".

Satire can undermine autocracy, while extremist humour can undermine democracy. One strategy to fight anti-democratic forces is, once again, humour – as creative campaigns against extremism and autocracy have shown.

Every two years, the Freedom Cartoonists Foundation presents the Kofi Annan Courage in Cartooning Award to shine a spotlight on cartoonists and their efforts to promote democracy. In 2024, the prize went to Wong Kei-kwan and Indian cartoonist Rachita Taneja. They both stand for thousands who struggle under difficult conditions to find words and images to uphold democratic values. They are a model and inspiration – including for audiences in established but embattled democracies.

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“Golf” by Khalid Albaih.

CARTOONS

“Challenge the version of history that our new-age pharaohs will try to write”

Khalid Albaih is a political cartoonist from Sudan. In our interview, he talks about why he called himself an internet artist, how algorithms censor, why cartoons are important contemporary documents – and why they really don't have to be funny.

KHALID ALBAIH INTERVIEWED BY KATHARINA WILHELM OTIENO

How do you see the role of political cartoons and satire in times of crisis, especially in the context of the ongoing war in Sudan?

Cartoons play a crucial role because they straddle different genres. From a journalist's perspective, they are a form of art; from an artist's perspective, they are a form of journalism. They also have the ability to reach diverse audiences – professors and children alike can interpret them in their own way.

In many ways, cartoons function as a diary. They capture my immediate response to events, creating a historical record of a given moment in time. So, we are actually a sort of chroniclers.

At the same time, looking back at cartoon archives can be disheartening, because you see that history does repeat itself. Many cartoons from World War I or World War II could just as easily be drawn today.

Do you see your work as a way of bringing hope or strength for resistance to people in crisis situations?

I don't think the people living through a crisis necessarily need my message. The ones who need to see and understand what's happening are those who are not in crisis. That's who I speak to – I want them to relate to situations beyond their own reality, to understand our situation. Often, people see conflicts as distant, as something they have no control over. But in reality, they do have power. My work is meant to bridge that gap and make them see their connection to these events.

At the same time, my cartoons also serve as a mirror for those who share my perspective or experience. It's about asking questions – challenging our own views in a simple way.

How does your work help to draw international attention to the situation in Sudan? Have you seen concrete examples of your work making a difference?

Yes, many times. I've been doing this since 2007 or 2008, and I regularly receive messages from people telling me how my work has affected them, opened their eyes, or made them see things differently.

Lately, I've been working more film work than cartoons. One example is "Bahar" ("Sea"), a seven-minute video installation about refugees crossing the Mediterranean. It's composed entirely of real footage I found online. The installation creates an experience – it forces you to be in that journey. We're not really used anymore to seeing a situation in a clip on social media for more than a few seconds before scrolling away. But here I put you in that situation, and you're stuck there for seven minutes, alongside people who have lived through it. That experience moved many viewers.

"My cartoons are a way to vent, to process events."

Illustration: Khalid Albaih
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flickr.com/photos/khalidalbaih/42252681371/
no changes were made

Khalid Albaih

I also did an exhibition in Doha called "Shahid", which means "witness". It started with the ongoing conflict in Palestine, but as someone from Sudan, I also wanted to highlight the lack of imagery coming out of my country. Sadly, people tend to disconnect from crises they don't see. Both warring parties in Sudan view cameras as a threat and weapon. A friend of mine told me it was harder for him to walk around with a camera than with a gun.

What was your goal with "Shahid"?

With "Shahid", I explore the paradox that, despite the vast amount of information and livestreams documenting the genocide in Gaza, many people still choose to look away. If such visible suffering is ignored, then the crisis in Sudan – where far fewer images emerge – goes even more unnoticed.

I wanted to turn the audience into witnesses. I wanted to push for accountability – not just in Gaza, but also in Sudan and beyond. Every life lost shouldn't just be a statistic. Who was this person? What was their name? Who took their life? In both conflicts, mass death has been shrugged off, leading to genocide and one of the worst displacement crises.

Through these works, I try to create a sense of solidarity – connecting people who are both distant from and deeply affected by these tragedies. In the end, putting yourself in someone else's shoes, even through art, is what can bring real change.

How do you balance humour with the seriousness of the issues you address?

When I first started out, I tried to get published in a newspaper because, in the 2010s, being published was the only way for a cartoonist to be taken seriously. I remember an editor once kicked me out of his office, saying my cartoons weren't funny. He asked: "Where are the speech bubbles? How are people supposed to get this?"

I told him: "They're not funny because the situation isn't funny." I'm not trying to be funny – I'm trying to reflect reality. If a cartoon turns out satirical, then so be it. If my emotions are darker, then the work takes on a darker tone. That's why I chose to remain independent rather than work for a publication.

I don't think in terms of balancing humour and seriousness. My work simply takes shape based on how I feel, and the medium allows that. My cartoons are a way to vent, to process events.

What roles do social media and the internet play for you and your work?

Social media is the reason we're having this conversation right now. It gave me a space to work and made my art accessible, just as it has for many others. The internet brought our work to the forefront.

My work is shared under a Creative Commons license – it's free to use and distribute. That reflects the early spirit of the internet: openness and sharing. I see the internet as a modern testament to human civilisation, much like the library of Alexandria or the ancient libraries of Mali.

For me, as someone from Sudan, where travel restrictions and visa rejections are common, the internet has been transformative. It allows me to connect with people across the world, to break out of the constraints imposed by borders. That kind of openness fosters curiosity – it lets us see beyond the boxes we're placed in. This is what the internet was meant to do. And for a time, it did. It enabled the Arab Spring, but it also enabled Trump.

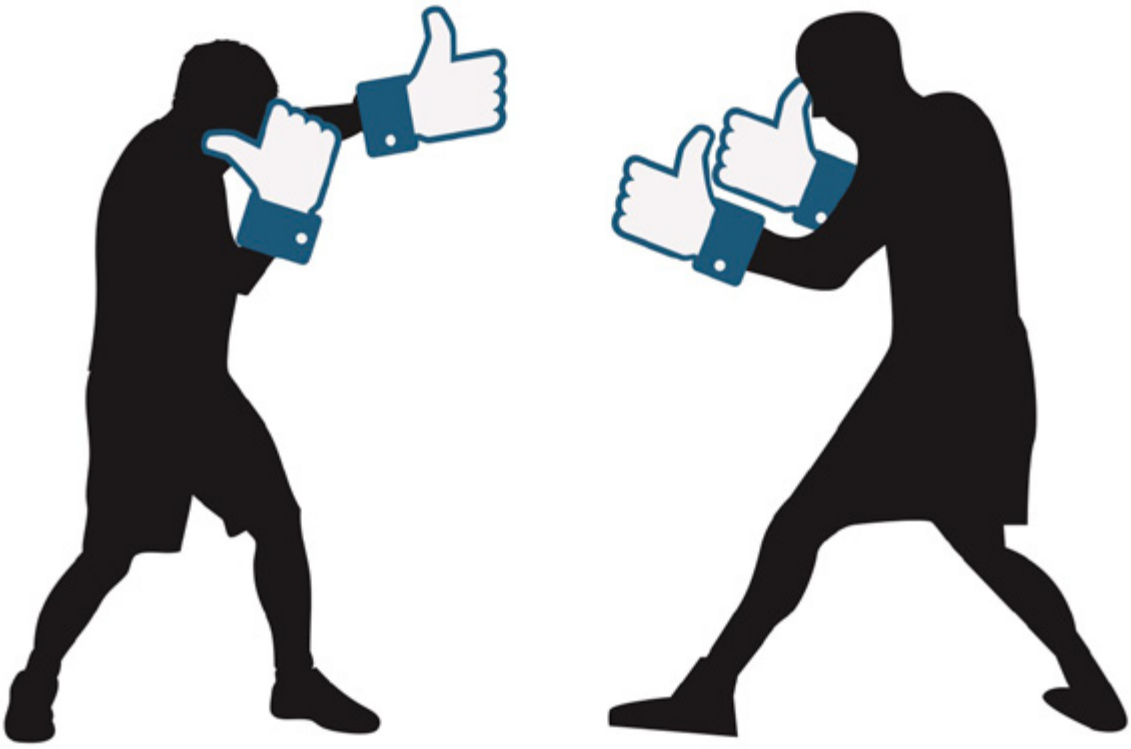
Now, however, we're witnessing increasing misappropriation. Governments use the internet for propaganda, and billionaires shape online spaces to serve their political agendas. Still, there was a brief moment of real freedom – where social media and the internet allowed for true creative and intellectual expression.

> "It's a completely different internet now. Whoever controls it – whoever controls attention – controls the world."

How has this transformation of the internet affected you?

I mean, I used to call myself an internet artist because that's where I existed – I had no newspaper column, no gallery exhibitions. I simply moved from one social media platform to another, trying to be present wherever I could.

“Boxing” by Khalid Albaih.



But over time, the social aspect of social media faded. It used to feel like a public square, a place for real conversations. Now, it’s more of a broadcast – people talk, but no one really listens. Algorithms decide what gets seen and whose voice gets amplified. Our attention, along with our data, has become a commodity.

It’s a completely different internet now. Whoever controls it – whoever controls attention – controls the world. And Elon Musk is now who he is, right? But I believe that at some point, we and others who were part of the internet’s early, more open days will create something new – an internet that brings back that freedom.

In what ways has censorship affected your work?

What happened to the early internet also happened to me. We were chased out, censored, threatened. We had to leave, self-censor, carefully consider what we said and how we said it – until, eventually, we were just silenced.

That’s why I don’t really make cartoons anymore. I used to create one every day, but I realised they were going nowhere. They simply disappeared into the void, drowned out by algorithms designed to suppress certain voices. That’s why I shifted my focus to other projects. And, of course, I’ve had many cartoons removed by Meta.

But today, censorship often isn’t direct – it’s more subtle. Instead of being openly banned, you’re just ignored. Your reach is cut, your communication fades, and there’s always the underlying fear of being watched. And this isn’t just an issue in the global south. There’s a sort of orientalist assumption that censorship only happens in places like Iran or Syria. But look at what happened to cartoonists at The Washington Post, who resigned when their work criticising

tech giants was rejected. Or how The New York Times ended daily political cartoons in its international edition back in 2019.

In one of your older cartoons, the words "We used our art to fight, now we need it to heal us" stand out. How does this reflect your own experience?

I was born in Romania, where my father was a diplomat. We moved back and forth to Sudan before eventually leaving for political reasons, ending up in Doha. When I started drawing cartoons, I couldn't return to Sudan until the revolution in 2019 – and even then, I had to stay in hiding. Now, I'm in Norway, effectively in exile. But Sudan is my home, or at least, what's left of it.

It's extremely difficult to carry the weight of something that feels unsolvable. You're just one person, a small part of a country and a system that's supposed to function. But when the system fails, it's isolating, frustrating. And a lot of people just want to live – to take their kids to school, to go about their day. After years under dictatorship or autocracy, you're just tired.

Over the past decade and a half, I've realised that you can't fight this battle alone. And, ultimately, you're never going to win – because the forces we're up against have money, surveillance, the power to make people disappear. That's when I started to rethink my approach. Instead of fighting head-on, I asked myself: What can I do now that will make a difference in the future?

That's why I focused on projects like my cartoon collection, the magazine 'Khartoon!'. It's not just about me – it's a collective effort. We're healing together, finding new spaces and ways to work. It's about creating a safe place where artists can express themselves without fear. Because without a space to create and speak, how can we even begin to heal? Then again, the act of resistance itself is also a form of healing.

The world isn't moving in a better direction – freedom of speech is under threat, violence is escalating in many places. What motivates you to keep creating despite the risks and challenges?

What motivates me is the sense that we still have an opportunity. History doesn't remember the art created in times of peace – it's the art born out of struggle that stands out. When everything is fine, of course people create beautiful things. But now is the time to be truly creative, to find ways to ensure history records that even in the darkest times, people still stood up.

Sadly, history is often written by the victorious. If we stop now, everything we've worked for could be erased. I always think about the pyramids – how grand they are, how they symbolise power. People remember the pharaohs. But those rulers enslaved and killed countless people. They are still seen as kings, but what about those who built the pyramids? What about those who resisted?

They don't have monuments. The camera was never on them. But those who truly study history know them, because they left their mark in some way. As artists, that's our role – to create an alternative narrative, to challenge the version of history that our new-age pharaohs will try to write. Now is the time to make sure our voices are part of that story.

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FEMALE COMEDIANS

Not just a laughing stock

In India, women comedians challenge social norms, the patriarchy and also their own perception of the world. They push the boundaries of what is considered humour, but they don't just want people to laugh – they want people to listen.

BY IPSITA SAPRA

Photo: Screenshot YouTube / Aditi Mittal

Platforms like YouTube are essential for the visibility of Indian female comedians.

Caller:

Hello. Is this the house of Mr. Bhatti?

Wife of Mr. Bhatti:

Hello, yes, the house is his. But hey, the land was given by my father in dowry!

This scene is from an Indian television comedy from the 1980s. Even back then, women played small but important roles that subtly conveyed profound social messages. In the present day, these roles are much bigger. In particular, stand-up comedy has grown a lot and the number of female performers – mostly young, urban and English-speaking – has increased significantly.

Feminist stand-up comedy is more than just entertainment. It works like satire, often serving to scrutinise the values and power structures of society. In this sense, it is a chronicle of our times, a social commentary on politics. In a world of surveillance and censorship, it provides a space to talk about difficult issues in a non-threatening but thought-provoking way.

REDEFINING COMEDY

Stand-up comedy has long been a male-dominated genre in India. If ticket prices are to be believed, names like Vir Das with higher fees, international gigs and corporate clients seem to have a much wider appeal. As Aditi Mittal, one of the more successful female comedians, wryly observes,

"Women stand-up comedians are the diversity candidates. Hello, vagina, please say something, anything!"

Despite this, female stand-up comedians are constantly challenging social norms, debunking stereotypes and redefining humour. Their comedy sheds light on everyday misogyny, the subordinate position of women in the home and workplace, unrealistic beauty standards and a range of contemporary issues that society often keeps quiet about.

Stand-up comedy for women covers overlapping themes: commentary on patriarchy, gender norms, sexuality, workplace dynamics, body and beauty norms, intergenerational conflict and, more recently, issues of disability, caste discrimination and LGBTQI+ identities.

UNPACKING PATRIARCHY

"My in-laws love me so much that they hardly let me go out. Just shows how indispensable they think I am, and how sad they would be if I go out for just a couple of hours,"

says Adya Srivastava. Female comedy reveals the difficult truths about the influence of patriarchal norms on daily life. It provides a space to confront and expose the patriarchy that masquerades as family values.

Self-deprecating humour also helps to address social judgements about women's choices. Shreya Priyam Roy quips:

"I am an ethical gold digger. There are several dating apps, but LinkedIn is by far the best."

At the same time, such jokes confront stereotypes while recognising how deeply rooted the patriarchy is – even among women themselves.

This also applies to questions of sexuality. In India, this is a taboo subject. Women who speak openly about it are considered scandalous. Comedy has enabled them to courageously break through this ceiling.

"Dildo is pleasure without patriarchy,"

says Devanshi Shah. This candid approach to female lust has sparked both praise and controversy.

Shraddha Jain talks about workplace issues.

"I am a corporate Cinderella. For one annual event I purchase an expensive dress with the salary hike that I did not get."

This topic is very popular with women, as the content is linked to their experiences of disappointment and rejection.

"I do not get any awards. I get dedications. My seniors, bosses and the CEO will dedicate their awards to junior executives like me while they take home the actual awards."

This humour underlines the merely symbolic appreciation that is often shown to women in workplaces without tangible opportunities for advancement.

VOICES FROM THE MARGINS

A positive trend, albeit small in numbers, is the emerging voice of female comedians with marginalised identities, including those with disabilities and from the LGBTQI+ community. Nidhi Goyal, a visually impaired comedian and activist, delivers punchlines that expose ableism:

"I am blind. But so is love. Get over it, guys."

By incorporating her own experiences into her comedy, she advocates for more inclusion in entertainment. Gurleen Kaur declared before an audience, ***"I am bisexual."*** Met with silence, she asked:

"If everyone could be so quiet at my coming out, I could have done that with my family, right?"

When the audience burst out laughing, there was at least a semblance of acceptance.

Discrimination based on caste is also thematised in comedy. Although there are very few women or queer people tackling this issue, the space is expanding with new actors such as queer Dalit comedian Ankur Tangade. Despite its social relevance, such comedy is often rejected by the organisers for fear of offending their audience.

BARRIERS BEYOND THE STAGE

Despite their growing influence, feminist stand-up comedians face hostility over their content, gender pay gaps and exclusion from mainstream industry opportunities. Several female comedians report, for example, that they are invited to "women's empowerment events" organised by companies where they are expected to perform for free.

There are also tensions between challenging hierarchies and trying to "fit in" and be accepted by the wider audience. Inequality in the industry extends beyond the stage – fewer gigs and limited opportunities for mentorship mean that some female comedians follow the male-dominated style of humour.

However, the rise of social media has allowed female comedians to continue to participate and get their views across through Instagram reels, Netflix events or YouTube clips. These are accessible platforms, especially for those struggling with economic, cultural and logistical barriers to live performances.

At a time when India is pushing for greater gender representation, female stand-up comedians have carved a place for themselves as cultural disruptors. They show that women's experiences are crucial in confronting uncomfortable truths and pushing the scope of what is considered funny. However, their comedy is not just about getting laughs, but also about creating awareness and provoking thought.

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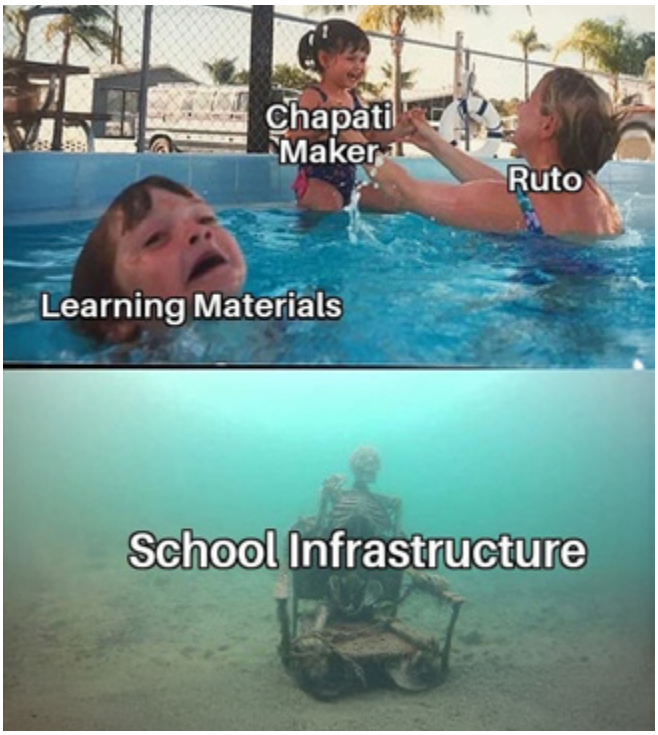
INTERNET CULTURE

When humour and tragedy go hand in hand

In Kenya, memes are a popular way of criticising the government in general and President William Ruto in particular. During the youth protests last year, a whole flood of memes spread over social media. As funny as some of the content is, the social background is tragic.

BY ALBA NAKUWA

Screenshot: X, @MwangoCapital



This meme spread in Kenya following President William Ruto's announcement to buy a machine that makes chapati – a popular flatbread – for schools. Many consider this to be superfluous compared to other problems in the country.

In Kenya – as everywhere else in the world – the growing popularity of social media platforms is being accompanied by the rapid spread of memes. The term refers to media content such as images, videos, audio or text of rather limited size that is predominantly humorous and easy for users to quickly copy and share with slight variations. Memes are an important part of internet culture.

The creators of this content are referred to as "meme lords" in Kenya. These are sometimes individuals and sometimes accounts such as Karis Memes, Funny Kenya Memes or Kenyan Memes Page. They post their content on social media sites and messengers where other entertainment pages then share it. Thus, memes like the one on the right and many others have gained great popularity and created a sense of belonging among Kenyans, especially on X, Instagram, TikTok and Facebook. Many memes have political content and are based on current news from traditional media.

Satire and political humour have a tradition in Kenya. For example, the television station NTV Kenya used to air a programme called "Bull's Eye" after the nine o'clock news from 2015 to 2022. The satirical show took a hilarious look at re-

“Some users employed memes for political education, while others used them to mislead political opponents and distract from the real issues.”

cent sociopolitical events and poked fun at the country’s elites and increasingly unpopular politicians. Viewers were able to call in live by phone.

CRITICISING THE GOVERNMENT

Memes can also express political opinions directly. Kenyans use them as a tool to humorously criticise the government and the state of democracy in their country. Last year, for example, when the Kenyan youth demonstrated for weeks against the government’s financial policy, social media was flooded with various memes. Some users employed memes for political education, while others used them to mislead political opponents and distract from the real issues.

During the protests, the use of memes as a coded form of communication increased: Only those who knew the allusions and double meanings could understand them. The exchange of memes as well as other content increasingly took place on Instagram and TikTok – beyond mainstream media such as the major TV channels.

Gen Z evidently lost faith in President William Ruto and the ruling coalition Kenya Kwanza (“Kenya First”). They looked for ways to demonstrate their frustration and linked memes to hashtags such as #siasambaya (“bad politics”) or #zakayoshuka (“Zacchaeus climb down”). The latter likens Ruto to the infamous tax collector in the Bible, who abused his power and took more from people than he should have. In memes, Ruto is also referred to as “Kaunda Uongoman”. The first part of the name refers to his fondness for the Kaunda suit, a two-piece garment that is particularly popular in East Africa. The second part means that he is a liar.

Ruto has in the past welcomed the use of humour in politics and used it as a tool for shaping public opinion. Now he is calling on Kenyans not to use humour to harass and defame others. For example, he gave a speech in which he criticised a popular meme for depicting him lying in a coffin, complaining that matters of life and death were being treated as a joke.

Screenshot: x.com/@kibuiX

Unfortunately, the protests against government policy did indeed quickly escalate into a matter of life and death. The Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, a government watchdog and advisory body, recorded 82 abductions of young people between June and December of last year. They are linked to attempts to silence dissenting voices. Due to public outcry and condemnation by human-rights organisations, some of the abductees were released at the beginning of 2025. However, many are still missing.

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Photo: dpa / Anadolu / Davit Kachkachishvili

With love for fair elections and European Union membership: Protest against Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze's decision to suspend negotiations on the country's bid to join the EU in Tbilisi, Georgia in December 2024.

NON-VIOLENT PROTEST

Laughing in the face of oppression

Non-violent and yet effective: Humour can be a powerful tactic for protesting against authoritarian regimes. It has been used effectively in countries from Serbia to Thailand.

BY SOPHIA A. MCCLENNEN AND SRDJA POPOVIC

As night falls over Tbilisi, Georgia, thousands of protesters flood the streets. It is December 2024, just over a month after parliamentary elections that the demonstrators claim were rigged. They are demanding electoral transparency and denounce what they see as a betrayal of their European aspirations: the ruling Georgian Dream Party's abrupt cancellation of EU negotiations. Yet, amid the tense atmosphere, an unexpected scene unfolds: Two protesters step into the centre of the crowd and begin swapping their coats, then their hats and finally their sweaters, completely exchanging outfits.

The crowd erupts into laughter as a speaker announces over the megaphone, "And this is undeniable proof of protesters' fake identities, as our beloved mayor revealed on live TV last night!"

The clothes-swapping stunt was designed to mock Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze, who had claimed that opposition protesters were disguising themselves by rapidly changing clothes to attend multiple rallies. Suggesting that the protesters were exaggerating the size of their crowds, the mayor claimed that, "The same people are participating in the

> "Resistance doesn't always have to be angry or aggressive to be effective: Mocking abusive power instead can have a far more destabilising effect."

marches, and they change clothes very quickly." He went on to say, "I think they are well-trained in this because it's not easy to attend one, two or even three rallies within an hour!" The claim was so obviously absurd that it quickly became a joke, fuelling a wave of humorous defiance across Georgia.

Meanwhile, thousands of miles away in Maputo, Mozambique, protesters face a far more violent environment. It is late November 2024. With over 50 demonstrators said to have been killed in previous crackdowns, riot police prepare to disperse a crowd that is demanding a recount of the votes cast in the general elections that had taken place in October. Instead of retreating, the protesters kneel in unison and start singing the national anthem. Watched by a sea of cameras, the police find themselves in a dilemma: Should they carry out their brutal orders and risk international condemnation or retreat in the face of a peaceful demonstration of patriotism? The police chose the first option. But that didn't stop demonstrators from repeating this strategy in protests during the months that followed.

These powerful and creative forms of resistance are examples of dilemma actions – strategies that force regimes and their security forces into lose-lose situations, exposing their weaknesses and mobilising public support.

WHY DILEMMA ACTIONS WORK

Such actions don't just make for fascinating stories, they really work. In fact, our research shows that dilemma actions are an essential tool in the arsenal of non-violent movements. They work by forcing oppressive regimes into difficult choices where any response – whether repression, concession or inaction – ultimately strengthens their opponents. Key reasons why dilemma actions are effective include:

1. Shifting the narrative: Authoritarian power tends to portray itself as righteous and just. Dilemma actions highlight hypocrisy and make it very easy to expose the contradictions and absurdity of authoritarian power.

2. Expanding participation: All movements thrive on expanding participation. By using humour and symbolic acts, opposition movements make resistance more accessible and appealing to a broader audience.

3. Disarming security forces: Trained to confront aggression, police often struggle with how to respond to playful or patriotic protests. They risk losing credibility when they attack protesters who are engaged in non-threatening acts.

4. Garnering global attention: Creative tactics are very media-friendly. The international media find it hard to resist a clever display of tactical action. Such stories often spread rapidly and then work to increase global support for the movement.

THE POWER OF HUMOUR IN RESISTANCE

Dilemma actions often incorporate humour – we call this "laughtivism". While the idea that humour can be an effective weapon for battling repression may seem counterintuitive, it turns out that this tactic has been used effectively in countries as diverse as Serbia and Thailand. When people laugh at an oppressive regime, this erodes its authority.

Back in the 2000s in Serbia, activists mocked dictator Slobodan Milošević by placing an oil barrel with his face plastered on it in public spaces and inviting passersby to take a swing at it with a baseball bat. The police were faced with a dilemma – confiscate the barrel and look ridiculous or leave it there and allow public defiance to grow.

In 2014 in Germany, a neo-Nazi march was turned into an "involuntary fundraiser" for an anti-extremism group. For every metre marched, local businesses pledged donations to EXIT Deutschland, an organisation helping former Nazi extremists leave the movement. Protesters and local residents cheered on the marchers, holding signs that read "If only the Führer knew!"

In Russia in 2012, activists bypassed a protest ban by setting up toy figurines holding anti-Putin signs. Hilariously, the authorities, feeling threatened, banned the toy protest, claiming "The toys are not Russian citizens." The crackdown only fuelled ridicule and international media attention.

These cases highlight how humour dismantles fear and exposes the insecurities of authoritarian regimes. And even more importantly, it boosts non-violent movements.

"Humour dismantles fear and exposes the insecurities of authoritarian regimes. And even more importantly, it boosts non-violent movements."

THE STRATEGIES OF LAUGHTIVISM

Often such actions are spontaneous. In 2019, an individual in Kazakhstan decided on the spur of the moment to hold up a blank sign to protest against the protest ban, sparking a series of copycat actions. The most successful dilemma actions require careful planning, however.

As part of our research, we've analysed over 400 examples of dilemma actions and presented them on our "Tactics4Change" website. We have identified several key factors that characterise successful dilemma actions. These include:

1. Identifying the right issue: Successful actions tap into what we describe as a "widely held belief" that can resonate with the broader public and is easy to communicate, a basic idea that is hard to disagree with. For example, the Mozambique protest described above taps into the widely held belief that those who peacefully sing the anthem are not enemies of the state.

2. Choosing an effective target: Successful actions expose contradictions in the regime's narrative without alienating potential supporters.

3. Planning a playful strategy: Humour, creativity and symbolic acts should align with the cultural and social context. The key is to choose a way to laugh at an abuse of power in a way that others will find funny and clever as well.

4. Amplifying the action: Effective use of the media helps amplify an action's message. Laughtivism actions have often spread through memes, viral videos and social media challenges.

5. Anticipating the regime's reaction: Preparing for potential responses ensures that activists remain in control of the narrative.

Dilemma actions may seem easy and playful, yet they are often very strategically organised. In Turkey in 2013, for example, activists staged a "kiss-in" at subway stations to protest against draconian morality laws. People met at subway stations and started kissing each other for several minutes, carrying signs reading "Free Kisses" and chanting slogans. The authorities faced an embarrassing dilemma – should they actually arrest people for kissing? In the end, the kiss-in movement successfully highlighted the absurdity of the new laws and gained widespread support.

Recent events in Georgia and Mozambique remind us of a powerful truth: Resistance doesn't always have to be angry or aggressive to be effective. While it makes sense to be angry at abusive power, mocking it instead can have a far more destabilising effect. It hits right at the heart of a regime's credibility. Whether it's coat-swapping in Tbilisi or anthem-singing in Maputo: Non-violent resistance can harness humour, patriotism and creativity to challenge authoritarianism in unexpected ways.

LINKS

Tactics4Change: *www.tactics4change.org*

McClennen, S., Popovic, S., Wright, J., 2023:
How to sharpen a nonviolent movement.
Journal of Democracy.

Popovic, S., 2015: Blueprint for revolution: How to use rice pudding, Lego men, and other nonviolent techniques to galvanize communities, overthrow dictators, or simply change the world.

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AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES

“Humour helps overcome the fear imposed by dictatorship”

Mana Neyestani, who lives in exile in France, is among Iran’s best-known political cartoonists. In our interview, he talks about freedom of thought, red lines, and why political satire is especially important in authoritarian countries.

MANA NEYESTANI INTERVIEWED BY EVA-MARIA VERFÜRTH

Illustration: Mana Neyestani

Cartoon by Iranian artist Mana Neyestani.

Mana Neyestani's life has not always gone as he would have wished: One of his children's cartoons sparked uprisings in Iran in 2006 and he was sent to the notorious Evin prison. After three months in custody, he fled Iran and travelled via Malaysia to France, where he was granted asylum. He continues to draw cartoons about life in Iran, but also about exile and migration. Social media helps him disseminate his cartoons in his home country and worldwide. Almost one million people follow him on Instagram.

> "Democracy is fragile and must be defended every day."

Mana, you once said that you're not a genuinely political person. Yet you're one of the most famous Iranian political cartoonists. How did you become a political artist?

It's true that I prefer to follow cultural and cinematic news. However, living in a country like Iran inevitably makes you political. The country is controlled by a totalitarian religious regime that interferes with every aspect of private life. I believe the most fundamental role of an artist, even the least political one, is to think freely. But in a dictatorship, especially a religious one, thinking freely is itself a crime and a form of political resistance.

You're living in France at the moment, but your art hasn't become any less political.

Over time, I have realised that even living in developed, free and democratic countries does not eliminate the need to be politically aware. Democracy is fragile and must be defended every day.

You were a cartoonist in a country with a repressive regime, and now you're a refugee in a foreign country. Does the Iranian regime's censorship still affect you?

In Iran, the regime was the primary enforcer of censorship and repression. When I started my career in Iran, it was not possible to draw political cartoons as openly and directly as cartoonists publishing in Western media do. Much of my work relied on symbolism and metaphor. Today, I still draw about issues related to Iran. However, the mechanisms of pressure and censorship have become more complex. Now, the Iranian regime's cyber army and various online groups use coordinated attacks, character assassination, harassment and intimidation to silence opinions they dislike.

You deal with deeply distressing issues such as repression, violence and censorship. What is the role of humour in the face of oppression?

Humour makes it slightly easier to digest harsh realities. It is also a psychological tool to overcome the fear imposed by dictatorship and repression. With humour, it is easy to dismantle false sanctities and break the illusion of grandeur.

Are there any red lines or subjects you wouldn't touch in a cartoon?

I try not to let red lines dictate my work. However, growing up in a country with numerous strict red lines has inevitably ingrained some of these taboos in my subconscious. Self-censorship is not something one can easily overcome. Religion, especially the sacred aspects of Islam, remains the biggest red line. The most obvious reason is what happened to the cartoonists of Charlie Hebdo in the heart of Paris, the so-called cradle of democracy.

> "In a dictatorship, especially a religious one, thinking freely is itself a crime and a form of political resistance."

You have experienced how explosive a simple cartoon can become, that it can be interpreted in a very different way than originally intended: Your children's cartoon about a cockroach caused controversy and even sparked uproar among the Azeri population in Iran. Has this experience changed the way you work? Have you become more cautious, for example?

It has certainly affected my subconscious. But the issue is that if we try to account for the sensitivities of various social groups and predict their reactions, which is impossible,

there will be very little left to satirise, and cartoonists will become paralysed.

The internet is censored in Iran. How can you reach people over there, and what feedback do they give you?

People inside Iran use VPNs and other circumvention tools to visit my Instagram and other social-media platforms. They leave comments and sometimes send direct messages. Some agree with my work, while others do not. Naturally, supporters of the Iranian government are not happy with my cartoons.

Are you in contact with other satirists from Iran?

Yes, through social media. Unfortunately, cartoonists inside Iran are in a very difficult situation – not only because of security concerns and a lack of freedom of expression, but also because of economic hardship. As a result, many of Iran's most talented cartoonists have shifted to more financially viable fields such as advertising.

It wasn't easy for you to reach Europe. After escaping from Iran to Malaysia, you were still in danger of being deported back to Iran. With the support of Reporters Without Borders, you were able to move to France, where you are now a member of ICORN, the International Cities of Refuge Network. How can international cooperation and NGOs support persecuted satirists?

This is not an easy question. Helping at-risk cartoonists and satirists – like other persecuted individuals – should primarily be the responsibility of western governments, as they have the power to issue visas and grant asylum. The effectiveness of NGOs depends on their influence over these governments. ICORN is one of the more effective organisations because it works closely with the administrations of major cities.

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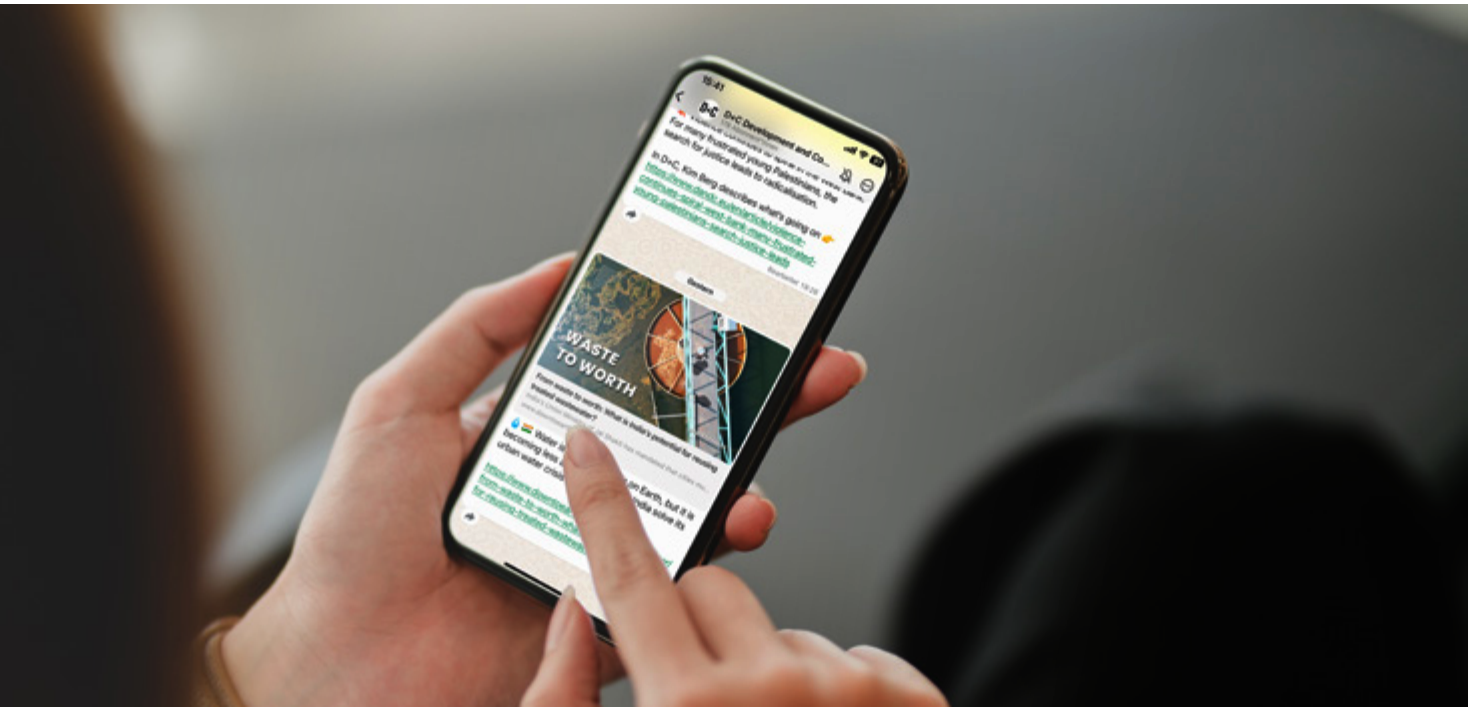

PHILIPPINE HUMOUR

“Joke lang!” — “Just kidding!”

From the TV shows of the 1980s to Twitter: Political humour has long been both a weapon and an escape valve in the Philippines. Some politicians have capitalised on this, while others have responded with strict laws.

BY ANGELO R. LACUESTA

In 2012, a Twitter account named @iamethylgabison, referring to the real name of Filipino comedian and singer Ethel Booba, was activated and soon gained viral popularity. While initially everything pointed to Booba herself being behind the account, she later publicly distanced herself from it under mysterious circumstances. Like Booba herself, the owner of the account staged themselves as a sassy but seriously talented funny girl who could easily transform into a sharp, hot-taking wit. The account posted tweets like this: ***“Question: Which really came first, the egg or the chicken? Me: The Mayor always comes first. Charot!”***

The term “charot” originated in the country’s gay culture but has long since become mainstream. It is a close equivalent to “Joke lang!” (“Just kidding!”), a very Filipino way to quickly take back something that has just been said. It works as a sort of pseudo-apology for something actually half or fully meant. More than 170 languages are spoken in the Philippines; the official languages are Filipino and English.

The use of “charot” became Ethel Booba’s trademark. In 2016, the year President Rodrigo Duterte took office, the comedian published a book summarising @iamethylgabison’s tweets under the title “#Charotism: the wit and wisdom of Ethel Booba”.

> “At the height of the pandemic, social media had become a virtual political battleground, set against an especially violent and quite tragic real-world backdrop.”

As the Duterte administration flourished and the pandemic crept in, the tweets became even wittier and more brazen. For example, the account criticised the government for its aggressive moves to hasten the closure of what was then the largest private news network ABS-CBN. It even entered a Twitter word war over the looming closure with a well-known pro-Duterte blogger. @iamethylgabison also referred to the fact that Vice President Leni Robredo, who represented and was supported by the opposition, was being harassed by an army of trolls on social media. One of her tweets can be interpreted as hinting at an orchestrated digital campaign against the opposition.

By this time, at the height of the pandemic, social media had become a virtual political battleground, set against an especially violent and quite tragic real-world backdrop. There was the terror and violence of the so-called war on

Photo: dpa / zumapress.com / Zedrich Xylak Madrid

Protests against former President Rodrigo Duterte and Senator Ronald "Bato" Dela Rosa in Manila in March following Duterte's arrest.

drugs: Proclaimed by President Duterte, it turned out to be a war against small-time drug pushers and users, with an extra-judicial murder toll that reached tens of thousands, according to some estimates. There was also the urgency and uncertainty of the Covid-19 pandemic, which carried with it a heavy cloud of political controversy and corruption.

The International Criminal Court consequently issued an arrest warrant for Duterte, and he was arrested in Manila in March. The result is a full-scale war across social media between pro- and anti-Duterte factions. Among the most effective of weaponry has been Filipino wit, which has been unleashed in the humorous posts of Facebook pundits.

TRADITION OF POLITICAL HUMOUR IN THE PHILIPPINES

Before the internet, these jokes had to be shared in person. During seasonal tour performances in hotel lounges and on TV shows, stand-up comedians like Willie Nepomuceno and Nanette Inventor delivered scathing political and social commentary through spot-on, and sometimes on-the-spot, impressions of towering figures. Willie Nepomuceno, who died in 2023 at the age of 75, was considered by many as the country's foremost impersonator: His career spanned five male Philippine presidents, from Ferdinand Marcos (the current president's father) to Rodrigo Duterte, all of whom he uncannily impersonated and artfully roasted.

In the aftermath of the 1986 People Power Revolution, the government of President Corazon Aquino replaced the dictator Marcos. During her term in office, a TV show called "Sic o'Clock News" filled its 30 minutes of programming with comedy sketches and impersonations presented as the correspondent reports and interviews of a fictitious news programme. The show heavily satirised congressmen and the new government. The sketches pulled no punches – they even went as far as to criticise the show's sponsors – but they also demonstrated that the Aquino government did not mind being picked on. It was freedom of expression in action, in contrast to the previous dictatorship.

IF YOU GET OFFENDED, YOU LOSE

Comedians did not have to fear severe persecution back then. In the Philippines, as in many other parts of the world, parody falls under the provisions of "fair use," which in certain cases allows for the use of intellectual property without notifying its owner. Moreover, in the 1980s and

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1990s, the basic attitude in the Philippines was “pikon-talo”, which roughly translates as “anyone who gets offended loses the game”. It gave comedians a sort of impunity, but also made them somewhat complicit: Purportedly corrupt politicians could easily claim that their critics were indeed “just kidding”.

Some wise politicians even thrust parodies of themselves into the spotlight. One famous case concerned a transgender women named Ate Glow who made a living performing an impersonation of then-president Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. She eventually found herself performing at election campaign events for Arroyo in her 2004 campaign bid for a full term. Though Arroyo did not formally hire her at first, she eventually became so popular that the president selected her to represent the government’s anti-illegal drugs campaign.

STRICTER LAWS

In 2012, the government under President Benigno Aquino III introduced the Cybercrime Prevention Act. Since then, libel on social media can be punished with a fine, civil claims for damages or up to 12 years in prison. This made it easy for online personalities to be targeted by thin-skinned politicians and those who keenly understood the power of social media.

Nevertheless, the art of the joke remains a powerful tool on social media. It both breaks social and economic barriers and helps to set boundaries. Almost anything can become fodder for comedy – from celebrities to well-known corporate brands and companies. Tens of millions of Filipinos are on Facebook, for example, where they diligently spread funny memes.

Filipino humour, which has seen people through difficult political times, continues to thrive in the digital age, as the example of @iamethylgabison shows. However, Ethel Booba’s distancing from the account and its abrupt permanent closure indeed mirrors the end of the TV show “Sic o’Clock News” not even four years after it began airing in 1987. The show simply ran out of corporate sponsors and advertisers, having managed to scare them away with its politically and socially critical setups, gags and punchlines. It was a victim of its own successful brand of comedy. And it had proven that in a country where humour is a weapon and an escape valve, the real world can be just as absurd as a comedy routine.

Illustration: stock.adobe.com

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SATIRE AND JOURNALISM

“Criticism of what rules, coated in candy”

True and apparent seriousness separate journalism and satire. The task of the latter is to question the conclusions of the former, explains Tim Wolff, publisher of the German satirical magazine Titanic, in an interview with D+C. He predicts that both are facing an uphill battle.

TIM WOLFF INTERVIEWED BY KATHARINA WILHELM OTIENO

How would you define the border between satire and journalism – what is each discipline able and allowed to do? How do they influence and complement one another?

Satire, I would propose, is an art form that springs from the human need to not let the seriousness of being simply be. What is, what prevails, what rules our lives has to be questioned, laughed at and sometimes even insulted.

Photo: Titanic

A front page of the German satirical magazine “Titanic”. It reads: “Previously unthinkable: Nazis in Germany?!”

The fact that satire and journalism seem so similar is probably due to the fact that we – for now – perceive the world and the forces that govern it through a journalistic lens. That’s why almost all modern forms of satire resemble journalism formats, from satirical newspaper columns to “The Daily Show”. Satire is at the same time always a parody of prevailing methods of information delivery. Thus, the borders are porous and also dependent on audiences’ media literacy.

The best journalism aims to deliver every repeatedly verified detail in a serious way; satire uses comedy and criticism to question what conclusions we should draw from those details. One strives for order, the other against it.

Yet satire cannot exist without journalistic groundwork, because satire is always a reaction to something else. In that respect, satire is also structurally conservative, because everything new is initially met with scepticism, whereas journalism can respond more quickly to the latest developments. Therefore, the relationship between the two offers a good way to deal with life’s contradictions – without coming to more than preliminary conclusions. It seems to me that the only true difference between journalism and satire is that journalism, done correctly, is serious; satire, done correctly, appears serious. If you want to combine the two, there is a greater risk of misunderstanding what is serious and what is not.

How do you create a balance between entertainment and information?

With a lot of hard work. By getting close to and stepping back from my own text again and again until it no longer puts one or the other at risk.

You are not only the publisher of Titanic, but also work in various media and formats, such as ZDF Magazin Royale, a German satirical TV programme, wrote a book ("Best of Sapiens") and a TV movie ("Hallo Spencer – der Film"). How do you change your approach for different platforms, and what challenges does that create?

Satire and comedy always have to be aware of the context in which they appear. You have to know where you will be publishing. Otherwise, spoken text differs from written text only in that you have to come to terms with the person presenting it. This is true even if you are the presenter.

In the era of fake news and disinformation, how can satire promote media literacy and improve the public's critical-thinking skills?

By staying true to its core mission: delivering criticism of what rules, coated in candy. That said, neither the criticism nor the coating always has to be high quality; clever stupidity is often the most entertaining. But that always means painstaking work: to find out what actually rules. Even if it is only the shared knowledge that prevails in the virtual or real space we play in. This is becoming more difficult in times of fake news and disinformation, but also due to the fragmentation of information dissemination through individualised news. Nowadays, many people think that satire is better than traditional journalism, because the seriousness of journalism is compromised by speed, a lack of fact-checking and (corporate) bias. But serious satirists never stop making an effort.

Many countries of the global south restrict the freedom of the press and of expression. What role can political satire play in those contexts?

Through satire, you can say what is happening without saying what is happening. That is undoubtedly a good way to lighten the burden of oppression. In my experience, however, satire can offer comfort but can change little more than the attitudes of just a few people. Real change is not compatible with irony, at least not fundamentally.

How do you assess the situation of freedom of the press and of expression in the western world?

In the so-called western world, satire is subject to what Critical Theory calls "repressive tolerance": It is tolerated because it is considered proof of the freedom of expression. Moreover, it is limited to cheerful criticism that changes little or nothing but, at best, creates the illusion that the act of criticism itself has changed something. Satire only becomes problematic – especially for itself – when it attacks the business foundation of the hand that feeds it. That's why the American comedian Jon Stewart can't talk about production conditions in China on AppleTV, though he can on "The Daily Show". But I think that will change too when the capitalism that is based on fossil industries transforms into a fossil fascism – which the USA in particular is experimenting with right now.

With regard to global digital networks: How do social media influence your work, and what opportunities and dangers do you see for satirists and journalists worldwide in this context?

Social networks are places of new understanding and great misunderstandings. You can encounter different perspectives faster than you ever would have without social media – and then reflect on clichés and assumptions. This is where social networks have an enlightening effect at best. Because comedy, in particular, works with the reproduction of resentments. And when the potential audience is larger and more diverse, you have to scrutinise your methods. The danger when comedy crosses borders, however, is the cultural misunderstanding that can also end in violence, at least since the Mohammed cartoons and the attack on Charlie Hebdo. Across certain boundaries, it is not always possible to communicate what is actually meant, or could be meant, by improperly occurring comedy.

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FAR RIGHT

When humour becomes a weapon

In the age of social media, the far right effectively uses humour and meme culture to its own ends: When hatred is wrapped in satire, xenophobia in irony and fascism in jokes, mainstream society struggles to respond effectively.

BY MIRCO GÖPFERT AND KONSTANZE N'GUESSAN

Photo: dpa / ASSOCIATED PRESS / Jose Luis Magana

In February, Argentina's president Javier Milei presented Elon Musk with his "chainsaw against bureaucracy", and Musk exclaimed: "I am become meme!"

In January 2025, during US-President Donald Trump's inauguration celebrations, his ally and consultant, Elon Musk, made a gesture that many perceived as a Nazi salute. This act sparked widespread controversy and debate online, with some interpreting it as an endorsement of far-right ideologies, while others dismissed it as a misinterpretation. Musk responded to the backlash with a series of puns referencing prominent Nazis, further fuelling the discussion.

Around the same time in Germany, supporters of the far-right party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) introduced the slogan "Alice für Deutschland" ("Alice for Germany") to promote their leading politician, Alice Weidel. This slogan bears a disturbing similarity to "Alles für Deutschland" ("All for Germany"), a Nazi motto of Adolf Hitler's paramilitary "Sturmabteilung", suggesting a deliberate attempt to evoke nationalist sentiments.

Meanwhile, in France, an AI-generated song titled "Je partirai pas" ("I won't leave"), which echoed far-right talking points about immigration, went viral on TikTok. The video paired footage of a person protesting forced deportation with an upbeat tune set to harshly xenophobic lyrics. It was used as an unofficial campaign theme for Jordan Bardella, president of the French far-right political party "Rassemblement National". Bardella has more than 2 million followers on TikTok.

Each of these incidents was met with a predictable cycle of public reaction: outrage, denial and deflection. Musk dismissed criticism as humourless overreaction. AfD supporters claimed the Nazi reference was a mere coincidence. The "Je partirai pas" song was framed as an organic cultural response, not propaganda. But looking at these cases together, a clear pattern emerges: Humour and irony are being used strategically by the far right to push boundaries and normalise extremist ideas.

BREAKING TABOOS THROUGH LAUGHTER

Far-right movements have long understood that breaking taboos can be an effective way to gain attention and shift societal norms. In digital culture, humour has become a key tool in this process. Jokes function as a shield: If a statement is met with backlash, its defenders can simply claim that it was "just a joke." This tactic, often referred to as edgelording, involves making provocative, transgressive or offensive statements under the guise of humour to amplify and legitimise extreme narratives. The example of Elon Musk shows that even mainstream figures use this approach.

The return of explicit hate slogans, now disguised as "jokes", demonstrates how humour is weaponised in far-right spaces. A prime example of this phenomenon occurred in 2023 on the German island of Sylt, where a group of young, privileged partygoers were caught on video chanting the slogan "Ausländer raus, Deutschland den Deutschen" ("Foreigners out, Germany to the Germans") to the melody of Gigi D'Agostino's Eurodance song "L'amour toujours". The video quickly went viral, triggering widespread condemnation. However, far from deterring such behaviour, the incident sparked a memetic chain reaction and became an online trend. The chant, originally an explicit racist slogan associated with neo-Nazi violence in the 1990s in Germany, was stripped of its historical gravity and transformed into a participatory joke. The song was played at private parties and public festivals. This shift – turning overt racism into an entertaining social-media trend – demonstrates how people become increasingly desensitised to hate speech when humour is used as a conduit.

Similar tactics have been observed in other parts of the world. In India, Hindu nationalist groups use humorous WhatsApp memes to mainstream anti-Muslim sentiment, often disguising exclusionary politics as light-hearted satire. Political parody songs, such as those mocking opposition leaders while glorifying Prime Minister Narendra Modi, have played a key role in normalising nationalist rhetoric in digital spaces. Meanwhile, in Brazil, former president Jair Bolsonaro himself frequently used humour as a shield, such as his infamous "golden shower" tweet mocking LGBTQ+ rights and leftist cultural movements. As in the German Eurodance remix scandal, Bolsonaro's supporters also turned popular songs into far-right anthems, reinforc-

> "When hatred is wrapped in satire, xenophobia in irony and fascism in jokes, it leaves mainstream society struggling to respond effectively."

ing extremist narratives under the guise of entertainment. By packaging racist imagery within humour, extremist groups make it difficult for critics to effectively call out their bigotry without appearing overly sensitive or humourless.

METAPOLITICS: SHAPING CULTURE BEFORE POLITICS

The ability of the far right to mainstream radical ideas through humour is not accidental; it is part of a broader ideological strategy known as metapolitics. The concept, developed by far-right thinkers in post-World War II Europe and borrowing from the Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci, asserts that before achieving political power, movements must first win the "cultural battle" – shaping public discourse, influencing language and redefining what is socially acceptable. After 1945, new right thinkers like Alain de Benoist from France and Armin Mohler and Götz Kubitschek from Germany sought to create a far-right ideology that could distance itself from brutal and violent neo-Nazism while still mainstreaming nationalist and xenophobic ideas. Through metapolitics, they aimed at winning control over hearts and minds.

In the digital age, humour has become a central tool in this battle. Far-right activists, from European Identitarians to alt-right trolls like British Milo Yiannopulous, former editor of the far-right "Breitbart News", or Andrew Anglin, founder and editor of the neo-Nazi website "Daily Stormer", have embraced internet culture as a means of spreading their ideology. "Racial slurs [...] should come across half-joking – like a racist joke everyone laughs about, because it's true," states Andrew Anglin in his article "A Normie's Guide to the Alt Right." Memes, slogans and ironic statements make extreme ideas more palatable. They encourage people to engage, share and join in the joke – even if they do not fully support the underlying message. Over time, this tactic shifts the "Overton Window", the range of ideas that are considered mainstream or acceptable.

DIGITAL POP CULTURE AND THE POLITICS OF VIRALITY

Social-media platforms have supercharged this strategy. The viral nature of memes allows messages to spread far beyond their original audiences. The more something is repeated – whether in jest, outrage, or as a casual reference – the more it becomes ingrained in the cultural landscape. This has significant real-world effects: When the young people at their party in Sylt sang racist slogans, many of them may not have identified as extremists. Yet they were participating in a culture of "fun racism" that has been carefully cultivated through social media. The same applies to those who casually share far-right-coded humour, thinking it harmless. What starts as an edgy joke can evolve into ideological conviction.

Memes, slogans and other forms of digital pop culture often function as a "testing ground" for extremist ideas. The goal is to introduce radical content in a form that feels light-hearted and acceptable. Repeating, for example, racist stereotypes over and over again, even with some kind of ironic twist or "as joke", will eventually result in the affirmation of these stereotypes. The rapid circulation of controversial memes on TikTok, Telegram and X shows how quickly extremist content can spread when wrapped in irony.

The effects are not confined to the internet and have reached the international political stage. At the 2025 Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Washington, Argentina's president Javier Milei presented Elon Musk with his "chainsaw against bureaucracy." Musk, after mimicking Javier Milei's iconic signature campaign move of waving the chainsaw, exclaimed: "I am become meme!"

> "A culture of "fun racism" has been carefully cultivated through social media. What starts as an edgy joke can evolve into ideological conviction."

HUMOUR, POLITICS AND THE RIGHT-WING COMEDY COMPLEX

Humour and politics have always been connected, but the lines between jokes and serious political messages are becoming increasingly blurred. Trickster-like behaviour – where irony, trolling and mischief replace traditional political debate – is changing how politics works.

Researchers Matt Sienkiewicz and Nick Marx describe the emergence of a "right-wing comedy complex," where reactionary stand-up comedians, satirical websites and podcasts form an ecosystem that pushes the boundaries of the socially acceptable. They change politics in at least two ways: first, by mobilising people through the "animating force" of irony, and second, by expanding the limits of what can be publicly expressed without causing general outrage. In "The souls of white jokes," researcher Raúl Pérez exposes this malicious side of humour. When hatred is wrapped in satire, xenophobia in irony and fascism in jokes, it leaves mainstream society struggling to respond effectively.

WHAT NOW?

Addressing the far right's use of humour requires more than just outrage. If anything, moral outrage can play into their hands, fuelling their narrative of victimhood and rebellion. Instead, effective responses need to combine digital literacy, strategic counter-messaging and platform regulation:

- Media and satirical literacy programmes should educate people – especially young audiences – about how humour and memes are used to push political agendas.
- Counter-memes and satire can be effective in exposing and mocking the absurdity of extremist narratives.
- Media companies need to recognise how their algorithms amplify harmful content and take steps to disrupt extremist networks. The steps recently announced by big social-media companies – such as Meta ending its fact-checking programme – point in exactly the opposite direction, however.

At its core, the battle over humour in politics is a battle over meaning: Who gets to decide what is acceptable discourse? In the end, jokes are never just jokes – they shape the way we see the world and, sometimes, change it. As far-right actors continue to exploit humour to push their agenda, it is essential that we remain vigilant, questioning the jokes we hear and the intent behind them. Only by doing so can we prevent humour from becoming a smokescreen for hatred and intolerance.

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