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communities demand in  
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A photograph showing two women in a room with blue walls and windows. One woman is wearing a colorful patterned headwrap and an orange top, while the other is wearing a yellow headwrap and a yellow top. They are embracing each other. The text 'Collective trauma' is overlaid at the bottom of the image.

**Collective trauma**

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## Focus: Collective trauma

### FOCUS

## Collective trauma

If a society does not come to terms with horrific atrocities of the past, tensions may fast escalate into new strife. People must know the truth. The causes of violence must be spelt out and the perpetrators must be named. Otherwise, a new sense of mutual trust cannot grow. Such trust is needed for competent and reliable institutions of governance. Where, by contrast, the wounds of the past keep festering, a shared understanding of the common good cannot emerge, so a peaceful future stays unlikely.

**Front page:** A victim embracing a lawyer after a hearing of Gambia's Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission.

**Photo:** picture alliance/Reuters/Christophe van der Perre





**Our focus section on collective trauma starts on page 20. It pertains to the UN's 16<sup>th</sup> Sustainable Development Goal (SDG): Peace, justice and strong institutions. Our photo shows a detail of the Holodomor victims memorial in Kyiv.**

and provide public goods – such as peace, environmental health, food security, stable financial architecture, pandemic preparedness, to name only five – we need international cooperation. Governments that mistake their undisputed power at home for the common good, cannot be expected to contribute much to the global common good. Moreover, in most cases, destructive impacts of historical trauma only affect the nation concerned. In the worst cases, they amount to an attack on humankind as a whole. The Nazi response to the perceived humiliation of Germany after World War I was to start the even worse World War II.

In Putin's war of aggression, military action is so far limited to Ukraine and, to some extent, Russia itself. The impacts are global nonetheless. Global energy markets are in disarray, which is an important reason for the climate summit in Sharm el-Sheikh in November not delivering stronger results. When governments must focus on short-term fuel provision, they find it hard to commit to the mid-term switch to renewables on which our common future depends.

## Traumatic past, lost future

Two months before Russia invaded Ukraine in February last year, Memorial, the Moscow-based non-governmental organisation, was banned. The two events were inherently linked. Memorial's mission was to inform people about the history of totalitarian rule. In the eyes of President Vladimir Putin, telling the truth about the horrors of Stalinism was basically nothing but western propaganda. In his paranoid world view, Russia is a glorious nation with only one problem: permanent rejection by the west.

Putin's nationalism does not worry about his people's welfare. Young men die as cannon fodder, but are never allowed to express their views as free citizens. Russian leaders since Peter the Great 300 years ago have thought along similar lines. They equated themselves with the state, expanded their power and ignored the suffering of their subjects, denying them any say in public affairs. Fear of suppressive government permeates Russian culture because the nation has not systematically grappled with the impacts of traumatic despotism.

Individual lives do not matter to Putin, the authority of the Kremlin does. That is why he is killing so many Ukrainian civilians and sacrificing so many Russian soldiers. He

does not want anyone to acknowledge the deadly famine ("Holodomor") Stalin caused in Ukraine 80 years ago, but is committing genocidal war crimes himself. He insists Ukraine is – and must always be – Russian.

When collective trauma lingers on, new trauma is likely to follow. In 2022, the Ukraine war was the worst example. Sadly, historical wounds keep festering in many places. That will not change until societies acknowledge the pain, assess the causes and achieve a minimum level of reconciliation. Where things are hushed up, conspiracy theories abound, with identity politics emphasising the suffering of one's own community and scapegoating other communities. No one who prevents a full reckoning with the historical truth deserves trust.

Things tend to be particularly difficult in formerly colonised countries. After victory, the leaders who fought hard for independence were prone to considering the young nation their personal fiefdom. Typically, they avoided accountability and used repressive means. They only freed their nation from colonial rule, but not the authoritarian attitudes it fostered.

In the current polycrisis, resentful identity politics is harmful. To safeguard



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Baba G. Jallow is a Gambian journalist and historian. He has recently been invited to serve as the inaugural Roger D. Fisher Fellow in Negotiation and Conflict Resolution at Harvard Law School in the 2023-2024 school year. In this issue, he shares insights from his previous position as head of Gambia's Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations

Commission (page 23). The challenge was to contribute to overcoming the post-colonial mindset Yahya Jammeh, the dictator, had benefited from.

► All contributions to our focus section will also appear on our website [www.dandc.eu](http://www.dandc.eu), where you will find other related content as well.



The Pantanal is home to a great diversity of species, including the Paraguay caiman.

## ECOSYSTEMS

## A future for the Pantanal

In the triangle formed by Brazil, Bolivia and Paraguay lies the Pantanal, the world's largest inland wetland. It is half the size of Germany and harbours a vast amount of biodiversity. Increasing agricultural exploitation is threatening this ecosystem, however. The Brazilian biologist and environmental scientist Cláudia Regina Sala de Pinho explains how biodiversity, agriculture and local traditional communities are intertwined.

Cláudia Regina Sala de Pinho interviewed by Lisa Kuner

**You come from a traditional Pantanal community and have studied the region as a scientist. How do people live in this natural environment?**

Most live in traditional communities and refer to themselves collectively as “Pantaneiros”. Many of them – including myself – are a mixture of black and indigenous. Their lifestyle is inextricably linked to the cycles of flood and drought in the region. How exactly communities live depends on where in the Pantanal they are located. Some are fishers, some rely on family farming, others on gathering nuts or fruit.

**Are these communities self-sufficient?**

They were more independent a few years ago. The fact that climate change and other factors are changing water-supply cycles in the Pantanal is a problem. Those who traditionally rely on smallholder family farms are largely self-sufficient, however. The cultivation is typically very diverse: people tend gardens with vegetable patches, and they plant corn, manioc and other varieties for their daily use. Usually they don't cultivate the same parcel of land every year, but instead change locations. Doing so is sustainable because it allows the soil to recover and at the same time there is no need to clear new areas.

**What role do large soy plantations, of which there are more and more in the region, play?**

They are mostly monocultures, which is bad for biodiversity. These larger farms also threaten smallholders' way of life: first, because they can produce much more cheaply. Second, because they buy up large amounts of land for their plantations. Especially in the last decade, regions very close to the Pantanal were also being cleared for agricultural land. Such deforestation leads directly

to the loss of biodiversity. The soy plantations use large amounts of pesticides, moreover. In a community near the small city of Poconé, we have already detected them in the soil. Pesticides impact human health. They affect food security as well: with poison in the soil, hardly anything besides soybeans will grow.

**What challenges are traditional communities facing?**

There are many. One of the biggest challenges is a lack of recognition and visibility. That is true in all of Brazil and in particular in the Pantanal. The National Council of Traditional Peoples and Communities does allow people some say. Nevertheless, it is still very difficult for these communities to receive political recognition. In addition, more and more companies are spreading throughout the Pantanal. Alongside intensive farming, more and more hydropower plants are being built.

**What impact does that have on traditional communities?**

None of these projects takes them into consideration. That is why we are fighting for their participation in decision making in this region. According to Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization (ILO), traditional communities have the right to be heard in all matters that could impact them and their way of life or their land. Many traditional communities depend on fishing, for example. Building hy-

dropower plants affects the water level in the rivers and therefore the opportunity to fish. Artificial intervention in the water level makes it impossible for communities to predict when it is a good time to fish or plant and when the floods will come. At the beginning of 2022, for instance, the town of Porto de Limão was suddenly flooded because a hydropower plant released its impounded water. Although flooding is normal in the Pantanal, it usually happens predictably during the rainy season. The residents were not prepared for this flood. It ruined all the crops they had sown. The public authorities were not very interested, however.

**Apart from direct aid, why is it also important, on a broader level, to protect the traditional way of life of the Pantaneiros?**

Doing so means protecting biodiversity and therefore our shared home, the Pantanal. The various communities here understand the Pantanal better than anyone else. They know that their way of life depends on an intact ecosystem, so they preserve it. They are the guardians of this region. That is nothing new: the Pantanal exists today in its current form only because, in past centuries, people have worked here and navigated the rivers on which they lived their lives – always considering the tides. Therefore when we talk about preserving this ecosystem today, that primarily means preserving the lifestyles of the people here and strengthening them so that they can also take care of the Pantanal in the future.

**To outsiders it can seem as if women took on leadership positions especially frequently in the communities of the Pantanal. Is that true?**

Yes, the majority of the communities are led by women, and many are matriarchally organised. My grandmother used to be the leader of the community I come from. Nowadays it is my aunt. Many women here take care of their families as well as their communities and the region as a whole. My mother taught me to play an active role. “Go and do,” she often said to me – and she also taught me that my voice was just as important as anyone else’s.

**How do you advocate for people in the Pantanal?**

I speak to the communities, gather their concerns and bring them to the attention of



Indigenous people on the Paraguayan side of the Pantanal demonstrated against the government having taken their land in 2017.

policymakers, so instruments can be developed that will in turn benefit the communities.

**What is your motivation to do so?**

Doubtless I’m motivated by the fact that my roots are in the Pantanal. Aside from that, I know that we have to value this ecosystem and its people so that it can continue to exist. My work in the whole process is nothing more than a drop in the Rio Paraguai, one of the large rivers in the Pantanal. Our achievements are only possible because many people are working together.

**What are some of your past successes?**

One success was that the local traditional communities were incorporated into the 2008 law on the Pantanal. That guaranteed many of our rights.

**Have you also experienced setbacks?**

Yes, especially under the government of Jair Bolsonaro, who recently lost re-election. Many programmes that supported people here were suspended, for example a programme for rural housing. It was supposed to help people find suitable places to live. We were in the process of gathering data for it when it was suspended. Many programmes that dealt with food security, which were helping people continue to

live here, were cancelled as well. Moreover, there used to be programmes that distributed seeds or promoted organic farming. All of them have been put on hold. Furthermore, subsidies to promote local value chains have been reduced. The government used to support the gathering of baru nuts, a local variety, and the extraction of oil from the babassu palm. Particularly the programmes that supported smallholders have been done away with.

**Are you hoping that the newly elected government under Lula da Silva will have more consideration for traditional communities in the region?**

Yes, I’m hoping that we can reverse some of the setbacks. I hope that minorities will be more on the new government’s radar and that it will advocate for them and their ways of life.



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COVID-19

# Neglected mental health

**Our contributor was a hospitalised coronavirus patient when India was hit by the pandemic's devastating second wave last year. Though vital resources were available, his experience is that there was a lack of mental-health support and basic human empathy.**

**By Boro Baski**

In mid-April 2021, I was fighting for my life in a Covid bed in the trauma-care facility of a government hospital in Singur, a small town near Kolkata. At the time, India was struggling with the deadly second wave of the pandemic.

I was lucky to get admission to the hospital. A friend of mine is a Kolkata-based doctor, and he helped me. The hospital had doctors, nurses and oxygen cylinders, so the situation was comparatively good.

Nonetheless, I saw dead bodies being removed from my ward every other day. In many cases, the patients died not because of a lack of doctors or shortage of oxygen. There was, however, a lack of basic human care.

I remember a patient in his late sixties. He had severe breathing problems one day

and was administered oxygen immediately. He was too weak to make any sort of physical movement by himself. The day went well, but the next morning he was found dead under his bed. He was probably trying to reach his oxygen mask when he breathed his last breath. The mask was found right beside him. Apparently it had come off as he fell out of the bed. At night, nobody was there to help him. We other patients were either sleeping or feverish, and the hospital staff was absent.

This kind of deadly neglect has several interrelated reasons. Nurses' work load during the pandemic was high, so many were plainly exhausted. The night shift may have been under-staffed. There is, moreover, a pattern of some government staff in India neither being very competent nor highly motivated. Moreover, people with political connections and influence tend to get better treatment. As is true in many countries, it also matters to what community one belongs. People tend to feel solidarity with those who are from their own population group, but not necessarily with others.

Some people, however, do not even trust their own family. I remember a nurse

asking an elderly Covid-19 patient why he had brought a huge sum of money to the hospital. He replied that his family had bade him farewell as though he would never return home alive. He therefore decided to take all his money along in case he might need it. The implicit message was that he was prepared to pay bribes. I cannot tell what became of him because I was shifted to another hospital soon after listening to this exchange.

The pandemic caused very much anguish. A general pattern was that people withdrew from one another. After being hospitalised, I recovered in a small town called Bandel, where I live with my wife and daughters. When I arrived home in a government ambulance for coronavirus patients, I had to enter the house through the backdoor to avoid panic among our neighbours.

The news spread eventually, of course, and some neighbours, with whom I had previously interacted normally, began to behave awkwardly. When I went out on to our terrace, for example, they avoided eye contact with me even from a distance. Quite obviously, they thought that I was a dangerous infection risk, even after I had been released from hospital. They did not understand that the virus does not spread over distances in the open.

Fear and ignorance thus disrupted social life. It did not seem to make a difference that quarantine rules were actually enforced quite stringently. As hospital patients, we were isolated from the outside world. My wife was not allowed to visit me at the hospital, even though she tried daily. I found it very comforting to know she was waiting outside, hoping to see me. This psychological encouragement helped me fight the disease.

I suffered common long-Covid symptoms. For many weeks, I felt weak. I lost my breath fast and only slept irregularly. I suffered from indigestion and wild mood swings. After a while I noticed that I had become slow in responding to people's queries. That was the case in direct personal interaction, but also on the phone. Close friends and family members told me I had become forgetful. I began to worry about mental decline. Things improved eventually, but it took a long time.

Both government agencies and non-governmental organisations made considerable efforts to help Covid patients and needy



Boro Baski's hospital ward.

families. Oxygen cannisters, free food and other important resources were distributed to needy people in our area. However, mental health care and basic human empathy were sadly missing.

### VILLAGE LIFE

I am from Bishnubati, a Santal village. We Santals are an Adivasi community with a language of our own. Our community has a history of marginalisation.

At first, I kept my Covid infection secret from the village community. I did not want to scare people. But when they learned about my plight, not only my parents, but the entire village wanted me to come home. Apparently, they did not fear I might spread the disease.

The background is that the pandemic has largely bypassed our village. Coronavirus did not take a single life in Bishnubati and the neighbouring Santal village Ghosaldanga. What I wrote about our villages in the first year of the pandemic, basically stayed true throughout it.

Indeed, the district we live in was not as severely affected as many other parts of India were. The official data are disputed, and the true infection numbers are impossible to tell, especially because there was less testing in rural areas than in urban ones, not least because of high costs.

However, one does not need official statistics to notice that our area did not have a dreadful surge of deaths. Farming and other daily activities in our villages went on normally, but there was less exchange with the nearby town of Bolpur. The comparatively casual attitude that dominated in our villages is surprising nonetheless, given that the pandemic was profoundly traumatic in other places.

I think an important reason is our approach to social media and television. Both played an important role in making people aware of Covid-19, but they also spread disinformation which inspired fear. Of course, digital devices have become very common in our villages, but our people do not pay much attention to angry agitation and sensationalist news programmes. As

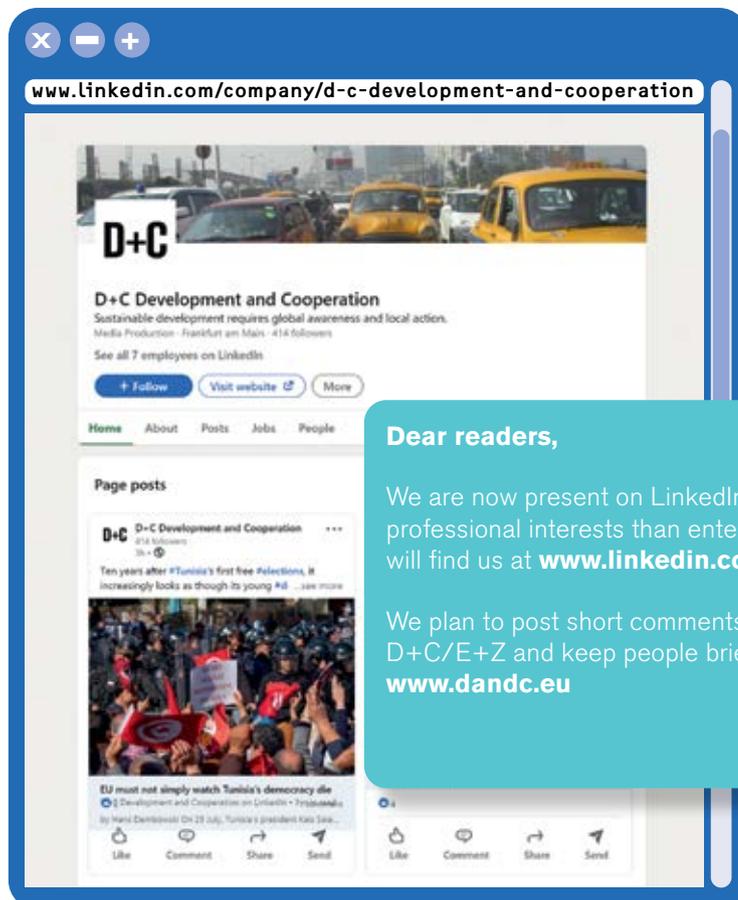
we are not part of mainstream society, we do not belong to the typical target groups of social-media or TV agitation. Our people are more interested in sports, music and games.

It also matters that the sense of solidarity within our communities is strong. Santals believe that the physical and mental support of family and friends has a great role to play in keeping people safe in times of crisis. Such psychological aspects are particularly important for a marginalised community that typically still lacks access to modern medical services, which tend to be unaffordable. There has been notable progress in our region, but many Santals lack the documents they would need to access governmental health facilities. In difficult times, we depend on one another.



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We plan to post short comments, discuss questions pertaining to future editions of D+C/E+Z and keep people briefed on important items we post on our website [www.dandc.eu](http://www.dandc.eu)

DEVELOPMENT AND COOPERATION | **D+C**



The G7 have a role to play: national leaders plus top EU officials.

## GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

## No time to lose

**History shows that, when sovereign debt becomes unsustainable, it is eventually restructured. We also know that much time tends to pass before this measure of last resort is taken. The big challenge today is to improve the G20 Common Framework for Debt Treatment. All countries must become able to rise to challenges of the current polycrisis – and debt issues are restraining many of them.**

By José Siaba Serrate

Responding to the pandemic shock in 2020, the G20 (group of 20 largest economies) implemented the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) in support of low-income countries. From May 2020 to December 2021, the 73 eligible countries neither paid interest nor repaid their debt. In total, the suspended payments amounted to \$12.9 billion.

The DSSI was quite helpful, but it did not solve longer-term problems. In 2022, the world's poorest countries had to afford \$35 billion in debt-service payments, according to the World Bank. They owed the money to multilateral, governmental and private institutions. More than 40% was owed to China, now the world's largest bilateral creditor.

In view of mounting problems, the G20 launched the Common Framework for Debt Treatment (CF) to reach beyond the DSSI. It is the only multilateral mechanism for forgiving and restructuring sovereign debt. An international mechanism to deal systematically with sovereign insolvency would be better, and Germany's Federal Government deserves praise for endorsing the idea.

So far, however, the CF is what we have. It has not achieved much. Only three countries – Chad, Ethiopia and Zambia – have applied for debt treatment under the CF, and none has accomplished debt restructuring.

More must obviously happen. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), 60% of low-income countries were deemed to be at risk of – or already in – debt distress at the start of 2022. That was twice the level of 2015. Rising interest rates, moreover, are further reducing governments' fiscal space (see André de Mello e Souza on [www.dandc.eu](http://www.dandc.eu)).

The implication is that the governments concerned cannot respond assertively to the polycrisis humankind must rise to. Failure to act fast, however, means more difficult and more expensive action will be

come necessary in the future. The CF is not the problem-solving mechanism the international community needs today – it mostly remains a vague promise.

It would make sense to enlarge the scope of the CF. Many middle-income countries are struggling with debt problems too. They must not suffer protracted liquidity problems or even insolvency.

So far, moreover, both DSSI and the CF only deal with governmental bilateral claims. This is insufficient as loans from private-sector creditors matter very much. Private financiers must be involved in debt restructuring. Otherwise, burdens will not be shared fairly and the temptation to “free ride” will stay strong, with relevant players trying to benefit from joint action without contributing to it.

Clear guidelines are also needed for the CF's cooperation with international financial institutions. It would be useful, for example, if the IMF declared that its emergency lending to governments in arrears regarding private and bilateral loans will continue even when those governments ask for restructuring and start good-faith negotiations with the CF and other creditors.

### INVOLVING THE PRIVATE SECTOR

In such a setting, moreover, the G20 could recommend generalised debt-service suspension while restructuring negotiations are going on. That would apply to private-sector loans too and thus serve as incentive for broad-based participation in the process.

A strong point of the CF is that it unites members of the Paris Club with other creditors, especially China. The Paris Club is an organisation in which established donor governments coordinate their response to sovereign debt problems. So far, Brazil is its only emerging-market member. It would be good if all G20 members that are engaged in lending to foreign governments joined the Paris Club.

The CF could then become a mechanism for involving and coordinating the entire range of creditors in the restructuring processes, including private-sector financiers in particular. Unfortunately, the CF still lacks a mechanism to stimulate their participation.

This lack is counter-productive, since all creditors, and not only CF members, deserve equal treatment. The CF also lacks proper methods for comparing various creditors' claims and obligations.

Assessing comparability is a challenging task. The range of creditors that lend to sovereign governments is very broad. It includes governmental, semi-governmental and private lenders. They operate according to different laws and use a broad variety of instruments. There is a great variety of contractual agreements. Moreover, some credits are granted at market rates while others are concessional.

Compounding the problems, not all contracts are disclosed to the public. Efficient sovereign debt-restructuring has to surmount a complex chain of hurdles to ensure the burden is shared equitably.

The current scenario is not transparent, however, which makes coordination of creditors very difficult. Holdouts have plenty of opportunities for obstruction, and free riding is hard to prevent.

More debt transparency is therefore needed. Debtors as well as creditors should have the obligation to disclose all relevant information to a trustworthy international agency, which might be hosted by an international institution like the IMF. The information would include all loans and cover amounts, terms, guarantees, assurances et cetera.

Improved transparency would support sound practices in public debt management. Making the information available to the public in general would have even stronger beneficial impact on governance, fiscal discipline and adequate risk management.



**The transition to renewables is urgent: Tunisian wind farm.**

The better the CF manages to provide transparency, the more lending policies will improve in the long run. In the short run, transparency is needed to restructure debts in an equitable manner.

### WHAT THE G7 SHOULD DO

The G7 (Group of leading high-income countries) should provide leadership. It can facilitate equitable burden sharing and discourage non-cooperative attitudes. In particular, G7 members' national legislation could evolve in a coordinated manner that makes free-riding more difficult and reduces opportunities to obstruct multilateral debt restructuring.

A good example was the Debt Relief Act 2010, which the United Kingdom adopted in 2010. It forced British-based private creditors to take part in the multilateral arrangements to provide debt relief to HIPCs (heavily indebted poor countries).

Another example was how the US and the UK made it illegal to file claims during Iraq's debt restructuring. They used the UN Security Council Resolution 1483 of 2003 as the blueprint.

It has, moreover, proven useful to insist on the inclusion of collective action clauses (CACs) in loan contracts. Binding commitments of this kind prevent creditors from opting out of restructuring talks.

Leadership from international financial institutions (IFIs) would be welcome too. The World Bank, for instance, could create a guarantee facility which would boost creditors' faith in restructured debt.

The IMF has an especially important role to play. It should update its system for Debt Sustainability Analysis (DSA) and align it to climate targets and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals in general. Moreover, its programmes should assure creditors of the viability of economic policies. The point is that debt relief must not trigger the next round of excessive borrowing.

A clever proposal was made by Anna Gelpern, Sean Hagan and Adnan Mazarei (2020). They want the G20 to establish a Sovereign Debt Coordination Group, which would consist of representatives from the official and private creditor community. Even without legal authority, the authors argued, this group could convene creditors, collect and disseminate information and facilitate negotiations.

In the past, several debt-relief initiatives have been successfully executed. They relied on joint criteria for many parties. Typically, these initiatives were improvised ad hoc, but they set precedents and helped to build institutions such as the Paris Club.

History shows, however, that these successful initiatives were often preceded by half-hearted and unsuccessful ones. Far too often, debt problems were only considered to be issues of liquidity rather than solvency. In our era of multiple crises, we cannot afford to lose time.

### LINK

**Gelpern, A., Hagan, S. and Mazarei, A., 2020: Debt standstills can help vulnerable governments manage the COVID-19 crisis. Washington, Peterson Institute for International Economics.**

<https://www.piie.com/blogs/realtime-economic-issues-watch/debt-standstills-can-help-vulnerable-governments-manage-covid>



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Urban poverty has tripled.

#### SOVEREIGN DEFAULT

## Intimidating reform agenda

**The economic crisis, that ended the presidency of Gotabaya Rajapaksa in Sri Lanka in July, is not over. Poverty has worsened considerably. A new IMF loan could help – but the IMF has made the restructuring of other debts a precondition.**

By Arjuna Ranawana

Sri Lanka's sovereign debt became overwhelming in 2022. The total amount was estimated at a little over \$50 billion with \$6.9 billion worth of payments due in 2022, according to the central bank.

Sri Lanka's current crisis was in the making for decades. The government had been borrowing money for a long time, mostly for infrastructure projects. Observers considered some of them to be vanity projects of the Rajapaksa family.

After taking office in late 2019, Gotabaya accelerated the crisis by taking several disastrous decisions. He cut tax tariffs for private-sector companies and wealthy individuals. He also abolished some compulsory taxation on private-sector employees. Accordingly, government revenues decreased. When the exchange of the Sri Lankan rupee

(LKR) decreased, he forced the central bank to peg it to the US dollar at a below-market rate.

When forex-reserves dwindled, he imposed an import ban on fertiliser. That step compounded problems in agriculture because many farms depended on chemical inputs and could not convert to organic methods on short notice. The production of foreign-exchange earning commodities such as tea and rubber were affected negatively. In a country normally self-sufficient in rice, food shortages became crippling. Medicine and fuel became scarce too, as the prices of those imported goods rose fast.

As Sri Lanka became unable to service its foreign debt, the economy deteriorated fast. In July youth-led protests swept Gotabaya away. Ranil Wickremesinghe took over as president, appointed by the national parliament (see my comment on [www.dandc.eu](http://www.dandc.eu)).

Since Gotabaya left, some aspects of life have improved for ordinary Sri Lankans. The long lines at fuel pumps are gone. Instead, there are mandated fuel quotas. Power cuts which used to last up to eight hours a day have been reduced to around

two hours. These are the results of relief measures made possible by emergency aid, provided mostly by India.

Shortages of medicines and food remain however. The UN World Food Programme (WFP) and other relief agencies have warned of severe malnutrition becoming worse. About 6 million Sri Lankans (30% of the population) are deemed to suffer food insecurity, according to the WFP.

In a report released in October, the World Bank stated that the poverty rate in Sri Lanka doubled in 2022. It went up from 13.1% to 25.6%. The document pointed out that "the poverty rate in urban areas has tripled from five to 15% between 2021 and 2022." It also stated that 80% of the poor still live in rural areas, and that half of the people in plantation areas are now below the poverty line.

The World Bank also predicted that the industry sector would likely decline by 11% in 2022. The respective figure for services was minus eight percent. Together, that would mean the loss of over 500,000 jobs, the World Bank warned. Employees were expected to see the value of their incomes reduced by 15%.

Remittances from migrant relatives normally account for 7.2% of household incomes in the country. They also declined in 2022. Moreover, public services such as education and health are increasingly becoming difficult to access. The lack of fuel matters, but protests and related security measures are obstacles too.

What is visible in terms of need, is just the tip of the iceberg, says Dhananath Fernando of the think tank Advocata. Other observers agree. While daily life has improved to some extent, what lies beneath remains a serious challenge.

### THE DIFFICULT ROAD AHEAD

Governance is indeed dysfunctional. For example, Sri Lanka is ranked 102 of 180 countries on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index this year.

Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu of the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA), a civil-society organisation, sees a "crying need for a change in the paradigm of governance". In a recent essay, he bemoaned a culture of populism and impunity with no transparency and little accountability. Points he raised included:

- Too many people rely on subsidies from the cradle to grave, while masses hardly get any government support at all.
- Politicians have patterns of always promising more public-sector jobs and higher pay for civil servants before elections.
- The country cannot afford to run loss-making state-owned enterprises.
- Taxation must increase, not decline.
- The military devours too many resources.

Saravanamuttu pointed out that “13 years after the war, we have over 250,000 members of the armed forces”, with the military budget eclipsing total expenditure on education and health.

The decades-long war with Tamil insurgents in northern and eastern Sri Lanka ended in 2009. At the time, Gotabaya’s brother Mahinda Rajapaksa was the president, and Gotabaya served as his Defence Secretary. Having won the war, Mahinda benefited from a triumphant populist sense of Sinhalese nationalism, was re-elected and stayed in office until 2015. He took loans from China at commercial rates for several

large-scale projects – an international airport, a convention centre and a cricket stadium.

All of them are making losses, and so are state-owned enterprises like Sri Lankan Airlines. Overhauls are necessary, and related reforms need political determination. Most of the top positions were earlier held by political cronies.

A staff-level agreement between Sri Lankan officials and IMF has been concluded. It states that the IMF’s Extended Fund Facility will support the fragile economy with \$2.9 billion for four years. However, the multilateral agency has set a condition. Before getting the money, Sri Lanka must get debt relief from creditors as well as additional financing from other multilateral partners. The IMF also wants to see Sri Lanka “making a good faith effort to reach a collaborative agreement with private creditors.”

According to the Fund, objectives of the new IMF programme include:

- restoring macroeconomic stability and debt sustainability,

- safeguarding financial stability,
- protecting vulnerable communities,
- addressing corruption and
- unlocking Sri Lanka’s growth potential.

Already reeling under shortages, loss of work and earnings, the massive changes that are likely to come through the reform process means Sri Lankans, particularly the poor, are looking at a very difficult road ahead indeed.

The reform agenda is intimidating. Getting creditors to restructure debts will be difficult too. Observers say that Wickremesinghe so far has been paying more attention to other things, in particular suppressing protests and protecting the Rajapaksa clan (see box). Fernando from the Advocata think tank says: “We haven’t taken any steps towards getting reforms done”. This was the state of affairs when this essay was finalised in early December.

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## Awkward allies

Ranil Wickremesinghe used to be an opponent of the Rajapaksa clan. Nonetheless, he was made prime minister by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa earlier this year and, in July, became his successor as head of state. Protests had forced Gotabaya to resign and flee abroad – but his successor has helped him return to Sri Lanka to a comfortable life.

Since becoming head of state, Wickremesinghe has clamped down on protests. Moreover, he is protecting Gotabaya’s family. Gotabaya’s brother Mahinda is another former president and prime minister, and several other siblings have held high government offices. It was during the presidencies of Mahinda and Gotabaya that the

nation’s sovereign debt multiplied, leading to the current economic turmoil (see main story).

Wickremesinghe belongs to the United National Party, but the parliamentary majority that made him president

included the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP), which is dominated by the Rajapaksas. In the eyes of Arjuna Parakrama of the University of Peradeniya, the new president is now protecting his predecessors’ clan in three ways:

- guarding them and their allies from the wrath of the people,

- shielding them from legal prosecution for corruption and other crimes and
- preventing new elections so the SLPP majority in parliament can keep power for another two and a half years before its term expires.

The professor says that new elections now would certainly wipe away the SLPP.

Wickremesinghe would be likely to lose as well. He has served as prime minister several times, and has also run for president. Many considered him a spent force after his party won only a single seat in the parliamentary election of 2020.

Wickremesinghe has even facilitated Gotabaya’s return from exile, setting him up at a luxury mansion in a fancy neighbourhood in Colombo, the capital city. That privilege is usually granted to heads of state after completing their term. AR



**Ranil Wickremesinghe (left) and Gotabaya Rajapaksa in May 2022, when the former became prime minister.**



Solar panels in Dhaka: Bangladesh's central bank is a front runner regarding green finance.

#### MACROECONOMICS

## Pay attention to growing ecological risks

**The global environmental crisis is escalating, and the damage it causes can undermine economies. A growing number of central banks and financial regulators have begun to rise to the challenges.**

By Ulrich Volz

The impacts of global heating and nature loss can subvert both macroeconomic stability (stable output growth and stable prices) and financial stability (the effective and reliable functioning of the financial sector). While high-income countries have contributed most to causing the global environmental crisis, its consequences are particularly painful in emerging markets and developing countries. Accordingly, central banks and financial regulators (CBFRs) in low- and middle-income countries are now facing the challenge of addressing related risks and impacts.

Many CBFRs, moreover, want to support national mitigation and adaptation ef-

forts. They have thus started to explore how to nudge the financial sector towards more sustainable investments.

There are at least five reasons why CBFRs should be concerned with climate change, the loss of eco-systems and the related dwindling of biodiversity:

- The impacts affect CBFRs' core mandate of safeguarding macroeconomic and financial stability. It is now widely recognised that the impacts of the global ecological crisis create financial risks that need to be mitigated. Moreover, it is increasingly well-documented that they can threaten macroeconomic and price stability. CBFRs must therefore understand these issues and deal with them appropriately.
- Central banks must consider the impact of climate- and nature-related risks on their own balance sheet. Central banks do not only use interest rates to control inflation, they also manage money supply by buying and selling financial assets. Their investment policies and collateral frameworks

should thus take account of ecological risks, so they avoid purchasing hazardous assets. That approach will not only protect their own portfolio, but also provide useful incentives for the financial sector and the real economy. The reason is that an asset is more valuable and more attractive if financial institutions can use it in operations with the central bank.

- As all organisations must, CBFRs have to consider the potential impact of their own actions on the environment. This is particularly relevant in places where CBFRs are expected to support governments' environmental policies.
- CBFRs contribute to shaping markets. For example, their prudential policies define what commercial banks must take into account when granting loans, issuing bonds or reporting to shareholders. CBFRs can oblige them to disclose climate- and nature-related risks as well as account for potential impacts in their lending and investments. The inclusion of environmental dimensions in such requirements can help to make the financial system support the transition to environmental sustainability.
- CBFRs should lead by example. Therefore, they must themselves adhere to all standards they want others to observe.

Of course, government action remains crucially important. Government policies matter most, and CBFRs must support them. To what extent they can deliver, depends on their institutional mandates and the specific country context. However, CBFRs certainly have a role of their own in "greening" both the financial system and the real economy.

#### EMERGING CONSENSUS

An international consensus has emerged that CBFRs need to consider the environment in the design of monetary policy and financial supervision. Doing so is part of their general mandate of safeguarding macroeconomic and financial stability. This is acknowledged by the 121 CBFRs that belong to the Network of Central Banks and Supervisors for Greening the Financial System (NGFS).

The tasks of mitigating ecological risks and scaling up sustainable finance are closely interrelated. The latter task supports the former. To address ecological risks, prices must be set appropriately, which has impli-

cations for the allocation of credit. Lending to environmentally harmful activities must be reduced, while more lending to sustainable economic activities will help to reduce long-term physical risks. Indeed, CBFs can make economies more resilient by supporting the financial sector’s alignment with climate and nature.

The toolbox at the disposal of CBFs is potentially large. As a starting point, it includes standards, taxonomies and metrics that are used for disclosure rules and compliance obligations. By defining these well, CBFs help the financial sector to identify, assess and tackle crucial environmental risks and impacts – and as a result, more capital will be invested in sustainable ways.

Moreover, CBFs can promote the development of new green market segments. For example, they can create a regulatory environment that supports the issuance of – and trade in – bonds that meet environmental, social and governance (ESG) criteria.

CBFs have also started to conduct climate and nature stress tests. These tests are meant to assess the vulnerability of financial institutions and the financial system in general. If a financial institution is found to be vulnerable to environmental shocks, it can be required:

- to enhance its environmental risk management practices,
- to assess and disclose such risks and/or
- to hold additional capital.

Such obligations make high-risk activities less attractive in financial terms. If, moreover, a commercial bank is systemically important, such rules can be tightened. For example, that institution can be required to build additional capital buffers. Rules designed to ensure the viability of a single bank are called “microprudential” and those that go further to safeguard the entire system are called “macroprudential”.

Central banks’ monetary policy should take environmental issues into account too. As argued above, central banks can exclude asset classes that harm sustainability from their collateral frameworks. Another option is to accept problematic assets at a below-market rate. Such central bank policies send strong signals, especially as commercial banks prefer assets that the central bank is willing to accept in principle. Furthermore, central banks can introduce special refinancing lines that make it easier for com-

mercial banks to grant loans to low-carbon or otherwise sustainable projects.

It bears repetition that CBFs should do what they preach. By disclosing climate or nature-related risks in own portfolios they will set good examples. That is also true when they adopt responsible investment principles for portfolio management.

Moreover, CBFs can support the broader sustainability agenda through sustainable finance roadmaps or by providing advice to their government. They can also support related capacity building efforts in the financial sector, raising awareness of

That fits the pattern of CBFs there typically playing a broader role in supporting government policies and development priorities. They have often taken a “developmental” stance. Accordingly, many of them are now tackling the financial and macroeconomic implications of the global environmental crisis in a pragmatic, hands-on way.

Many CBFs in the global south have creatively adopted eco-friendly instruments and policies that may seem unorthodox to their counterparts in high-income countries. With the worsening global envi-



China’s commercial banks follow government priorities when lending money.

how environmental risks can harm macroeconomic and financial stability.

All CBFs must ultimately rise to the multi-layered challenges of environmental, macroeconomic and financial stability. While the need to act is universal, the sense of urgency is strongest in developing countries and emerging markets.

- They are more exposed to the detrimental impacts of the global environmental crisis.
- Their investment needs are larger, while their financial systems are less developed.

Unsurprisingly, CBFs in poorer world regions were among the first seeking to address environmental risks. Leaders include Bangladesh, Brazil, China and Lebanon.

ronment crisis causing stronger impacts, more CBFs are likely to gear their policies and instruments to sustainability. Going forward, CBFs will have to more systematically assess the effectiveness, efficiency, and equity of adopted measures. Doing so is part of their duty to safeguard macroeconomic and financial stability. It also serves to ensure that clearly defined policy goals are met while unwanted distortions are avoided.



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A completed village health centre, ready to be handed over.

#### RURAL DEVELOPMENT

## Making a village healthier

**The German Institute for Medical Mission is supporting health care in Malawi. It has helped to build multiple village health centres in a rural area using an approach which centres around the commitment of local people and locally available resources.**

**By Olaf Hirschmann**

Health care in Malawi is characterised by limited resources, misallocation and chronic understaffing. Foreign assistance in this area has often been well intentioned. However, for decades it has cemented the dependence of the country's poorest on external aid.

The German Institute for Medical Mission (Difäm) – a charitable Christian organisation that has worked in global health development for over 100 years – is relying on the ASSET approach to support Malawi.

The abbreviation stands for “anerkennen (recognize), stimulieren (stimulate), stärken (strengthen), engagieren (engage) and transformieren (transform)”.

The core of ASSET is the old but nevertheless still valid credo of “helping people help themselves”. The programme directs attention to resources that even the poorest have access to: sand, stones, water, land, their muscle power, their social systems and their faith. People should become empowered to establish their own primary health care by employing these resources in a targeted way.

The approach can be traced back to a conference organised by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1978 in present-day Kazakhstan: in the Declaration of Alma-Ata, the WHO affirmed that health care should be provided at the local level – expressly with the active participation of the local

people. The declaration is referring to primary health care, which should be available everywhere.

### VILLAGE HEALTH CENTRES SAVE LIVES

In Malawi, for example, Difäm used this approach to implement a project in the village of Chintembwe in the centrally located Ntchisi district. Prior to its start, a team of trained village volunteers surveyed people about which health care problems they wanted to address first. The team went from door to door and listened to residents. Only then were priorities set and the actual work began.

The most important visible changes are the newly erected village clinics. While the villages in the region already had health surveillance assistants, they often spent only two days a week in the villages due to a lack of housing opportunities and good working conditions. Since Chintembwe is about 20 kilometres away from the nearest health centre, the village was undersupplied with medical first aid.

As part of the ASSET project, a total of 20 village clinics were built. The local people organised and paid tradespeople and also fired bricks themselves. The chiefs provided the land. Thanks to additional financing, the clinics could be equipped with solar power. ASSET acquired only those building materials that were not available locally.

A health-care professional who can be reached around the clock now lives and works in every village with a clinic. Most clinics are also well supplied with medications and provide the most important treatments. The clinics have dramatically improved the health care of pregnant women and small children in particular. The most common diagnoses in children are malaria, diarrhoea and colds. If they cannot receive help quickly, they are at risk of dying. Since the village clinics were opened, death rates have declined significantly.

“In the last three years, I have never presided over a funeral of an under-five child,” Chief Vuso Jere said happily. He is the highest traditional authority in the region. He describes the many problems his people faced before the project was implemented: “Before ASSET came, there was so much filth in this community. People used to relieve themselves in the streets, but now the village is clean. You can walk long dis-



# LGBTQI rights remain sensitive issue

The topic of sexual rights of minority groups remains controversial in many parts of the world. In Zambia, a fashion event has caused uproar as religious purists and moralists accuse organisers of promoting homosexuality in the country.

Zambia is still stuck with an archaic law that criminalises homosexuality and what is broadly termed as “related unnatural acts.” The law has been in existence since 1911 when the country was still under colonial rule and persons accused of homosexuality can serve a life sentence in prison.

In the past, the topic of homosexuality has been discussed in the country, often sparked by events or remarks made in support of rights of sexual minorities (LGBTQI – lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex). The country’s leadership maintains a tough stance against those it considers promoters of minority rights. In 2019, US diplomat

Daniel Foote was expelled from the country after making critical comments about a judgement that sentenced two men to 15 years in prison after they were caught having sex in 2017.

The 2022 “Lusaka July” fashion event has stirred uproar on social media in Zambia as many people accuse its organisers of violating national values. Critics say that the fashion exhibition event was organised as a platform to cleverly bring attention to the plight of sexual minorities. People are mainly bothered by the fact that men appeared in women’s dresses and fanciful gowns.

Religious leaders also expressed their disapproval. Father Emmanuel Chikoya, the general secretary of the Council of Churches in Zambia (CCZ), said: “We wish to condemn in the strongest terms activities that violate our values as a nation. This comes in view of the recent events in the country, in particular the Lusaka July festival that has attracted social-media attention and cross examinations from different stakeholders in the country because of the un-Zambian acts that were portrayed at the event.”

The comments from the Pentecostal Assemblies of God-Zambia (PAOGZ)’s council of bishops was furious about the festival. They said that “as a church community, we are alive to the fact that attempts are being made to establish and support LGBTQI activities and events to promote their detestable lifestyles. We wish to put it on record that such behaviour, even under the guise of fashion, will not be tolerated in the Zambian community.”

However, organisers of the Lusaka July festival, who are rightly afraid of being on the wrong side of the law, have defended their event saying that their records indicate no photo of a homosexual nature as purported by critics following exaggerated pictures circulating on social media. The show has been taking place since 2016 as a fashion event aiming to bring together lifestyle enthusiasts and business leaders.



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# MASTHEAD / IMPRINT

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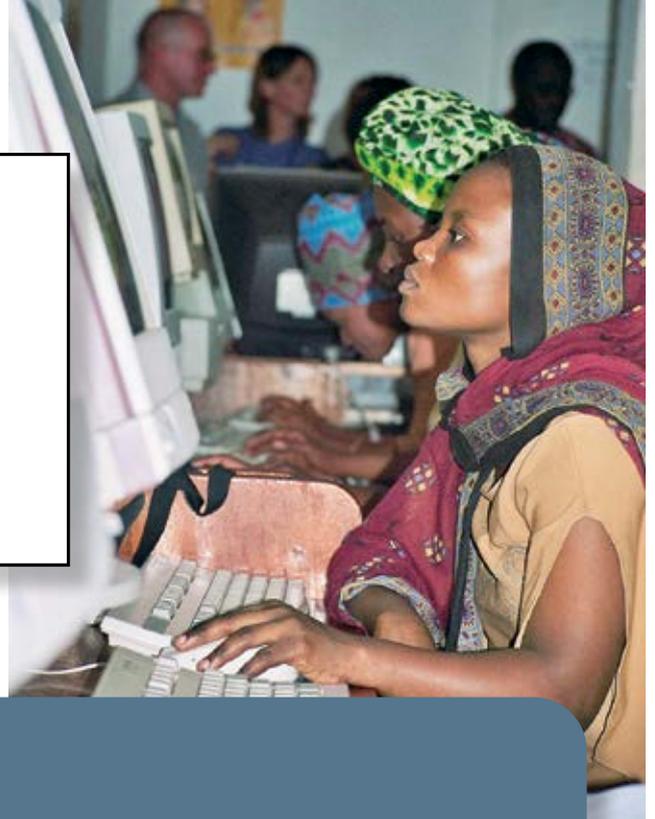
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RELIGIOUS TOTALITARIANISM

Iran's protests resonate around the world



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## RELIGIOUS TOTALITARIANISM

# Revolution 2.0

**Women around the world must be free to go where they like and dress as they please. Iran's protests resonate in many countries, and not only those with predominantly Muslim populations.**

By Marva Khan

Women are at the forefront of the protests in Iran. Some even speak of “a new revolution”. The rebellion against the fundamentalist Shia regime has generated global reactions. People across the world are expressing solidarity – as well as concern for victims of repression.

In Pakistan, for instance, women were among the first to speak up when the protests started in September after Mahsa Amini, a young woman, had died in police custody. She was arrested for not wearing her hijab as demanded by Iran's fundamentalist law. In Pakistan, female lawyers, legislators, civil-society activists and scholars were appalled. Some of us accuse Iran of smearing the name of Islam. Others oppose the violation of women's rights. The violence perpetrated by Tehran's totalitarian regime is troubling, and Pakistani women are now praying for the safety of Iran's people.

In Pakistan, most people are Sunnis, while the Shia constitute the majority in Iran. However, the outpour of concern in Pakistan is unanimous, involving followers of every version of the Islamic faith. We are impressed by the strength and courage of Iranians and disgusted by brutal repression. According to media reports, some 500 persons had been killed in Iran by mid-December. The government has even executed two young men after ridiculously short court trials.

Iran's Mahsa Amini protests concern several different issues. One is the freedom of expression and press. Another is the freedom of assembly. Yet another is the basic right of women to bodily autonomy and mobility. Rhetoric disguised in religion, culture and tradition is used in many places to enforce restrictive, patriarchal notions. Typically, they force women to dress in a par-

ticular way and limit their access to public spaces.

Things are especially harsh where these supposed “values” are codified into law, as is the case in Iran. Pakistani women who are old enough to remember the rule of military dictator Zia ul Haq from 1977 to 1988 know what it is like when an authoritarian government disrespects civil rights and abuses human rights. Zia used his orthodox Sunni ideology to hound dissidents. Today, things are particularly bad in Afghanistan, with girls and young women being denied access to education.

For obvious reasons, the protest movement in Iran matters particularly to women in predominantly Muslim countries. At the same time, many of us are uncomfortable with expressions of support emanating from western countries which have a pattern of looking down on women who wear hijab. In France, the government legally restricts its use. We want freedom – and it means that we decide where we want to go and what we want to wear.

Muslim women, moreover, are tired of being pitied as victims of repressive traditions. We know that things are not perfect in the west either. We took note of the #MeToo

movement. We know that courts in various western countries often shy away from convicting perpetrators of sexual violence if a judge feels that the victim was dressed “provocatively”. It is obvious, moreover, that conservative Christians in the USA and other western countries are keen on restricting abortion rights. In the USA, the most radical legislators now even want to limit access to contraceptives.

In early December, there were reports that the Iranian regime abolished the Gasht-e-Ershad (the morality police). Most likely, this was only a token concession without serious impact. The government later insisted that wearing hijab would stay a legal obligation. Photos from Iran, however, show that women increasingly opt for not wearing it. At considerable personal risk, they are insisting on their freedom.

The Mahsa Amini protests are a wake-up call not just for the state of Iran, but for governments across the world. It is high time that the world leaders move away from curbing individual agency based on gendered biases. Every woman everywhere is entitled to her fundamental rights.



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Expressing solidarity with Iranian women in Karachi, Pakistan.

PANDEMIC

# U-turn on zero-Covid

**After nationwide protests against lockdown restrictions, China radically reversed its policy. The leadership thus prevented further politicisation, which might have harmed the standing of Xi Jinping, the country's president and head of the Communist Party.**

By Berthold M. Kuhn

In response to broad-based opposition to its zero-Covid policy, China's government has loosened lockdown rules. This step was not unusual, but actually quite typical. Many people in the west are not aware of the Communist Party often making serious concessions fast in order to calm down protests or strikes. There have been many examples in the past, regarding environmental grievances for example.

This approach is in line with traditional Confucian ethics, according to which the ruler is supposed to facilitate a harmonious and prosperous society, without however, being democratically accountable. Even though China has no universal free elections, and powers between the party and the government are not as clearly separated as

in the west, political accountability matters in modern China. The government is also quite serious about the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Not only students and intellectuals expressed their discontent in recent weeks, plain workers did so too. The government understands that its zero-Covid policy had considerable downsides, including in regard to the economy. After its U-turn, protests generally stopped by mid-December. The big risk is that a harsh wave of infections may now occur. As especially old people have not been vaccinated sufficiently, the health sector is facing huge challenges.

It was astonishing how fast the policy changed. Only a few weeks earlier, Xi Jinping's term had been extended. Many people, however, were not only aware of recent demonstrations, they also paid attention to how other countries and regions dealt with coronavirus in past months and years. In comparison, China's approach now looks less successful than it did a few months ago. Many other nations obviously responded more competently to the omicron variant,

with low hospitalisation rates suggesting that infection waves were less dramatic.

As China's population is huge, comparing absolute numbers with other countries does not make much sense. The death toll moreover, was high in other large nations as well, including in India and the USA, where it was actually worse in per capita terms than in China.

However, Xi Jinping's entourage has now seen that the reformers who would like to liberalise the economy further have more support than assumed so far – and not only among the business community, but the people in general. Nationalist propaganda did not have much traction in view of very stringent lockdown rules. TV coverage of the football World Cup in Qatar played a role too, showing masses of happy and unmasked fans.

The death of Jiang Zemin in December made people reconsider things too. As China's top leader, he had implemented far-reaching reforms. He also stood for a more open culture and exchange with the west.

In spite of the coronavirus U-turn, Xi Jinping still stands for authoritarian leadership, but widely appreciated governance and concern for the plight of ordinary citizens. The fast response to the protests has reinforced his image in the eyes of many Chinese, even though western observers find that hard to understand. Absent a major health disaster, Xi Jinping in mid-December looked likely to emerge stronger from the recent crisis.

Nobody in China is interested in political escalation. The leadership will do what it can to keep things calm. That may even have a positive impact on relations with Taiwan. At this point, China is not interested in increasing tensions with the west. A military attack on Taiwan would have serious economic consequences. The legitimacy of the Communist Party hinges on its promise of broad-based prosperity and reduced inequality. Given the progress made in the past 40 years, that promise is credible in the eyes of most Chinese people.



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Blank pages stood for no freedom of speech: protesters in Beijing in late November.



Commemorating famine victims of the early 1930s: detail of Kyiv's Holodomor memorial.

FOCUS

## Collective trauma

“The government systematically neglected Matabeleland after the genocidal campaign.”

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Many victims did not get a grave of their own.

#### GENOCIDAL VIOLENCE

## When ZANU turned on ZAPU

**In 1980, Zimbabwe gained its independence from Britain after a lengthy armed struggle. What followed, was even more traumatising, at least in the southern region of Matabeleland.**

**By Zenzele Ndebele and Bhekizulu Tshuma**

The country's independence was won by the combined efforts of two liberation movements. One was the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), the other was the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), which is now the ruling political party.

Both ZAPU and ZANU had military wings. They fought on different fronts, but their shared goal was to free the people from white minority rule.

The sense of unity did not last. ZANU won the first post-independence elections and soon started a disinformation campaign against the erstwhile partner during the struggle. Prime Minister Robert Mugabe, who served as president from 1987 to 2017,

accused ZAPU leader Joshua Nkomo of destabilising the country. Mugabe claimed Nkomo, bitter after losing the elections, was mobilising dissidents. ZANU demonised ZAPU and accused its leaders of wanting to "topple a democratically elected government." Mugabe publicly declared that the "dissident party and its dissident father" deserved total destruction.

ZAPU had been strong in Matabeleland, the southern part of the country, where the predominant language is Ndebele. The region's people, whether ZAPU supporters or not, were hoping to celebrate independence in 1980. Instead, they soon suffered a great betrayal. ZANU leaders now claimed to be the young nation's only true patriots, though they basically represented the Shona speakers they had organised in the independence struggle. A brutal genocide followed. It is called Gukurahundi.

Politically uninvolved citizens were killed. Women and children were slaughtered, accused of being the wives and chil-

dren of dissidents. Pregnant women were brutally murdered "for carrying children of dissidents". Ndebele speaking men too were killed for either being dissidents or supporting dissidents. More than 20,000 people, mostly Ndebele speakers, died due to the ZANU government's efforts to exterminate ZAPU and Nkomo.

In Matabeleland, black majority rule thus turned out to be the tyranny of an electoral majority. ZAPU supporters had expected "independence" and "freedom" to apply to all Zimbabweans universally. That was what they had fought for. What they got instead was genocidal bloodshed.

#### DEADLY DISINFORMATION

The violence was facilitated by the disinformation campaign that smeared Nkomo and his party. The campaign created fear and suspicions, deeply dividing Zimbabwe's two most important ethnic groups.

ZANU is actually still using identity politics to rally its base. Stoking tensions helps it to stay in power, distracting from poverty and corruption, which are undermining the common good. To this day, mistrust shapes the relations of Shona speaking people with their Ndebele speaking compatriots.

It fits the pattern that the government systematically neglected Matabeleland after the genocidal campaign. It hardly invested in the regional infrastructure and other dimensions of development. Spending on schools, hospitals, electric-power provision, housing et cetera lagged behind what happened in predominantly Shona-speaking areas.

Matabeleland also has rather few media outlets. Political discourse is thus largely shaped by the media houses based in Harare, the capital, not Bulawayo, the major urban centre of Matabeleland.

**MEDIA LITERACY MAKES A DIFFERENCE**

The rise of the internet, however, gives marginalised people opportunities to take charge of their information needs in a more independent manner. It is against this back-

ground, that the non-governmental Centre for Innovation & Technology (CITE) has launched the project “Media and Information Literacy in Matabeleland” in 2021 (see box below).

In the course of four years, it aims to empower people to detect misinformation, which is unwittingly inaccurate and false, and disinformation, which is not only fake, but spread with the intention of misleading people. It is also designed to empower local communities to use digital technology for sharing their world view with others. More generally speaking, the internet is a space where Zimbabweans can resist authoritarian disinformation.

The CITE project can thus prove transformative in a double sense. It helps local people collect reliable information but also empowers them to counter disinformation with more accurate messaging.



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contribution is based on a presentation of his and his team’s at the 2022 annual FOME conference in Hamburg. It was hosted by the Interlink Academy on behalf of German organisations that support independent media in developing countries. FOME stands for “Forum Medien und Entwicklung” (Forum Media and Development).

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# Media literacy matters

The project “Media and Information Literacy in Matabeleland” teaches workshop participants the basic methods of fact-checking. It also trains them in internet safety and producing internet content. It is run by the Centre for Innovation & Technology (CITE) in Bulawayo.

To assess the reliability of information, it is essential to check and verify sources of information. When an author only quotes one source and does not include other views, a story is less trustworthy. Whether it is coherent and logically consistent matters too. Comparing the content of individual messages and articles with other information is useful too. In doubt, it makes sense to consult knowledgeable people. When dealing with photographs, one should check whether identifiable landmarks are correct and whether other

pictures show the same scene in a very different perspective.

Users of social-media platforms and new portals, moreover, must know that something is not simply true because it goes viral and is reiterated in many places. As a matter of fact, disinformation is often spread in a sensationalist and catchy way. It differs from unintentional misinformation in the sense of being designed to mislead as many people as possible. Media literacy means that a person knows these things.

Unfortunately, school education pays little attention to media literacy even in countries with high incomes, as the excited debate on fake news has shown in recent years. In low and middle income countries, things tend to be worse – and that is particularly true where governments have authoritarian attitudes. In Zimbabwe, the

party that orchestrated genocidal violence four decades ago is still in power (see main story).

The CITE trains individual persons at the local level to assess messages diligently before reaching a conclusion or forwarding them. The young generation matters in particular. On the one hand, they are avid users of digital technology, on the other, they have little knowledge of what happened in Matabeleland four decades ago. At the same time, it is important to detect current disinformation that keeps being used strategically.

The project also makes an effort to teach them how to

tell their own stories on digital platforms. Young people deserve to learn how to use their mobile phones and social-media platforms effectively. The CITE courses thus include the production of text, images and videos.

The starting point for the media-literacy workshops is to make people in Matabeleland aware of how disinformation became a weapon in the Gukuruhundi genocide. That includes providing information from reliable sources, which are indeed available on the internet.

Another important topic is digital security. There is a general tendency to use predictable passwords such as birth dates of the names of loved ones. Many people use the same password for every account they have online. Far too many share their passwords freely. They need to learn that unsafe passwords put them at risk of being attacked and losing stored information as well as money.



## TRANSITION FROM DICTATORSHIP

# Learning the lessons of the past

**After autocratic rule, a country's civic culture must change to make future human-rights abuses inconceivable. Therefore, a truth commission must do more than merely assess the facts. It must engage the public in a lasting manner. The former executive secretary of Gambia's Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC) shares some of his insights.**

By Baba G. Jallow

Gambia's National Assembly enacted the bill to establish the TRRC on 25 November 2017. The Commission started public hearings in January 2019 and submitted its final report with recommendations to President Adama Barrow in November 2021. It was a small, but nonetheless momentous ceremony at State House.

One month later, and in line with the demands of the TRRC Act, the government published the report on 24 December. In May 2022, it released its response in a white paper. For victims, their families and many other people in Gambia and beyond, it contained good news. The government accepted all but two of the commission's 275 recommendations.

The two proposals it rejected concerned personal issues of an officer of the intelligence agency and ten judges from other West African countries. They were of minor relevance. That was similarly true a few months later, when the government decided against the amnesty of an army officer, who, according to the TRRC, had shown remorse and proved cooperative. That was also true of a further rejection some months later.

The most popular recommendations were to prosecute culprits for crimes against humanity. That obviously applies to Yahya Jammeh, the country's former dictator who is now living in Equatorial Guinea. It also applies to his closest associates. Three members of his death squad, which was called "the Junglers", are currently facing criminal charges in the USA, Switzerland and Germany under the principle of universal jurisdiction, according to which a court

must not have jurisdiction over the place where crimes against humanity were perpetrated to start legal proceedings against perpetrators. It is therefore widely expected that even if Gambia does not move to prosecute Jammeh, universal jurisdiction will catch up with him someday and he will face prosecution in another country.

ing their power and violating human rights. Other recommendations concern civic education, reconciliation and social cohesion, as well as reparations to victims.

The TRRC was established in fulfilment of an election campaign promise made by Barrow when he ran as a coalition candidate against the ousted dictator in 2016. The nation had suffered 22 years of brutal dictatorship. There had been many cases of torture, extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances – and there were many related rumours. Many Gambians wanted to know the truth, so Barrow's promise to create a truth-seeking mechanism was appealing.



Yahya Jammeh's rule relied on brute force.

The prospect of taking a former head of state to court excites Gambia's public. Other recommendations, however, are no less important. The transformative mission of a truth commission depends on constitutional and cultural reforms that empower citizens and make government institutions accountable. Citizens must become able to speak up and thwart any attempts to violate fundamental rights. The TRRC thus recommended reforms to prevent office holders from abus-

People also appreciated that he acted fast after taking office as president.

## TYPICAL OBJECTIONS

Nonetheless, it was not all smooth sailing. A small but critical mass of Gambians raised concerns. Some argued that the crimes of the former regime were well known, so perpetrators should simply be arrested and charged before a court of law. Some accused

the government of using the truth commission as a smokescreen behind which they wanted to dodge more urgent responsibilities. Yet others insisted that since there had been no armed conflict in the country, the truth commission was a money-making venture for those involved and would not achieve anything. The TRRC was accused of being a witch-hunting exercise, and some refused to participate, insisting that Yahya Jammeh did not commit any crimes.

Objections of this kind are typically expressed whenever a truth commission is established. They serve the obvious purpose of shielding the perpetrators. Nonetheless, they must be taken seriously.

More generally speaking, the history of truth commissions in many countries warrants some scepticism regarding effectiveness. From Latin America to Asia and Africa, truth commissions have come and gone, guzzling millions of dollars in public funds, but ultimately leaving little positive impact on the societies concerned.

There are exceptions, of course, but by and large, the governments did not respond to the commissions' work sufficiently. All

too often, truth commissions operated well, but government authorities later ignored, downplayed or even refused to publish their final reports and recommendations. Where governments lose interest in transitional justice, they jeopardise the transition itself.

In Gambia, this risk was considered from the start. The people who ran the TRRC wanted to ensure it would become a transformative effort. The idea was to change the country's civic culture in a way to make dictatorship, political impunity and gross human-rights violations inconceivable in the future. However, the TRRC only had a short mandate for achieving its goals.

The historical context of the country indicates that certain socio-cultural factors enabled Jammeh's dictatorship. The despot obviously relied on his secret police, the National Intelligence Agency and his death squad. However, the silence and seeming acceptance of the brutality resulted from the country's civic culture, especially the wide-spread belief that the government is a God-ordained institution. To most Gambians, opposing the king-like Jammeh thus felt like opposing God.

A truth commission cannot tease such issues out if it only focuses on individual cases of brutal repression. The TRRC therefore challenged the medieval notion of an all-powerful, infallible monarch and emphasised principles of a modern nation state with separate branches of government and inalienable rights of all citizens.

It also did what it could to involve the public, making sure to avoid shortcomings of previous commissions in other countries (see box). The strategy worked out well. Gambian society has changed in a profound way. Police brutality and power abuses have not ended, unfortunately, but they now regularly trigger protests. A culture of civic defiance has taken root, especially in urban areas, where traditional attitudes are not as strong as in the hinterland.



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## The Never Again campaign

Gambia's Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission was not the first of its kind. It was able to learn from what had not worked out in other countries.

Previous commissions, for example, had often excluded entire population groups from the proceedings. The pattern was that commissions secluded themselves. To some extent, they did not consider public involvement necessary or useful. In other cases, they lacked the means for facilitating more public participation.

In Gambia, the TRRC wanted the people to be involved. Every interested individual was supposed to see, hear and learn exactly what

happened in the past. Victims could publicly name and shame their tormentors, and perpetrators could publicly confess their roles in the crimes. The goal was to minimise the scope anyone would have in future to deny that human-rights violations ever occurred.

In most previous cases, the members of truth commissions had done most of the work themselves, with some technical support from a secretariat and perhaps a few professionals. Commissioners were typically overwhelmed by their workload, which included investigations, hearing witnesses, documenting results et cetera. That often made them

less effective than they might have been.

Aware of these challenges, Gambia's TRRC was built on the twin principles of inclusivity and transparency. Inclusivity meant that specialised units of the secretariat were involved in victim support and outreach activities. In what was called the "Never Again" campaign, they engaged communities across the country. The point of the campaign was to engage the Gambian people in a conversation on what happened, how it happened, why it happened and how best to prevent its recurrence. During that time, many victims' organisations sprung up. They became involved in the TRRC hearings, outreach activities and, crucially, advocacy for justice for victims. These organisations are

still active. In terms of transparency, the commission ensured that its events – public hearings and site visits – were not only broadcast live on TV and radio, but also streamed on social-media platforms. Anyone interested could follow and know exactly what was going on.

The results are encouraging (see main essay). Accordingly, many experts now consider the Gambian TRRC an example of best practice. BJ





People commemorating the 1994 genocide in Kigali, Rwanda, in 2018.

## TRAUMA

## Listen to multiple voices

**Wars and armed conflicts cause serious traumas worldwide. They hurt individuals and entire societies. The media can help process what has happened and play a constructive role in rebuilding nations. To be effective, journalists need to understand their role well.**

By Rousbeh Legatis

According to the Sweden-based Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), nearly 3 million people worldwide were killed in war and armed conflict from 1989 to 2021. How many more people have experienced – and continue to experience – violence in such contexts is difficult to tell. Even a relatively short conflict can cause severe individual and collective traumas which take decades and even generations to heal.

In Germany, for instance, there is still a serious need to deal with the psychosocial, political and cultural legacy of the Holocaust in innovative approaches. That is true even 80 years – or three generations – after the twelve years of dictatorial Nazi rule ended. In Rwanda too, efforts to come to terms with the 1994 genocide in legal, psychosocial and

political terms are far from complete. That year, at least 800,000 Tutsis were killed. The atrocious campaign went on for 100 days.

Individual trauma differs from collective trauma. The former is a psycho-emotional response to a severe experience. It can become a lasting mental wound with serious physical consequences. It is important to distinguish the catastrophic event – for example war, a natural disaster or the death of a loved one – from the individual person’s way of dealing with it. According to Canadian physician Gabor Maté, “trauma is not the bad things that happen to you, but what happens inside you as a result of what happens to you”.

### HOW COLLECTIVE TRAUMA COMES ABOUT

Individual trauma is often denied and repressed for years. It needs to be dealt with on a personal level. Collective trauma, on the other hand, is more than just the sum of individual experiences of suffering. It is shaped by how groups of people in society attribute meaning to the events in memorials, commemoration days and rituals or

other forms of multi-faceted storytelling. They all contribute to the construction of a common narrative, which in turn can then inform collective attitudes in the long run, according to sociologists Jeffrey Alexander and Elisabeth Butler Breese (in: Eyermann et al. 2016).

The media can uncover the narratives of multiple voices and make them accessible to large numbers of people. Journalists bear responsibility as they decide how the attribute significance to certain events. Their work influences the perceptions in society.

This starts when journalists cover a conflict (Legatis 2015). It is vital to involve previously neglected parties. Otherwise, some narratives may dominate for the wrong reasons. The media must offer alternative – but nonetheless truthful and fact-based – viewpoints. In particular, marginalised communities, which often have large numbers of victims, must be supported in expressing their views.

Another reason multi-voiced perspectives matter is that extended violent conflict tends to twist people’s worldview, making them more narrow-minded. The psychosocial consequences can be serious. Moreover, it becomes more difficult to transform a conflict. As perceptions of “us” and “them” harden, aggressive stereotyping becomes prevalent.

It is necessary to put an end to such dynamics of hateful polarisation. However,

it takes a long time and much effort. It can also prove painful to individual persons moreover.

## NEW PERSPECTIVES

In the aftermath of mass atrocities and systematic human-rights violations, those who suffered must regain strength if they are to adopt new perspectives. To rebuild a society with peace-promoting structures, people must become able to imagine future-oriented modes of collective life. Forms and content must be negotiated in public discourse.

The media can contribute to peace building by setting the public agenda, if they offer opportunities to check and understand the perceptions and patterns that people use to make sense of traumatic experiences. Both the people who bear political responsibility and those who are personally affected deserve such opportunities. The

point is that the media can help to modify hardened identities and clear the path towards further change.

To grapple with collective trauma, suppressed narratives must get attention. It is important to be sensitive to constructive criticism and promote the kind of dialogue in which all relevant parties are heard. For the media to make a meaningful contribution to peace building, the quality of what they publish and the motivation that drives them both are decisive.

It would be naïve to assume that media outlets and their staff do not pursue agendas of their own. Moreover, they operate according to systemic requirements. Conflict coverage is filtered by journalists who spell out causes and effects. Narratives are thus regularly selected and shaped by media before they spread in a community. Journalism must therefore continuously be questioned and its legitimacy should not be taken for

granted. As a matter of fact, journalist must do so themselves (see box below).

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## Speaking of trauma

Journalists who cover traumatic events in writing, video or audio, must work in a conflict-sensitive manner. Media professionals must not only research the history of a conflict and its local and global contexts; they should also consider what influences their own perception and which vested interests they may be serving.

When interviewing survivors and victims it is crucial for journalists to do so with great sensitivity. The experience of telling a TV camera about how one's child was murdered can be re-traumatising and fast undo considerable previous psychosocial efforts to cope with the pain. Sometimes, moreover, journalistic practices intentionally or unintentionally deprive individuals of controlling their own narrative in public media discourse, with re-traumatising consequences.

To avoid harmful mistakes, media professionals should continuously update their knowledge of related matters. They should undergo professional training in order to understand what causes trauma and what kind of therapies exist. It is important to know, for example, that persons who have experienced torture, sexualised violence, persecution or flight must not be asked to speak about their suffering again and again. Instead, as is always emphasised in psychosocial work, the journalistic focus too should be on their strength and the fact that they survived traumatic events.

Training in conflict-sensitive journalism is a typical component of everyday peacebuilding programmes. However, not only reporters should take part. Editors and managers should do so too. Media houses should

motivate journalists and other professionals to grasp such opportunities and make sure they have the time and funding they need. This does not only apply to large international media houses, which hopefully can be expected to support their staff's advanced training.

It especially applies to smaller, local outlets with reporters who often work on their

own in remote areas. These journalists are particularly likely to encounter victims and survivors of mass atrocities, given they operate in proximity to the communities that experienced mass violence. In the aftermath, these areas are precisely where a way must be found to deal with trauma at the personal and the societal level. RL



Journalists must deal sensitively with victims of violence.

## IDENTITY POLITICS

# A history of grief

**India's partition in 1947 continues to evoke strong emotions even after seven decades. It resulted from the entrenched identity politics, which has its roots in colonial India and pits Hindus against Muslims. Partition resulted in collective trauma, deepening the faith divide on either side of the border.**

By Suparna Banerjee

The crown jewel of the British empire, India, obtained its independence in 1947. The event was fraught with the challenge of partition. The country was divided into two – the Hindu majority India and the Muslim majority Pakistan. The result was bloodshed and lasting trauma.

In 1947, then British Governor General Lord Louis Mountbatten established the boundary commission. Its task was to divide the provinces of Bengal in the east and Punjab in the west. Unlike other subcontinental regions, no religious faith was predominant in these provinces, so defining the new national border became difficult.

Sir Cyril Radcliffe, a British lawyer, was appointed the chairman of the commission. He was given five weeks to draw the border. He had never been to India, but did manage to travel to some parts of the colonised territory before deciding its future. Radcliffe tried to maintain the homogeneity of religion in the regions. West Punjab became part of Pakistan and east Punjab became part of India. Similarly West Bengal is now Indian, and east Bengal is Bangladesh.

In 1947, Pakistan had an eastern and a western wing, which were divided by the huge landmass of India in between. One generation later, east Pakistan became Bangladesh in a liberation war. Indeed, the Bengali community of east Pakistan had not had much in common with its western counterparts other than religion. In retrospect, it is clear that the idea of a united Pakistan never made much sense.

The independence of India and Pakistan was announced to be on 15<sup>th</sup> August and 14<sup>th</sup> August respectively. However, it was not until the 17<sup>th</sup> August that the boundaries of

the two countries were announced. That was the starting point of utter chaos.

Violence erupted as faith-based communities turned against one another. Hindus and Muslims who had been living together for centuries (though probably not always harmoniously) were suddenly torn apart. Houses were looted and burned, properties were destroyed, women were raped and children were killed. The numbers are not reliable, but historians estimate that 15 million people were displaced and around 2 million people died in the bloodshed.

Hindus fled to India and Muslims to Pakistan. Some men killed their wives and children to spare the humiliation of being

raped and abused by men of a different religion. Countless people committed suicide to avoid the horror they anticipated. The atrocities were indeed terrible. In Punjab, trains full of dead bodies were sent across the new border.

The crisis was particularly profound because many people were surprised by what side of the border they found themselves on. The Bengali districts of Murshidabad and Malda, for example, were predominantly Muslim, so everyone expected them to become part of Pakistan. Instead, they turned out to be in India, even after some people had already unfurled Pakistani flags. Hindu-dominated Khulna, however, was now Pakistan (and became Bangladesh in 1971).

Radcliffe, the British officer, had only had five weeks to determine the borders. The violence that followed saddened him, as *The Hindu*, a South-Indian newspaper recollected in 2021, so he burnt his papers,



Victims of the partition riots in Delhi in August 1947.

refused his 40,000 rupees fee and left, never to return.

Millions of people were severely traumatised. Many had lost their families and homes. They became refugees who could not go back. Even those who stayed had witnessed murder and rape. In both India and the two wings of Pakistan, the bloodshed contributed to defining the new national identity. To many people, the idea that Hindus and Muslims might live together in peace, as they had for centuries, now looked absurd.

**MASSES OF TRAUMATISED PEOPLE**

About 2 million dead and 15 million displaced people may be an unreliable statistic, but it stands for masses of traumatised people who suffered terrible pain which is

hard for outsiders to fathom. The American Psychological Association defines trauma as, “an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape, or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical.” Trauma persists and affects people long term, often reducing their capacities to work, support others and deal with the normalcy of daily lives. However, psycho-social support can make a difference, especially if the causes of the trauma are acknowledged by the national public.

Collective trauma impacts not just the individuals but the entire communities and societies. More often than not its impact is felt for a long time to come. Neither in India nor in Pakistan has there been much systematic institutional effort to deal with the tragedy.

The perpetrators of massacres largely enjoyed impunity. Reckless politicians still thrive on mobilising faith communities against one another. As the history of partition is not often discussed in a fact-oriented manner, collective memory is defined by what people of one’s own community say. All too often, people attribute violence only to the other community, overlooking that members of their own faith acted with equal brutality. At the same time, the historical truth is that not everyone took part in the violence – and that neighbours sometimes saved neighbours belonging to the different faith.



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# Harmful identity politics

The ruling political party Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India, is inspired by the ideology of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Its core philosophy revolves around the idea of a predominantly Hindu India which deserves a role in global leadership.

In Pakistan, faith-based identity politics matters too, though not in the same way as in India. Radical Sunnis have managed to largely redefine “Islam” as their own version of the faith, discriminating against others.

It would be an illusion to believe that earlier Indian governments after independence in 1947 built a harmonious and inclusive society. Most of the time, the Congress party was in charge. Power mostly rested in the hands of upper caste and upper class elites. The minorities remained marginalised. Governments rarely targeted them with hate rhetoric, though

the anti-Sikh pogrom in Delhi in 1984 was a terrible exception. Today, the minorities and especially Muslims have become targets of systematic and institutionalised hate campaigns. In this sense, the trauma of partition is still most virulent.

The popular adage says that the colonial power ruled India only with 15,000 Brits in the country. They managed to control the huge subcontinent, because Indians contributed to and supported their rule for more than two centuries. Indeed, the upper casts largely flourished, as they had under Mughal rule before.

As part of the colonial tactics, the British relied on a policy of divide and rule. They focused on pitting Hindus and Muslims against one another, inculcating religious identity as the primary identity. Historically, language, caste and class were of at least equal importance, with the caste system

permeating other faiths than Hinduism. After the uprising of 1857, which involved Hindus and Muslims and which South-Asians call the first war of independence, the colonial power stringently followed its divide-and-rule strategy.

The Congress party, formed in 1885, was the political forerunner in the fight against the British. It was not a Hindu organisation, but some Muslims nevertheless felt excluded. Accordingly, the All India Muslim League was formed in 1906. Congress wanted India to stay united after independ-

ence, but the Muslim League insisted on a separate state. The reasoning was that, under Congress rule, Muslims would suffer as second-class citizens.

In the years up to the independence of the country, the tensions grew so much that hatred spread. In 1946, the Great Calcutta Killings were a terrible communal riot between Hindus and Muslims. When the British gave up power, India and Pakistan became two separate states one year later. In both countries, members of the established elites controlled the new governments. SB





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Hannah Arendt portrait on display at a 2020 exhibition funded by Germany's Federal Government in her honour.

COLLECTIVE TRAUMA

## Why even the most atrocious evil can have a banal basis

Zionists have a pattern of accusing Jews of anti-Semitism if they fail to support Israel in the way Zionists want them to. A prominent example was Hannah Arendt, whose book “Eichmann in Jerusalem” caused a controversy 60 years ago. It was an important contribution to understanding the atrocities of the Nazi dictatorship and totalitarian rule in general.

By Suparna Banerjee

Hannah Arendt was a German born Jewish intellectual who had to flee Nazi Germany. As a reporter for the American magazine The New Yorker, she covered the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem. Eichmann had organised the transportation of over

2 million European Jews to various death camps – Auschwitz and Treblinka, for example. Around 1950, he had managed to flee to Argentina. Mossad, the Israeli Intelligence Agency, kidnapped him and took him to Israel to put him on trial.

Arendt’s New Yorker articles were later compiled in a book. It was highly controversial when it appeared in 1963. Indeed, Arendt was even accused of anti-Semitism and Jewish self-hatred. The subtitle of the book – the banality of evil – was often misunderstood, and she later regretted having chosen it. Today, the book is considered a classic essay on important aspects of totalitarian rule.

In her eyes, Eichmann was a criminal who deserved the death penalty. However,

he was banal in the sense of obeying orders, fulfilling his duties and trying to move forward in his career. Doing so was evil, because he was serving a genocidal regime, enabling it to commit mass murder. Her reporting shows quite clearly that Eichmann was not consumed by racist hatred himself. Nor did he actually kill or even wound anyone directly. However, he never asked himself what consequences his action had nor questioned whether the regime he was serving was legitimate. He insisted that he only ever fulfilled duties and that any guilt had to be borne by his superiors, not him. Arendt considered him “banal” in the sense of being a petty bureaucrat.

Nonetheless, some read her subtitle in the sense of Nazi evil having been trivial. That was clearly not the case she was making. The Israeli prosecution, however, was casting Eichmann in the role of a bloodthirsty monster and mastermind of the genocide. Arendt insisted that this was a false interpretation of his personality – and that he never had the official authority to enforce such a horrendous continent-wide scheme.

She admitted that Eichmann was guilty of bragging about his role, and that

he did so among Nazi refugees in Argentina, was why he was ultimately discovered in hiding. She insisted, however, that the evidence showed that he was nothing more than a diligent and efficient underling who wanted to do his job well but did not care about the implications. Many found her assessment disturbing. The public wanted to see Nazi criminals as sociopaths and psychopaths, not ordinary careerists.

## DISAGREEING WITH ISRAEL'S GOVERNMENT

David Ben Gurion, then Israel's prime minister, moreover, wanted to use Eichmann's case to illustrate how Jews had always suffered discrimination and were constantly at risk of persecution. He was interested in portraying Eichmann as an anti-Semitic hate monster.

Arendt, a former Zionist herself, found anti-Semitism unacceptable. She nonetheless rejected the way Ben Gurion wanted Eichmann to be seen. To her, his approach meant to ignore what made the Nazi genocide unique. It was particularly atrocious, to her, because it was implemented by low-level officers in cool-blooded, sober-minded, bureaucratic operations. Eichmann was a prominent example of a civil servant who behaved as though he was implementing a standard government policy, unconcerned by the horrendous suffering it caused.

According to Arendt, the trial in Jerusalem had the markings of a show trial. She argued that Israel would never have kidnapped Eichmann if it had not been very sure of the result. If the outcome of a case is obvious before it is even heard, however, the focus is clearly not on discovering what exactly the culprit did and what evidence is available. To Arendt, the unprecedented "banality" of mass murder mattered more than a show trial that emphasised anti-Semitism in order to legitimise Israel.

Eichmann had actually not formally broken German law. He insisted that he was therefore not a criminal. Arendt disagreed. Her point was that Nazi law violated fundamental principles of humanity. Moreover, even the Nazis had not punished people who refused to take part in genocidal action. Eichmann's crime, in her eyes, was to serve a criminal regime with ambition but without questions.

When top Nazis were tried for war crimes and crimes against humanity in

Nuremberg after World War II, the international court decided that their guilt did not depend on whether or not they had broken German law. What mattered was that their actions caused serious harm. Considering it normal would make it impossible to enforce any kind of peaceful international order. Arendt appreciated that approach. In her eyes, it applied to Eichmann too.



Eichmann on trial.

Arendt was adamant that a criminal trial was not about the suffering of victims, but the guilt of perpetrators. Her point was that murder – and even more genocide – not only has individual victims, but disturbs peace in society and, indeed, between nations. Guilt must be addressed, she argued, to restore peace and trust. That is an important part of coming to terms with a traumatic past. Reconciliation of victims matters too, but to Arendt it was a separate issue.

Arendt's book also caused controversy by not brushing under the carpet the role of the so called "Judenräte" (Jewish councils) in the genocide. These councils consisted of local Jewish elders who were supposed to manage their community. To a very large extent, they cooperated with the Nazis, and many of them were allowed to escape the holocaust as the reward. Arendt spelled out clearly that their systematic sharing of per-

sons' details with the Nazi administration allowed the regime to identify Jews easily. Without such, the genocide would have been harder to organise. Eichmann's transport logistics, for example, relied on such information.

For many Jews, that was an uncomfortable truth. Accordingly, Arendt was fast and insultingly accused of anti-Semitism. Indeed, she fully appreciated the performance of the judges in Jerusalem and endorsed the death penalty for Eichmann. The judges, she wrote, paid close attention to the accused and were not swayed by the prosecution's focus on anti-Semitism.

The full horror of Nazi murders was their industrial precision and scale, according to Arendt. It was only possible because people like Eichmann lacked the ability to consider the moral dimension of the orders they obeyed – and thus their own action. In this sense Eichmann was indeed ordinary, trivial or banal. His work, of course, was not ordinary but atrocious. That he was not driven by a strong anti-Semitic ideology made him even more frightful. Insights of this kind is why the book is still considered important today. Reporting from the trial in Jerusalem, Arendt actually dissected an important characteristic of totalitarianism.

People doing evil may only be doing so because they are banally irresponsible. Under a different government, Eichmann might have been harmless. What made him evil was that he unquestioningly obeyed orders, not that deep inside he desired to kill and harm others. He was guilty because he failed to consider the suffering he made happen. This point is important for understanding not only Nazi atrocities, but crimes committed under totalitarian rule in general.

Eichmann in Jerusalem and other books Hannah Arendt wrote became classics. This author deserves attention at time when authoritarian leaders are gaining clout in many places.

## REFERENCE

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Refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo pass through the Bunagana border area of Uganda in October 2022.

## REFUGEES

# Open-door policy

**Uganda is not only the largest refugee hosting country in Africa, but also among the top-five globally. What makes Uganda special is its progressive stance on refugee issues. As masses of people flee from strife-torn countries and despotism, international donors appreciate Uganda's valuable service to the international community.**

By Roselyn Davina Vusia

Situated in East Africa with a population of not quite 50 million people, Uganda is home to more than 1.5 million refugees, mainly from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

Unlike in other hosting nations, refugees in Uganda do not live in fenced camps. The country has a well-developed and well-executed refugee response framework,

which fosters self-reliance. Jeje Odongo, the Ugandan Minister of Foreign Affairs, has said: "Here, refugees are given land to live on and farm; they are enabled to move freely, access social services such as education, start businesses and find employment." He emphasised that refugees are treated with dignity.

Refugees in Uganda are indeed allocated land for settlement and kitchen gardening. They thus grow some of the food they need themselves. In northern Uganda, local communities' generosity has provided land for settling refugees. The region is rather poor and not densely populated.

In the western region, the government has made some of its own land available for this purpose. In both regions, refugees do not get enough land for commercial farming.

A variety of factors have contributed to Uganda's progressive stance. The Refugee Act of 2006 and Refugee regulation 2010 have accorded refugees with the right to work as well as the freedoms of movement and association. These two policies have also provided a strong legal and regulatory framework for refugee rights, which is in line with the "leave no one behind" approach of the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants which the UN General Assembly adopted in 2016. Its main objective is responsibility sharing by countries to ease the pressure on the country hosting refugees and ensuring conditions in the country of origin are improved for them to go back and live in dignity.

Progressive policies, which grant refugees the right to live and work in the country hosting them, are helpful only when they are implemented effectively. The Ugandan government has created a department for refugees. Among other things, it is in charge of the comprehensive refugee response framework (CRRF) with a 35-member steering group. It plans and implements measures and coordinates among

different ministries. The private sector and civil-society organisations are involved too.

Uganda's approach to refugees is both nuanced and holistic. Multi-stakeholder coordination discourages siloed action. Indeed, the government's current Third National Development Plan addresses refugee issues.

**INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT**

Uganda is a low-income country. Its welcoming attitude towards refugees is supported internationally. Indeed, its open-door stance has proved beneficial to the country. Uganda is receiving both humanitarian aid and official development assistance (ODA).

Given that the country has been struggling with its fight against poverty and providing basic amenities to its citizens, donor funding matters very much. It often benefits both refugees and local communities.

For example, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) is running a project which is designed to build local infrastructure, which serves everyone living in a given area. The World Bank too is making efforts to improve local-level development opportunities. These projects are meant to ease pressure on the country and the people hosting refugees.

Donors generally appreciate Uganda's welcoming attitude to refugees. For example, the European Union made €200 million available over four years. The hosting of refugees also has downsides. Detrimental impacts on the environment have increased. For example, the demand for fire wood has grown and is contributing to deforestation.

The impacts of climate change, moreover, are affecting agriculture and food prices are rising internationally. Conflicts over resources occur regularly. Aid flows are not keeping up with the need, and Uganda's

refugee-friendly programmes tend to be underfunded.

Uganda nonetheless continues to practice its open-door policy. It is doing the international community a service. People who flee from strife-torn areas to foreign countries need a place where they can live in dignity – and global problems are compounded if they do not find one. Inclusive policies are thus necessary, and they must pay attention to the special needs of traumatised people who have experienced brutal violence.

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## Increasingly self-reliant women

At present, 52 percent of the refugee population in Uganda are women and 29% are children. According to the national statistics, one in two refugee households are headed by women. The respective share for Ugandan households is one in three. Accordingly, many refugee response interventions are geared towards empowering women.

The bilateral German development agency GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) is supporting inclusive socio-economic opportunities for refugees and host communities in six West Nile districts. The project is cofunded by the European Union Trust Fund and Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

It provides access to financial services and markets, offers capacity building and

skills training. The idea is to generate income and employment through farming and off-farm activities. Off-farm activities include agro-processing, branding and packaging, as well as the launching of start-ups (MSME – micro, small and medium enterprises).

To date, about 3000 women have received vocational training, while more than 4500 women are members of farmer groups trained in good agronomic practice and climate smart agriculture. About half of the project's participants are refugees and the other half consists of members of the host community. Women have created their own support groups which enable economic growth and support. Others get psycho-social support from the groups.

The focus of the project is to create an enabling environment for self-reliance and

resilience among refugees and host communities. The point is that an emergency response is not enough, as long-term development is needed too. Empowering members of the refugee and the host communities serves both purposes. Addressing both communities helps to avoid the worsening of disparities. To some extent, it also addresses the problem of "othering" in the sense of aggressive identity politics.

Experience shows that this approach encourages women to step out of their traditional roles. Indeed, a considerable number are now active in in male-dominated trades like plumbing, carpentry and welding/metal fabrication. For those who have ventured into these trades, it has proven easy to find jobs. Employment is harder to get in traditionally female trades like hairdressing or tailoring. RV



The GIZ project provides women with vocational training.

Valuable ecosystems like the Pantanal need better protection.

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