

# D+C

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DEVELOPMENT AND  
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urgently needs

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## FOCUS

# Tourism rebounding

Around the world, tourism is recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic. It is boosting national economies, but its downsides are reappearing too, including detrimental impacts on ecosystems and societies. As prosperity increases, tourism will probably do so to. The implication is that it must be made environmentally and socially sustainable, in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Grassroots communities must be empowered to participate in decision-making.

Title: Kitesurfers and Maasai in Zanzibar.  
Photo: ko





Our focus section on tourism rebounding starts on page 19. It pertains to the UN's 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Sustainable Development Goal (SDG): Decent work and economic growth and Industry, innovation and infrastructure. It also has a bearing on other SDGs.

# Make tourism environmentally and socially sustainable

The Covid-19 pandemic severely disrupted tourism around the world. International travels declined by more than 70%. Hotels and resorts had to shut down; many events were cancelled. Masses of people who normally depend on tourism lost their livelihoods.

In the meantime, a new upturn has set in. In the first quarter of 2024, international arrivals of overnight visitors climbed back to 97% of the level recorded in 2019, according to the UN. Global tourism is expected to fully recover to pre-pandemic levels over the course of the year.

Regional disparities are striking, however. The numbers are recovering faster in the Middle East than in Asia, and nations with high incomes are making faster progress than those with middle incomes. In least-developed countries, the rebound is the least evident. In many cases, this crucially important sector thus still looks qui-

*„Tourism is still far from climate neutral. The irony is that popular destinations are exposed to the impacts of global heating.“*

te fragile. Foreign visitors, after all, mean an inflow of foreign exchange, and their purchasing power translates into local people's incomes.

Middle-class consumerism is evolving in some emerging markets, so domestic tourism is becoming increasingly important. Infrastructure is being built in disadvantaged regions, and it can serve other purposes than merely tourism. Examples include transport routes, water pipes and power grids.

As tourism is rebounding around the world, its downsides are reappearing too. Where new facilities are planned and built, ecosystems often deteriorate. When prosperous people opt for destinations in poorer areas and financiers make investments there accordingly, real estate prices tend to go up and social disparities tend to become wider. Local people are often at a disadvantage. In some places, moreover, the impacts of mass tourism are already so serious that policymakers are considering restrictions in order to control the damage in both environmental and social terms.

Carbon emissions, moreover, obviously increase in step with expanding air travel. Though general awareness of climate issues has grown, tourism is still far from climate neutral. The irony is that popular destinations are exposed to the impacts of global heating, including, for example, the rise of the sea level. A recent UN survey showed that extreme-weather events are among the factors that are holding back tourism, right behind higher transport and accommodation costs and concern for the economic environment.

As prosperity increases, tourism will probably do so too. The implication is that it must be made environmentally and socially sustainable. We must prevent harm to people as well as ecosystems. Smart certification systems can serve that purpose, and so can policies geared to the common good at the local level. Grassroots communities must be empowered to participate in decision-making in ways that ensure they get their fair share of the benefits.

Managed well, tourism can keep serving important functions such as

- allowing people of most different backgrounds to meet,
- facilitating education and recreation and
- creating opportunities for disadvantaged communities in disadvantaged regions.

Unsustainable tourism, by contrast, will destroy ecosystems and devastate local communities and their cultures. It will thus, sooner or later, erode what it needs to thrive.



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# Farewell, printed D+C – [www.dandc.eu](http://www.dandc.eu) will carry on

Digitalisation is progressing fast. All fields of publishing are affected – print, audio, video. Content is increasingly distributed online, and, in the case of many publications, exclusively so. D+C/E+Z is no exception. Our final print edition will go to press in November; and the second last is currently being distributed.

Phasing out the print issues makes sense for several reasons. Online distribution is fast, affordable, reliable and comparatively environment-friendly. Even airmail services can be excruciatingly slow. It may take three months for D+C/E+Z to be delivered in an international hub like Nairobi. Some D+C/E+Z copies get lost in the mail. Our carbon footprint will become much smaller, and our paper demand will be reduced almost completely.

And yet I feel sad. I personally am not very fond of reading online. Indeed, empirical research shows that it tends to be more superficial. Hyperlinks, advertising, message notifications and other internet-inherent distractions make it more difficult to focus. Reading on paper may also be less demanding physically, as staring into a screen on a desk or on a small phone often becomes uncomfortable rather fast.

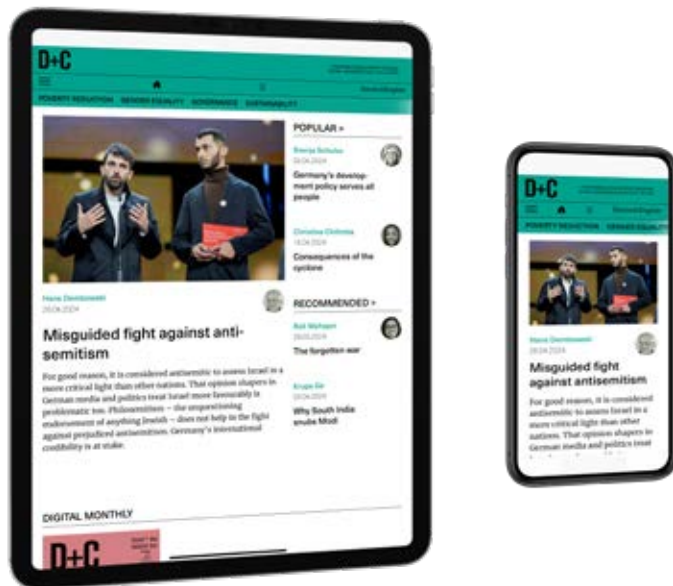
What bothers me as a journalist, moreover, is that we must increasingly cater to algorithms instead of only facilitating easy reading by human beings. Search engines – and especially Google – increasingly force our profession to use the popular buzzwords they reward. Doing so boosts journalists' outreach, though it may not serve our reasoning. Some commonly used terms are problematic. "Global south", for example, suggests that all countries that suffered under colonialism are now cooperating in a sense of solidarity. That narrative suits China's diplomats. However, the People's Republic often proves to be a very difficult partner, for example, when it comes to debt relief for an African or South Asian country.

We print journalists used to pay close attention to the ideological connotations of a term. Today, we all are pressed to use the jargon that search engines recognise. As our regular readers, you will probably have noticed that we are doing our best not to give in to that growing pressure too much. Sloppy wording, after all, is incompatible with our mandate, which is to facilitate serious international debate with the means of independent journalism.

As the long-term readers among you will also know, we have been improving our digital outreach continuously in the past two decades.

- We relaunched our website [www.dandc.eu](http://www.dandc.eu) three times.
- We started to publish fresh content daily 15 years ago.
- We also built a presence on social media platforms.
- We have only recently relaunched our newsletter once again.
- We introduced our Digital Monthly, a PDF with the same layout as the print issue, but 50 % more content, in 2015.
- We have recently launched a new WhatsApp channel.

We thus offer a broad range of options for you to follow what we do. In my experience, the Digital Monthly, of which the July 2024 issue is presently on your screen, allows for a similar sense of deep reading as printed products do. Indeed, my personal approach to online media includes subscribing to e-paper versions of my favourite daily papers and reading them offline, if possible, and preferably



snuggled up comfortably on a couch. Our Digital Monthly, moreover, can easily be stored and read offline, which should prove useful in places where Internet connectivity is still shaky. The PDF can also be forwarded to other people. Intelligence services find it harder to monitor a short download than to take note of users who spend a long time on any specific website. That matters in places where governments limit free media.

We will further improve our digital outreach, but our mandate will stay the same. Our job is to foster debate on how to achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goals internationally. We hope you will keep reading our content, and we will do our best to make it easy for you.

Please help us to modernise our digital outreach in ways that suit your needs. It will take you five minutes. We are currently running an anonymous online survey regarding our users' preferences. Please do take part – just scan the QR-code or go to:

<https://faz-bm.limesurvey.net/284583?lang=en>



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Gro Harlem Brundtland presenting the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development in London in 1987.

SDGS

## The agenda humankind needs

**As new experiences are made, development thinking keeps changing – slowly, but continuously. Sustainability issues have attracted increasing attention over the decades, but they still do not get enough.**

By Iwan J. Azis

“Development is a multidimensional undertaking to achieve a higher quality of life for all people.” This definition was included in “Our common future”, the 1987 report of the World Commission on Environment and Development. The Commission had been established by the UN and was led by Gro Harlem Brundtland, the then prime minister of Norway.

What the term “quality of life” means exactly, is impossible to say, however. How people assess their personal quality of life clearly depends on their individual preferences after all. The things that matter include happiness, self-esteem, respect, dignity, prosperity, personal capabilities and freedom of choices. Academic debates on

these interrelated issues, however, typically remained fuzzy and had little impact on public policy.

Nonetheless, work done by Amartya Sen, who won the Nobel Prize in 1998, and others did make a difference. The approach they took to measuring the quality of life relied on a broad range of indicators, covering economic factors (such as incomes, jobs and productivity), social factors (most importantly health and education) and political factors (like democracy, access and freedom).

The idea is that people’s quality of life depends on important matters. Poor people’s quality of life obviously thus needs improvement in particular. What is required is:

- policies to boost production and equitable distribution, as well as
- efforts to enlarge people’s freedom, options and capabilities, in particular through education and healthcare.

Based on the work of Sen and like-minded scholars, experts have been ag-

gregating data for relevant indicators and designing composite development indices. The UN Development Programme has launched several such indices in the past three decades, including the Human Development Index (HDI) and the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI). The World Bank came up with the Human Capital Index (HCI).

The double intention of these efforts is:

- to capture emerging development issues (environment, health, gender, personal network et cetera) and
- to better evaluate the process and status of development over time and across different geographical areas.

The expert community appreciates the UNDP indices, and they also get wider international attention. They have an impact on policymaking. Unfortunately, however, the level and growth of gross domestic product (GDP) still remain the most widely used indicators for “development”.

The World Bank, for example, keeps emphasising growth, as the Concept Note for its not-yet published World Development Report 2024 shows. Its message can be roughly summarised as follows: countries should first become integral parts of international supply chains and then focus on innovation. The impacts of distribution

issues on social justice do not get much attention.

## BIGGER, NOT BETTER

Development and growth are not the same, however. When something grows, it gets bigger, but when something develops, it is supposed to get better. Producing the same level of output with less input is obviously better, especially if the quality of output improves. Achieving higher growth by using more resources, however, is not inherently better. It may actually be worse if it means more pollution and deeper social disparities.

The costs of resource depletion and pollution are often not accounted for in standard cost-benefit analyses. These costs are born neither by the sellers nor the buyers of the goods or services concerned. Economists therefore speak of “negative externalities”. The burden falls on other people or the state as representative of the general public. Environmental destruction, moreover, has an impact on inter-generational justice. Decisions that ignore relevant concerns will leave future generations with less resources available to them than the present generation is enjoying.

Economic growth that depletes resources and harms ecosystems, is unsustainable. Ignoring environmental externalities and social justice gives us a false idea of growth improving people’s quality of life. Therefore, the above-mentioned Brundtland Report emphasised that development must be sustainable. This insight inspired the Earth Summit in 1992.

## HARMFUL SHORT-TERMISM

When policymakers’ plans take account of environmental externalities, the long-term results will obviously be better, though short-term growth numbers may be lower. Unfortunately, most office holders tend to want fast success and do not worry much about the distant future. That is the most important reason for progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which the UN adopted in 2015, remaining rather slow.

A minor, but still relevant reason is that official development assistance – or aid for short – is not up to task. What technocrats call “development cooperation” is

“New ideas and approaches in development may replace current ones. It is striking, however, that ideas associated with Brundtland and Sen have taken root both in expert debate and political discourse.”

too often short-sighted and self-centred (see box next page).

The 17 SDGs amount to an agenda of concerted efforts to build an inclusive, sustainable and resilient future for humankind on this planet. The three core dimensions of sustainability are economic, social and environmental. That is in line with the UNDP development indices discussed above.

The SDG agenda has some limitations, including the fact that it is not legally binding. Despite some shortcomings, however, it certainly makes sense because it can inspire action. Moreover, it helps us see how far we are lagging behind what is needed.

SDG-related action must speed up. Humankind has no time to lose because global heating and the erosion of biodiversity are causing irreversible harm. Unfortunately, the SDGs have not become the universal agenda that guides governments. Two trends compound this problem:

- International organisations are doing too little. Even the multilateral institutions that have officially endorsed the SDGs typically cherry-pick sectors that fit their interests. What is needed instead is cross-cutting action that links the economic, social, and environmental components of sustainable development.
- The international community is splintering into blocs, with geopolitical rivalry causing increasing geoeconomic fragmentation. Even in areas where international cooperation had been working fairly well (including trade, foreign direct investment, capital and technology), national-security concerns are increasingly being prioritised.

Development thinking has been evolving since the end of World War II. It reflects experiences made and takes into account novel challenges. Development objectives are therefore not fixed permanently, and

the strategies, institutions and policies that are meant to achieve them also change over time.

After World War II, many advanced countries focused on reconstruction, and the objective of achieving higher growth reflected their current needs. A set of growth-supporting policies was developed, based on theories and models that fit their situation.

In the 1950s and 1960s, North America, Western Europe and Japan relied on decisive state interventions in markets. When, from the 1970s on, stagnation and inflation began to haunt these economies, the focus shifted to stabilisation and structural adjustment with an emphasis on free market dynamics. In the 1990s, development policies were dominated by liberalisation, deregulation and issues of governance and institutions. Trade and export-oriented strategies gained attention, they were closely associated with growth and structural change.

For a long time, poverty alleviation was largely seen as a trickle-down result of growth. From the early 1990s on, however, the UNDP indices gained some traction. Theories became more complex, and other kinds of evidence were taken into account. The old classical thesis that inequality spurs growth was challenged, as data actually revealed a negative relation between the two. Moreover, the idea took hold that blueprints do not work. Rather than simply following the example of advanced nations, every developing country needs to find its own policy mix to deal with its particular situation. National ownership of policies, moreover, matters very much. Experience shows that, without it, foreign-funded development efforts will fail.

Meanwhile, the adoption of digital technology is increasing fast. It will probably have profound effects on people’s activities and quality of life. New ideas and approaches in development may replace current ones. It is striking, however, that ideas associated with Brundtland and Sen have taken root in both expert debate and political discourse.



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## Problematic but indispensable aid

Development aid is supposed to facilitate the transfer of prosperity and assist developing countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Despite record levels, aid flows often fail to deliver the intended results.

Official development assistance from the developed to the developing countries has steadily increased, reaching \$223 billion in 2023 according to the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). However, problems with aid and its delivery are widely acknowledged. They occur on both the donor and recipient side. The dynamics show that the politically correct term “development cooperation” is a misnomer.

On donor governments’ side, problems of coordination, bureaucracy and fragmentation are common. A large number of intermediaries and agencies are involved. Disparate actors have different interests, and the results often include uncoordinated delivery of aid and auditing disputes. The multitude of development institutions that all use administrative rules of their own put a severe strain on the government systems of recipient countries. All too often, moreover, donor governments have clear ideas of what kind of programmes they want and do not want to support.

On the side of recipient countries, limited capacities to plan, weak governance systems and institutional bottlenecks

constrain aid effectiveness. Systemic challenges include over-ambitious targets, unrealistic timeframes and budget constraints. Obviously, the self-interest of policymakers plays a role too.

Efforts to improve aid effectiveness have been unsatisfying. Part of the problem is that it is very difficult to tackle long-term issues of governance and institution building. In this context, it matters very much that the relationship between donor and recipient governments is asymmetric. Donor governments respond to their own constituencies, rather than to the people who are in need in recipient countries. The result is a serious lack of accountability for what really matters (see main essay). In particular, long-term development requirements often become an after-thought.

Problems associated with development lending also abound. Among several issues, low repayment capacity of developing countries is a most serious one. This emerged especially on the back of the Covid-19 pandemic. Trade stalled, supply-chains were disrupted, and commodity prices fell. Increased sovereign-debt burdens curtail the development capacities of the countries concerned. If meaningful debt restructuring and other relief programmes cannot be arranged, the quality of life of millions of their citizens is likely to be jeopardised.

At the same time, the call for more aid (with a shift from loans to a larger component of grants) is louder than ever, not least because the international community must make up lost ground after the Covid pandemic. Humanitarian needs are mounting in many developing countries due to wars, disrupted supply chains and climate emergencies. Last year alone, close to 800 million people across the world were facing hunger, including a 10% increase in the number of people facing life-threatening hunger.

The good news is that aid is not as dysfunctional as some critics argue. No, it does not inherently lead to aid dependency. The plain fact that many countries have grown out of aid eligibility shows that the inflow of foreign funding is not simply a trap that corrupts recipient governments and thwarts their nations’ development. It is also true, however, that the less successful countries that remain eligible face greater challenges than the successful ones. Accordingly, it is inherently harder for international agencies to deliver the expected results there. IJA



Where development schemes are nationally owned, aid works: a three-year old playing with her mother’s cell phone during a storm in a Bangladeshi cyclone shelter in 2022.



Artists from Uganda perform at a crafts fair in Faridabad, India.

#### CULTURAL INDUSTRIES

## Investing in culture

**Uganda's vibrant arts scene has recovered from the Covid-19 pandemic, but it does not receive enough support. Due to a lack of institutional programmes, young talent is self-taught.**

By Anna Adima

After a long break imposed by one of the world's strictest coronavirus lockdowns, Uganda's arts scene sprang back to life in 2022. Today, artists offer a sparkling programme of dance, theatre, film, visual arts and literature. In the capital Kampala, the Njabala Foundation stages an annual exhibition on International Women's Day exclusively for female artists, this year on the theme of grief. The Yenze Theatre Conservatoire gives much-applauded performances of classic Broadway musicals at the National Theatre in Kampala. The African Writers Trust organises workshops and skill-building opportunities for writers, and the Tebere Arts Foundation hosts the annual Kampala International Theatre Festival.

However, the lively arts scene lacks funding, particularly for long-term structural support. The Ugandan government's priorities are STEM – science, technology, engineering and mathematics – and that emphasis is reflected in schools: science teachers earn more than those teaching humanities. Preservation of the country's cultural heritage is largely a topic for discussion in the context of promoting tourism.

Support comes primarily from the western cultural institutions British Council, Alliance Française and Goethe-Zentrum (a cooperation partner of the Goethe-Institut). Project-based funding is also provided by the EU, the Dutch organisations Prince Claus Fund and DOEN Foundation and private initiatives such as the Mastercard Foundation.

Unlike Nigeria and South Africa, Uganda has comparatively few artists who are active in the continental and international scene. Ugandan artists are not lacking in talent, however. What they do lack are opportunities to develop and hone their skills.

For many, careers peak early due to a lack of professional training.

Apart from the Department of Performing Arts and Film at Makerere University, art academies and university courses are few and far between in Uganda. Ambitious young artists often put together their own training programmes – from Youtube tutorials and occasional workshops with international artists, organised by one of the western cultural organisations. Only a handful who are not hindered by visa restrictions are able to travel abroad for further training, for example by participating in the International Forum of the Berliner Festspiele, a platform for global exchange between theatre makers supported by the Goethe-Institut.

#### FURTHER TRAINING PROGRAMMES

According to the UN, cultural and creative industries generate nearly 50 million jobs worldwide and employ more young people than other sectors. So, in view of Uganda's very young population, it would be a valuable contribution to the country's development to invest in institutions and structures that facilitate further training in various forms of art. One excellent example of this is the aforementioned Yenze Theatre Conservatoire, whose drama school offers courses and training opportunities for performing



artists and creatives. Its founder, Aganza Kisaka, is a young Ugandan woman who studied theatre at New York University and returned to her home country with the aim of making Kampala the theatre capital of Africa.

Special effects make-up artist Esther Nakaziba also recognised the need for further training and investment at an early stage in her career. For years, she was one of only a few make-up artists in Kampala's film industry. Then she decided to open her own make-up artist school. Today she runs a thriving business, Enakaziba Creatives, teaching young women skills in film make-up and costume design – and thus also opening up job opportunities.

Investment in the arts can create jobs. A film or television production, for example, requires not only actors and directors but also screenwriters, a camera crew, make-up artists, costume designers, music professionals and technicians. The Ugandan film industry operates independently in many respects, but the quality of productions varies, depending on budget. It needs external

„In view of Uganda's very young population, it would be a valuable contribution to the country's development to invest in institutions and structures that facilitate further training in various forms of art.“

funding to be able to compete with rivals in South Africa or Kenya.

In Germany and elsewhere, development funding is currently being reduced, so more money for the arts seems unrealistic. Budgets do not necessarily need to be increased, however. If cultural components were more rigorously integrated into existing development projects, a great deal could be achieved even within existing budgetary constraints. Greater involvement of the private sector would also be desirable, for example to encourage private music- or film-production companies to invest.

Promotion of the arts is often wrongly sidelined in development policy. It can bring multiple social and economic benefits – and would give Uganda's talented artists the platform they deserve.

#### LINKS

Njabala Foundation:

<https://njabala.com/>

Yenze Theatre Conservatoire:

<https://www.yenzetheatreconservatoire.com/>

African Writers Trust:

<https://africanwriterstrust.org/>

Tebere Arts Foundation:

<https://tebere.org/>

Kampala International Theatre Festival:

<https://kampalainternationaltheatrefestival.com/>



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## Please help to improve [www.dandc.eu](http://www.dandc.eu)

As our printed magazines will be discontinued at the end of this year, we plan to expand our digital outreach instead (see “Magazine info” on p. 4 in this Digital Monthly). Our mandate will stay the same. Our job is to foster debate on how to achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goals internationally. We hope you will keep reading our content, and we will do our best to make it easy for you.

If you like, please help us to modernise our digital outreach in ways that suit your needs. We are currently running an anonymous online survey regarding our users' preferences. Please do take part – just scan the QR-code or go to:

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A family in Senegal.

## ALBINISM

# A dangerous superstition

**In many countries, people with albinism are a stigmatised minority. They experience discrimination because of their noticeably light skin and hair, as well as their visual impairments. This is particularly the case in some regions of Africa. Education is vital to protect those affected.**

By Gudrun A. Rappold

Due to the deeply rooted superstition that the body parts of people with albinism possess magical powers, they and their families are often confronted with dangerous myths and perceptions. Sometimes mothers are accused of infidelity with white men or ghosts and expelled from their family. The myth that sexual intercourse with a woman with albinism can cure infertility and AIDS

places them at high risk of sexual violence and infection with HIV. In the worst cases, newborns are killed immediately after birth, or children and adults are attacked, kidnapped, mutilated or murdered. The graves of people with albinism are also plundered. Their body parts are used to make occult talismans, which is a lucrative business.

Moreover, many people with albinism on the African continent either receive inadequate schooling and professional opportunities or none at all. Thus, they are robbed of the possibility of achieving financial security.

In Tanzania and Malawi, people with albinism experience violence disproportionately often. The organisation Standing Voice reports that since 2006, approximately half of all human-rights violations in Afri-

ca that were associated with albinism were registered in these two countries, especially in the regions of Machinga in Malawi and Mwanza in Tanzania. In neighbouring countries like the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique, Burundi, Zambia and others, human-rights violations have also been registered and transnational organ trading has been reported.

## UNDERSTANDING GENETICS

Protecting people with albinism from discrimination and racism means understanding the genetic context, learning about their particular physical limitations and need for assistance and creating a social environment in which their rights are respected at the local and national level.

Albinism is a rare congenital metabolic disorder with an estimated prevalence of one in 20,000. The condition is much more common in Africa, where it can affect one in 1000 people. In some parts of the continent, about every twentieth person carries the defective gene without showing any mani-

festation of the disease. This prevalence can vary greatly from region to region, however. If both parents carry the defective gene, their child has a 25% chance of being born with albinism, even if the father and mother are phenotypically healthy (see box).

## GROUNDBREAKING JUDGMENT

The previous negligence with regard to crimes against people with albinism is changing. In 2022, for the first time, the High Court in Malawi found a Catholic priest, a police officer and a clinician guilty of the joint murder and sale of the body parts of a young man with albinism. All three were given lifelong prison sentences. The judgment was groundbreaking not least because prominent members of society were convicted – even though in many countries the countless criminals who are perpetuating these horrible traditions are still not being punished. The judgment is one indication that public interest and social pressure have increased to the extent that these crimes are now being prosecuted.

Two historic resolutions to protect people with albinism helped spur this change. In November 2014, the UN General Assembly declared 13 June „International

Albinism Awareness Day“. Since then, it has been celebrated annually worldwide and given people with albinism a voice. Ikponwosa Ero, a lawyer from Nigeria, was appointed the first independent UN expert on the enjoyment and defence of the human rights of persons with albinism in 2015; the jurist Muluka-Anne Miti-Drummond from Zambia took over the office in 2021.

Furthermore, in 2019, the Executive Council of the African Union adopted an action plan for the entire continent to end human-rights abuses of people with albinism in Africa. Even though such measures are not legally binding, they form a crucial foundation for the protection of this genetic minority. Other international campaigns by human-rights organisations and the UN aim to increase awareness of the threats that people with albinism face, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Various organisations like Standing Voice, Africa Albinism Network, Albinism Society of Kenya, Black Albinism, Under the Same Sun, Tanzania Albinism Society, Albinism Foundation Zambia, Positive Exposure and the National Organization for Albinism and Hypopigmentation (NOAH), among others, are directly involved in the social and medical protection and support of these people at the local and

national level. Promoting the inclusion and strengthening the self-confidence of people with albinism are important measures too.

Despite these positive developments, there are still children with albinism who live apart from their families in boarding schools and safe houses in order to protect them from danger. Too many people still believe the superstition. People with albinism still disappear and are mutilated or killed; murder cases remain unsolved. The estimated number of people who have disappeared and whose fate is unknown remains high.

Providing scientific education about the genetic causes of albinism in schools is therefore an essential tool to spread knowledge to all segments of the population and to finally lay a centuries-old superstition to rest.

## LINK

<https://www.albinism-justagene.com>



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## Just a gene

Many people with albinism are still exposed to dangerous forms of discrimination (see main text). In order to counter the myths and superstitions surrounding the metabolic disorder, it is important to understand its genetic foundations.

If both parents carry the defective gene that causes albinism, some of their children will have black skin and others white. In order to understand this, the genetic basis of the different pigmentation must be clarified. Albinism occurs when there has been a small change in one of the twenty genes that either produce or

distribute melanin. As a result, the dark pigments in skin, hair and the iris of the eyes are missing. If people do not adequately protect themselves from UV rays, the condition can lead to skin cancer and early death. In most people with albinism in Africa, one particular gene, the OCA2 gene, is affected. In other regions of the world, different genes are responsible.

Albinism is a recessive disorder caused by the interaction of a defective gene from the father and a defective gene from the mother. If two gene carriers have a child together, there is a 25% chance in every

pregnancy that the child will have albinism as a result of inheriting two defective genes. There is a 25% chance that the child will be phenotypically and genetically healthy and a 50% chance that the child will be phenotypically healthy, but a carrier of the defective

gene. This and many other basics of genetic inheritance have been summarised in the new book „Albinism – just a gene!“, which was created for African schoolchildren and adolescents. It can be downloaded online free of charge. The text explains in simple language the foundations of various pigmentations and of genetics in general. An exhibition on the topic of albinism, with text and illustrations from the book, will also take place this year in the Cultural & Museum Centre Karonga in Malawi. GR



Cover of „Albinism – just a gene!“

## LITERATURE

„Albinism – just a gene!“, illustrated by Viola Kup. Available for free in over 20 languages at: [www.albinism-justagene.com](http://www.albinism-justagene.com).

## INTERNATIONAL LAW

# Apartheid in Palestine?

Israel has been accused of committing the crime of apartheid in the occupied Palestinian territories. In his new book, law professor Kai Ambos examines whether these charges are justified or an expression of anti-Israel hostility.

By Kim Berg

Few topics have been debated so bitterly in recent years as the accusations of apartheid levelled against Israel by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the Israeli civil-society organisations Yesh Din, B'Tselem and Kerem Navot. At issue are various forms of systematic discrimination against Palestinians in the occupied territories, Israeli-annexed East Jerusalem and Israel itself.

The apartheid question is not new. As early as the 1960s, Palestinian intellectuals were concerned with possible apartheid structures in the Palestinian territories. They quickly met with the approval of the African National Congress, which was fighting racial segregation in South Africa at the time and now is that country's dominant political party.

Ambos, who specialises in international criminal law, has taken up the issue in a new book, assessing the situation in the West Bank. He warns that the charge of apartheid should not be levelled casually, but only after thorough, unbiased scrutiny and even then with caution. Nonetheless, he advises Israel to take the accusation seriously. Solving the Middle East conflict in line with international law, after all, is essential to Israel's long-term security.

Before Ambos turns his attention to the West Bank, he explains the legal framework and discusses the prohibition against apartheid under international law. He concludes that a state can indeed commit the crime of apartheid in occupied territories beyond its national orders.

After a comprehensive survey of the history of apartheid in South Africa, Ambos addresses the international accusations of apartheid against Israel. In his concluding report of 2022, Michael Lynk, a Canadian law professor who served as UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory, states bluntly: "This is apartheid". According to Lynk, apartheid in the Palestinian territories does

not have entirely the same characteristics as it had in South Africa. However, he calls attention to some "pitiless features of the 'apartness' rule by Israel" that go beyond what happened in South Africa. He points out segregated highways, high walls and extensive checkpoints that isolate the Palestinian people from the outside world. He also finds fault with civilians being exposed to missile strikes and tank shelling. Finally, he finds it problematic that Israel has left it to the international community to take care of Palestinians' humanitarian needs and social welfare.

Ambos also examines the arguments of those who disagree with the apartheid claim. He primarily cites the Israeli organisation "NGO Monitor". In broad agreement with the Israeli government, this organisation firmly rejects the charge. NGO Monitor called the UN report "Michael Lynk's final fiction", which allegedly contained many "falsehoods and distortions".

In the third section of his analysis, Ambos applies the legal apartheid norms to the occupied West Bank. Even after a thorough investigation, he finds it difficult to draw a "definitive" conclusion. In his eyes, it ultimately depends "on the circumstances of the individual case whether the charge of apartheid can hold up against a particular defendant before an independent court".

Ambos' analysis shows that it is possible to objectively examine charges of apartheid. However, it also demonstrates that the term remains quite vague. Thus far, only two former apartheid-era security officers have been charged with apartheid-related crimes against humanity in South Africa in 2021.

Things may change soon, however. In 2022, the UN General Assembly tasked the International Court of Justice with filing a comprehensive report on the Israeli occupation. This report will also address the accusations of apartheid.

## REFERENCE

Ambos, K., 2024: *Apartheid in Palästina?* Frankfurt, Westend Verlag (only available in German).



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Exclusively Israeli: segregated highway with a security wall in the West Bank.

# Converting motorised streets into recreational spaces

Globally, nearly half of all journeys within a city are made by private motorised transport. To make urban areas more liveable, the streets need to become more attractive for people again.

Across the world, several street experiments are being implemented to reclaim the street for the people and create opportunities for social engagement. An example of these experiments is the closing of streets – known as *ciclovías* – for non-motorised transportation, such as “*Vía Recreativa*” in Guadalajara, one of the three largest cities in Mexico.

The *Vía Recreativa* is a social programme that converts public roads into places for leisure and recreation for all people. It began in September 2004 with 11 kilometres of bike lanes, now it covers 70 kilometres through four central municipalities of the Metropolitan Area of Guadalajara and with around 100,000 people attending every Sunday.

*Ciclovías* repurposes streets by closing main and commercial roads to give priority to humans over automobiles. And it is important to allow citizens to see that. “Many times, people are not aware of the amount of space that we dedicate

in our cities to move and store cars, and ultimately it is very important to reclaim this public space,” acknowledges Diego Marquez of the Institute for Planning and Development Management of the Metropolitan Area of Guadalajara (IMEPLAN).

For several hours, streets become exclusive bike paths while other urban spaces are transformed into amusement parks. The urban space becomes a place for the individual and collective appropriation of public space, in which play, sports, art, dance, performance and commerce bring citizens together in a space that creates a sense of community.

For Fernanda Aguilar, an architect and urban planner, “temporary or sporadic interventions such as the *Vía Recreativa* have the purpose of occupying the street so that there begins to be more interaction among people, where nearby there is a park with a yoga class, and in another park, there is a Zumba dance class, that same intervention and appropriation make other spaces come to life and create a perfect excuse to start having other social dynamics evolve.”

In the last 10 years, Guadalajara has been moving towards more sustainable urban mobility. Diego Marquez points out that there are around 200 kilometres of bike lanes built and 360 public bike stations installed. These changes are giving rise to new ways of using the streets, as younger generations cannot conceive of a city in which bicycles no longer exist. “Just as we see it as normal that there are so many cars outside, we will begin to see as normal that we have wide sidewalks, that we have safe infrastructure, spaces for rest,” says Diego.

The *Vía Recreativa* is a transformative urban shift that has been sustained for 20 years despite changing governments. These efforts have been supported by civil society, government officials and urban planners who continue to push for more equitable access to public spaces and reshaping the city towards a more vital, sustainable and healthy environment.



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# MASTHEAD / IMPRINT

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Sustainable development requires global awareness and local action.

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MEXICO

● Guadalajara

STEP MAP

## DEVASTATING FLOODS

# Apocalyptic scenario hits unprepared Brazilian state

**Starting in late April, the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul faced one of the largest natural disasters in its history. Unusually intense rains affected 458 municipalities. In May, more than 600,000 people were displaced.**

**By Thuany Rodrigues**

According to the state's civil-defence authority, 175 persons were confirmed dead and 38 remained missing on 9 June. Cities like Eldorado do Sul had been partially submerged. Some residents had to be rescued by helicopters. Many families lost all their possessions apart from the clothes they were wearing when they fled their homes.

The scenario of destruction included flooded streets, submerged cars and destroyed homes. Entire families were swept away by the currents, and dead bodies were found among the debris. The lack of potable water and sanitation made the humanitarian situation worse, raising the risk of disease outbreaks.

Local authorities declared a state of public emergency. The state governor requested assistance from Brazil's federal government, which indeed mobilised

troops and resources. Nonetheless, the disaster proved overwhelming in some places. Cities like Nova Santa Rita and Tapes were isolated, accessible only by air.

This tragedy's scale was unnecessary. Authorities had not ensured proper preparation for foreseeable flooding. In June 2022, Marcelo Dutra da Silva, a professor of ecology at the Federal University of Rio Grande (FURG) had alerted the public to the growing likelihood of severe flooding in previously unaffected areas. It was what climate research showed.

Unfortunately, his warning that large human settlements must adapt to the new climate reality was not heeded. Among other things, Dutra had insisted that urban planners should not allow the development of public infrastructure and residential areas in places that are at risk. Such places now suffered serious harm.

The government's immediate response to the natural disaster was inadequate too. Authorities have been criticised for negligence and their lack of preparedness. Humanitarian aid only arrived with delay. Slow emergency measures left thousands of people helpless, increasing their suffering.

Local communities proved resilient to some extent, relying on self-help and mutual support. Fast professional emergency relief, however, would have done more to limit the suffering.

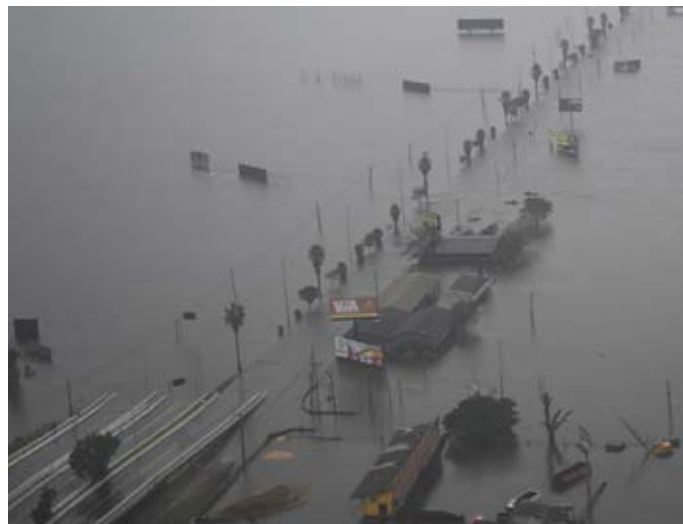
Reconstruction will be expensive, moreover. According to initial estimates, the equivalent of \$3.5 billion will be needed to repair houses, roads and other kinds of damaged infrastructure. The reconstruction of bridges alone is expected to cost about \$670 million. Both the state and the federal budgets are tight because of debt burdens, so it will be difficult to mobilise the funding.

Disinformation matters too. Carol Macario, a journalist, points out that fake news has distorted public perceptions, so many people do not understand how severe the climate crisis is. She adds that disinformation not only downplays climate science. It also fosters distrust in the state. Though governance in Brazil may leave a lot to be desired, it is not as bad as right-wing populists claim. The irony is that climate-denying people who insist on fossil fuels and deforestation for the sake of large-scale agriculture are trying to benefit from state agencies not dealing with climate impacts as well as they should.

Brazil is a major emerging market and not one of the world's poorest countries. Rio Grande do Sul is one of Brazil's more prosperous states. Its capital city Porto Alegre is said to be one of the best managed. Our policymakers must do a better job and set an example by rising to urgent challenges.

The floods in Rio Grande do Sul show that the climate crisis is real. Even high-income countries' societies must prepare for its impacts and adopt policies to mitigate the problems. Failure to adapt properly to global heating will, of course, have particularly painful consequences in poorer world regions.

Pietra Madeira is one of the disaster victims. Her family's house was flooded. She speaks for many disaster-affected people when she says: "The state should have been better prepared; we were warned years ago." That must not be the case when heavy rains occur the next time.



**Submerged highway in Porto Alegre agglomeration in May 2024.**



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## DEMOCRACY

# Modi no longer looks invincible

**What happens when masses of people make up their mind? They can humble an arrogant and spiteful leader. That is what happened in India's general election, which took place in stages from mid-April to early June.**

By Suparna Banerjee

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had boasted that the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), a coalition of parties that supports his Hindu-chauvinist BJP, would win more than 400 of 543 seats in parliament. Instead, the number dropped to 293, only 19 more than needed to return him to office.

Five years ago, the BJP alone had won 303 seats. It was, in principle, to form the government on its own. No longer. Modi does not look invincible anymore. His survival in office depends on two regional parties from now on.

Modi based his campaign on aggressive identity politics. He accused the opposition of favouring Muslims and promised to put Hindus first. Masses of disadvantaged Indians, however, saw through his ploy. Poor Hindus know that they still live in hardship after 10 years of Modi rule. The constant hounding of Muslims, which included brutal lynchings and deadly riots, did not alleviate their socio-economic suffering.

Ayodhya is the striking symbol of this trend. In this north-Indian town, Modi had inaugurated a Hindu temple in January. It had been built on the site of a historic Mosque, the illegal destruction of which by Hindu-supremacists in 1992 had triggered bloody riots across South Asia. The media celebrated the temple inauguration as a moment of national greatness. A majority of citizens in Faizabad, the constituency that includes Ayodhya, felt differently. They snubbed Modi by voting for an opposition candidate from the oppressed Dalit community.

During the campaign, Modi praised India's economic performance under his government even though masses of people were left behind. He told investors "stability" would serve their interests. When exit polls suggested he would triumph in the

elections, the stock market soared. When they turned out to be wrong, it crashed. The Congress Party led opposition alliance INDIA (Indian National Development Inclusive Alliance) now demands an investigation into whether this was deliberate insider trading.

In the past ten years, Modi and his party did what they could to weaken democratic institutions, shifting to increasingly



**Narendra Modi (left) now depends on the support of two regional-party leaders, Chandrababu Naidu (centre) from Andhra Pradesh and Nitish Kumar (right) from Bihar.**

authoritarian rule. Aggressive online agitation pushed that agenda too. Unfortunately, India's large media houses largely caved into the pressure. Nonetheless, masses of voters have now refuted manipulative identity politics.

Indian politics has always been personalised. Voters appreciate a charismatic leader. Ten and five years ago, the opposition lacked such a popular face. This time, however, Rahul Gandhi, whose father, grandmother and great-grandfather had served as prime ministers, managed to become that face. His rise started with his 'yatra', a long walk across the length and breadth of the country in 2022/23. It fit a multi-faith tradition of humble pilgrimage, but also indicated an interest in how people are faring, both in remote rural areas and urban slums.

When Modi's NDA coalition won in 2014, that was an anti-incumbency vote against Congress Party corruption. The NDA victory in 2019 was an endorsement of Modi, as people hoped he might deliver on development promises. This year's election did not oust him, but it did reinforce democratic principles.

It would be naïve to underestimate Modi and the vast Hindu-supremacist network his party belongs to. He may be down, but he is not out. An interesting side effect is that the NDA now lacks token minority MPs. There is not a single Muslim, Sikh or Christian among its MPs anymore. That makes the divisiveness of the BJP approach more obvious than it was before.

No democracy is perfect. India's is no exception. The number of women MPs is 74, not even 14% of the total. Nonetheless, the election result shows that Indian democracy is alive. It is important to note that poor, marginalised and downtrodden people saved it. They are not interested in a glorious Hindu nation but want their fate to improve.

It is now up to the opposition to keep up the momentum. It must stay focused on issues like social justice, secular governance, civil rights and the public accountability of state agencies.



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## ELECTIONS

# Democratic horse-trading

**South Africa's elections on 29 May took the country into new political terrain. The African National Congress (ANC) lost its absolute majority, suffering a greater blow to its legitimacy than anticipated. But thanks to democratic forces' willingness to cooperate, damage limitation was possible.**

By Henning Melber

The ANC was in power for thirty years with an absolute majority. With Nelson Mandela at the helm, the party led the fight against apartheid. But in the latest set of elections, it received just 40.2% of the vote – a 17.3 percentage points drop in support. The party now needs a coalition partner to govern.

The Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) led by Julius Malema and uMkhonto weSizwe (the MK Party), founded six months ago by former ANC and South African president Jacob Zuma, are two populist parties that have already split from the ANC. They reject the idea of a government of national unity – which the ANC now sees as the best possible solution – due to the economic influence of the privileged white minority. Together, the two parties won around a quarter of the votes cast in the election – more than the 21.8% claimed by the Democratic Alliance (DA), which is seen as the party of the white minority.

However, a “big tent” arrangement has been reached with the DA, paving the way for an ANC-led government with DA support. The deal also includes the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), a group with a strong Zulu base which came fifth in the election with 3.9% of the vote. These have so far been joined by the national conservative anti-migration party Patriotic Alliance (PA) and the centre-left party “Good”. Commanding 273 of the 400 seats in parliament, these parties give the government a two-thirds majority.

An official “grand coalition” (ANC-DA-IFP) failed due to resistance within the ranks of the ANC and the DA. A minority ANC government tolerated by the DA (in exchange for parliamentary control by the DA) was also rejected. This left the option of a government of national unity, a formula

similar to the transitional solution adopted after the end of apartheid. Prominent among those who helped craft that solution was the current President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa. At the core of the present deal is recognition of constitutional principles and the rule of law.

This still leaves considerable scope for the kind of policymaking favoured by Ramaphosa, who prefers negotiated agreement to snap decisions. Protection of constitutional principles and intact autonomy of the central bank (which MK, EFF and parts of the ANC would have liked to nationalise) along with stronger energy, water and transport infrastructures are conditions that were partly unacceptable to the EFF and wholly rejected by the MK but were enough of a shared platform for the DA.

But the devil is in the detail, and 2024 is not 1994. The ANC is divided into two opposing factions, personified by Ramaphosa and the still influential Zuma. It remains to be seen how much of an internal clean-up will be needed – including action on corruption – to make the party a reliable partner. It is also unclear how much potential for destabilisation MK can mobilise among the population. Zuma once declared that the ANC would rule until Jesus returns. Today, he takes an obstructionist stance, fuelled by hatred of Ramaphosa and a desire to eject him from office by any means necessary.

As required by South Africa's Constitution, President Ramaphosa was elected within 14 days of the official election results being announced, at the first sitting of the new parliament on 14 June. The first step taken was to elect the speaker and deputy speaker of parliament from the ranks of the IFP and DA. This was a prerequisite for the governing triumvirate. A number of other smaller parties out of the total of 18 parties represented in parliament will also participate in the “national unity government” (MK Party MPs did not attend the swearing-in ceremony and inaugural session). Job assignments are now being negotiated. Ramaphosa needs to appoint the new cabinet, and the parties need to agree on their respective representation in parliamentary committees. This is where the extent of horse-trading will be revealed.

Stephen Grootes in the “Daily Maverick” praised the ANC's stance as a gift to South Africa's democracy. He wrote that acceptance of the humiliating election result normalised something that does not come easy to former liberation movements – relinquishing their exclusive grip on political power. Whether President Ramaphosa survives his term of office unscathed will depend partly on the ANC conference in 2027.



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**Uncertain time ahead for South Africa's president Cyril Ramaphosa.**





After many presidents, the first presidenta.

## ELECTIONS

## Cautiously hopeful

**The result of Mexico's presidential election was historical for several reasons. It was the first time the winner was a woman, a non-Catholic and someone with scientific expertise unlike her predecessors who had degrees either in law or economics.**

By Virginia Mercado

Several factors have contributed to Claudia Sheinbaum becoming the first female president with strong citizen turnout and a stunning 60% of the vote. The popularity of her predecessor Andrés Manuel López Obrador – or AMLO for short – and his untiring support for her in the campaign mattered very much. Morena, the party to which both belong, proved so strong that some observers said it painted the map of the country maroon, which is its colour.

The first female president may lack AMLO's charisma, but she shines in her own way. She is a scientist of academic reputation and has served in important public offices. For example, she was the governor of Mexico City, where her initiatives helped to improve the traffic situation, environmental protection and public security. Even some

people who do not appreciate AMLO voted for her.

Another important issue was that the opposition looked utterly unconvincing. Especially in rural areas, it did not manage to connect to common people. Its alliance with the upper classes was too obvious. Aggressive attacks on a third presidential candidate, which it accused of distracting from the shared goal of fighting Sheinbaum/AMLO, did not help.

The plain truth is that the main opposition parties did not learn from their defeat in 2018 and failed to reinvent themselves accordingly. In six years as head of state, AMLO managed to make masses of people see those who opposed him as opposing the public interest.

When the opposition coalition of the major centre-right parties PRI, PAN and the leftist PRD made Xóchitl Gálvez their presidential candidate, that choice looked opportunistic – and it was indeed inspired by AMLO. The opposition parties nominated a woman, emphasising her working-class background and indigenous heritage, but the agenda remained clear support for dominant economic interests. That seemed

phony. A few members of the parties concerned are now self-critically admitting that they did not manage to challenge the AMLO administration in ways that might have convinced people of an alternative vision for Mexico.

Mexicans, however, remembered both the corruption scandals and the broken election promises of the past. The PRD, which had long been a strong political force, got so few votes that it lost its status as a national party.

A leftist woman will serve as the president of a country that is profoundly marked by both machismo and the Catholic Church. Her family background is Jewish, but secular. She says she is not religious. Only a mere 70,000 of 126 million Mexicans are Jews. To masses of voters, faith was irrelevant.

Sheinbaum must rise to a host of huge challenges, of which rampant violence is probably the greatest. Indeed, over 30 candidates for various public offices were killed during recent election campaigns.

She must also convince people that she is taking decisions autonomously and not acting under the influence of her predecessor. She has said that she wants continuity regarding what he calls Mexico's "fourth transformation". In this context, AMLO has demanded controversial constitutional reforms, including the election of top judges. Sheinbaum has embraced his proposals.

As the first women president, Sheinbaum may be exposed to gender-specific attacks. Citizens want AMLO's social-justice policies to continue. They would also like to see progress in areas where things got worse under him, including security and – largely due to Covid-19 – public health and education. To some extent, feminists were disappointed in AMLO because of the high femicide rate and his disdain for women's causes. Environmentalists did not like his fossil-fuel enthusiasm and want Sheinbaum, a climate scientist, to reduce oil production.

The expectations are very high. People cautiously hope she can deliver.



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GERMAN ODA

# Prioritise international solidarity over national interests

**German policymakers like to justify cuts in international-development spending as “pragmatic”. Instead, Svenja Schulze, the federal minister for economic cooperation and development, should insist on solidarity with the global south. Unfortunately, she is adopting the utilitarian rhetoric of market-orthodox liberalism and populist nationalism.**

By Cornelia Möhring

Schulze spelled out her approach to development policy in D+C/E+Z, arguing it was no longer about “we are helping them”, but rather “increasingly about balancing interests”, which, according to her, has become a “fundamental component of international political realism”. Her phrasing was an indirect response to the rhetorical question Christian Lindner, the market-orthodox finance minister, likes to ask. It is whether projects serve German interests. He may hope to win over some voters who lean towards national populism of either the right variety (Alternative for Germany) or the left one (Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht). The real impact, of course, is reinforcement of the “German money is being squandered abroad” narrative.

Official development assistance (ODA) is being reduced to a tool in the competition for geostrategic influence in the new Cold War. Lindner’s ideology rejects regulation and social protection as a matter of principle. Since Schulze, a Social Democrat, wants to show her budget is being used well, she emphasises national interests instead of international solidarity.

The federal budget for 2025 has been the topic of fierce debate for months now. Money earmarked for international action is particularly at risk, even though funding for the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the Foreign Office’s humanitarian aid has already been slashed considerably in recent years. VENRO, an umbrella group of develop-

mental civil-society organisations, reckons that the BMZ budget is thus set to be about €3.5 billion (or about one quarter) smaller in 2025 than it was in 2022. In the same period, the spending for humanitarian aid is set to decline by 1.7 billion (or roughly one third). As VENRO noted in 2023, only the Federal Health Ministry is suffering deeper cuts.

Germany is reducing support for developing countries and emerging markets at a time when the climate crisis and wars are exacerbating poverty, hunger and flight. A coalition of Social Democrats, Greens and the market-liberal FDP has been running the country since late 2021. “Dare more progress” was the title of their coalition agreement. According to it, German policy in foreign and developmental affairs would be based on values and promote human rights, peace, democracy and gender justice. The new government, moreover, would make money available to ensure that Germany lives up to the old pledge of spending 0.7% of gross national income (GNI) on ODA. Moreover, 0.2% of GNI would flow to low-income countries. The agreement also promised that ODA and humanitarian aid

would increase at an equal rate with defence spending.

The opposite has happened. The Ukraine war, lingering impacts of Covid-19, recessions, inflation and the hard right’s increasing momentum show that more state action is needed, not less. Nonetheless, Germany’s Federal Government is implementing austerity, arguing that increasing sovereign debt would be unconstitutional. Instead of rising to global obligations, leaders now stress German interests. In cooperation with its EU partners, moreover, Germany is fortifying the walls of Fortress Europe. In spite of their human-rights rhetoric, policymakers now want to deport criminal offenders from Afghanistan to that country, even though it is controlled by the Taliban, the former fundamentalist Islamic enemy.

According to market orthodoxy’s distorted concept of the homo oeconomicus, we are all utility-maximising egotists. In times of crisis, however, the common good, solidarity and humanitarian principles deserve support internationally – and that means investments and redistribution. To fight back against right-wing activism in Germany and Europe, Minister Schulze should insist on the pledges made in the coalition agreement.



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**German funding is declining while humanitarian needs are growing: Sudanese refugees in Chad in late 2023.**

Religious artifacts on sale as souvenirs in Kathmandu.



FOCUS

## Tourism rebounding

**History of slave trade makes Ghana a tourist destination**

[Dasmani Laary \(p. 20\)](#)

**How to assess sustainability**

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**In Zanzibar, foreign visitors bring business opportunities to local women**

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**Pros and cons of tourism in Nepal**

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**People on holiday are driving upswing after Sri Lanka's multi-pronged crisis**

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**Domestic tourism flourishing in Pakistani region**

[Felix Kugele \(p. 30\)](#)

**Mexico's indigenous people deserve a fair share of tourism revenues**

[Pamela Cruz \(p. 32\)](#)

**Why upturn hardly looks sustainable**

[Konstantin Auwärter \(p. 34\)](#)

## DIASPORA TOURISM

# Travelling to understand your own history

Four centuries ago, the transatlantic slave trade brutally tore millions of Africans from their homeland. Today, the Ghanaian tourism industry offers diasporans the opportunity to travel to the land of their ancestors to reconnect with their roots. This special kind of tourism indeed boosts Ghana's economy.

By Dasmani Laary

Ghana has a lot to offer tourists: The West African country is home to a wide variety of landscapes and wildlife, along with a rich cultural heritage – from historical sites and traditional

arts and crafts to food, music and dance. Tourism contributes to Ghana's economic performance and creates numerous jobs for locals. International arrivals alone generated \$3.8 billion in 2023, according to Ghana's Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture.

The Ghanaian tourism industry has been increasingly courting a special target group for several years: the international diaspora. The initial spark for this was the "Year of Return, Ghana 2019" (YOR19) campaign, launched by Ghanaian President Nana Akufo-Addo in 2018 in Washington during an appearance before members of

the African-American community in the United States.

YOR19 featured events like conferences, concerts, sporting events, fashion shows and visits to heritage sites. The programme was intended to connect people of Ghanaian origin in the diaspora with their historical and cultural roots – and boost Ghana's economy, particularly the tourism sector. The timing was chosen carefully: 2019 marked the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of the slave trade from Africa to America.

Other policies have driven Ghana's homecoming tourism industry too. In 2001, Ghana's Parliament allowed dual citizenship for people of Ghanaian descent who hold citizenship abroad. The policy has attracted thousands of people from Europe and other places in search of a new home. Moreover, a programme was introduced that allows citizens of Barbados and Guyana to enter Ghana for 90 days without a visa. Ghana has extended the same invitation to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.



Inner courtyard of Elmina Castle, historical site of the transatlantic slave trade in Ghana.

## MOVING TRAVEL EXPERIENCES

In recent years, many people from the diaspora have taken the opportunity to research their own origins in Ghana. “Essentially, they come here to reconnect with their ancestral roots and gain insights into the historical realities of the brutal slave trade,” says Victoria Odoom, Deputy Director of the Ghana Tourism Authority in the Eastern Region. Many diaspora tourists are interested in tours that focus on historical sites of the transatlantic slave trade, such as the forts of Elmina and Cape Coast in the Central Region.

When visiting dungeons, castles and forts, diaspora tourists often appear to be deeply moved by their ancestors’ struggles, explains Abigail Serwaa Owusu Ansah, Senior Marketing Officer at the Ghana Tourism Authority headquarters in Accra. She recounts a journey with some visitors who wanted to trace their roots from the city of Tamale in the Northern Region through western and central regions of the country and finally to Cape Coast, one of the most important West African harbours from which slaves were shipped to America. “It was evident from their facial expressions that they were overwhelmed with emotions and sorrows,” Ansah recalls.

Of course, travelling to the coast of West Africa also has its cheerful side, for example when tourists learn about traditional customs, music and dance. Ghana’s vibrant festivals, such as the Homowo Festival near the capital Accra and the Bakatue Festival in the Central Region, play an important role in showcasing the country’s diverse traditions. They also serve as a platform for diasporans to connect with local communities. Also worth mentioning are the biennial Panafest (Pan-African Historical Theatre Festival) and the Aday Festival to commemorate the ancestors.

## TOURISM BOOSTS THE ECONOMY

Abeiku Aggrey Santana, a radio personality and tourism operator, says that many diaspora tourists have read and heard a lot about Ghana and the struggles Africans faced during the slave trade era. They now come to Ghana to see for themselves. Their visits have significantly boosted the country’s tourism sector, says Santana. “Ghana wouldn’t have developed up to this stage

„The influx of visitors in Ghana is also having an impact on sectors beyond tourism. For example, the growing demand has led to hotels and resorts being renovated or newly built, which benefits the local economy and creates jobs.“

without homecoming tourism,” he claims. “Tourist attractions or sites are not for free; visitors must pay a fee to be able to access them. This helps our local economy and raises productivity because visitors reserve lodging and make food purchases, both of which generate revenue for the government through taxes,” he adds.

Tourism companies benefit from the fact that they can offer a wide range of services tailored to the expectations and needs of home-comers. These visitors come from widely divergent geographical, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. According to a report by the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture and the Ghana Tourism Authority, the US, Nigeria and UK were the top contributors to international arrivals from 2019 to 2023. Germany ranked fourth in 2023. Visitors include students and historians from the US, the Caribbean and Europe who come to Ghana to deepen their understanding of African history and culture.

In the “Year of Return” 2019, the Ghana Tourism Authority registered 1.13 million international arrivals, 18% more than in 2018. The number of visitors at important tourist attractions increased too. Cape Coast Castle, for example, recorded an increase from around 75,000 in 2018 to more than 88,000 in 2019. The fortress is one of the most important roots tourism destinations for the African diaspora. Slaves were held there before being shipped to America.

## RECOVERING FROM THE PANDEMIC

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of foreign visitors fell sharply in the following years. It reached pre-pandemic levels again in 2023. The upward trend is a promising sign for the industry’s recovery from Covid-19 and potential growth in subsequent years.

While it is hard to estimate how much homecoming tourism exactly contributes to Ghana’s economy, it is safe to say that the YOR19 campaign did help draw attention to the country as a tourist destination. For instance, several celebrities visited the country in 2019, including model Naomi Campbell and actor Idris Elba. Not to be underestimated is the fact that many diaspora tourists report on their experiences on social media, drawing attention to Ghana.

The influx of visitors also has an impact on sectors other than tourism. For example, the growing demand has led to hotels and resorts being renovated or newly built, which benefits the local economy.

## INADEQUATE INFRASTRUCTURE

Despite significant progress, challenges persist. A major issue is infrastructure development. Many tourist attractions are in rural areas that lack basic infrastructure such as roads, electricity and water. This makes it difficult for tourists to access these sites, leading to frustration and disappointment.

Coordinated efforts are therefore needed to realise the full potential of tourism in Ghana and homecoming tourism in particular. Development strategies should focus on enhancing tourism infrastructure, promoting cultural heritage sites and engaging local communities. To achieve this, government bodies, local authorities and the private sector should work together even more closely.

## LINKS

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A Green Globe-certified hotel in Aruba.

SUSTAINABILITY CERTIFICATION

# “We send people every two years – governments don’t”

**Green Globe certifies companies in the tourism industry based on 44 criteria that go hand in hand with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). CEO Birte Pelayo explains the certification process and what is important for truly sustainable tourism.**

Birte Pelayo interviewed by Katharina Wilhelm Otieno

**Can you describe how Green Globe’s certification process aligns with the SDGs?**

We currently have 44 criteria with 385 underlying indicators on how to achieve them. A hundred of them are mandatory. As they are consistent with the SDGs, our members are automatically in line with the SDGs if they fulfil these criteria.

In fact, Green Globe predates the SDGs. We are a brainchild of the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992. By the end of 1994, 19 travel industry

associations had supported the programme and promoted Green Globe to their members through joint marketing strategies. After the SDGs were defined in 2015, we adopted them.

**For some goals, it is quite obvious how tourism can contribute to their achievement. For others, less so – how can businesses achieve indicators that fulfil SDG16 (peace and justice) or SDG3 (good health), for example?**

When we talk about good health, a key question for us is: How do you as a company treat your employees? Are they insured? Do they get enough time to recover from illness? What offers do you have in terms of health workshops or awareness-raising campaigns?

With regard to peace and justice, we examine, for example, how companies ensure the protection of children or whether they give their employees the opportunity to get involved in labour organisations. But that’s not all: it’s also about training employees on

how to respond to certain situations in a de-escalating manner. Or – and this is unfortunately becoming increasingly important in today’s world – staff being trained in disaster management or emergency response, for example in the event of natural disasters or terrorist attacks.

**How does your certification process work?**

We don’t issue any handouts or templates because every company is very individual in the way it works. There are differences based on location, size, work culture and the local culture. So, we want to make sure that the way they implement our criteria ends up working for their operations. We can only see sustainable results if our standards become a natural part of their everyday working life and are not perceived as a burden.

We have an online system that new members – we mainly certify hotels – can simply join and take one step at a time. As soon as they have implemented something, they have to upload evidence. Then they are checked by our auditors – both online and during on-site audits. We carry out on-site audits every two years. We have members who have been with us for 15 years – what they did in their first and second audit is nowhere near what we accept today, and therefore regular adjustments to new developments, technologies or scientific findings are necessary.

**How often do you adapt your criteria to new developments?**

We review them twice per year. However, these biannual reviews are not about new developments. We need to see whether the criteria or indicators make sense for the local companies after a certain period of implementation and whether they actually apply them. We don't want someone in a hotel, for example, to need a university degree in order to understand our standards. So, if something proves to be unclear, we have to rephrase it.

Every few years there is a major revision, in which we also implement all the new developments of recent years. But the structure remains the same: the first part is about sustainable management, the second and third parts are about socio-economic and cultural aspects – HR policy, connection to local communities – and the fourth part is the largest section on environmental practices and “green” indicators such as resource management, purchasing practices or wild-life policy.

**Hotels in particular produce a lot of waste because they accommodate a lot of people. What do Green Globe-certified companies do in terms of resource management?**

This starts with the purchasing policy. Suppliers who pursue a policy of recycling and take back packaging should be favoured, or packaging should be reused. Glass bottles must replace plastic bottles. Buffets are of course an important factor in food waste. Sensible planning is essential here.

Another factor is, naturally, water resources. It's all about getting the basics right, such as water-saving shower heads or low-flow taps. If there is a pool, there should be ways to recycle and reuse the water. But we look at how the chain of command works too. If the caretaker discovers a leaky tap – how long does it take to get it fixed?

It also has a lot to do with awareness-raising. If a hotel capitalises on its location near beautiful mangroves, it should be clear that the wastewater must not flow into these mangroves. But such things are still happening in many places. And it takes us and other certification organisations to make sure that the companies change. We send people there every two years for inspections – the governments don't do that.

**How does Green Globe support the empowerment and inclusion of local communities**

**in the tourism industry, particularly in regions where tourism plays a significant role in economic development?**

We have a number of binding indicators. We want to make sure that they have local staff and that those local staff are paid a wage that they can live on – and that's not necessarily the minimum wage, if there is one. If you're an employee in this industry living in a tourist area, you're probably faced with a high cost of living. That needs to be considered.

Another point to consider with regard to staff is their diversity. We need measures to combat discrimination – be it on the basis of gender, sexual orientation or religion.

**If businesses are in touch with indigenous communities, how do you make sure that they are acting with respect to their wishes regarding tourism in their area?**

Especially when a new hotel or resort is built, it is important to ensure that the relationship with the surrounding communities is on an equal footing from the outset. It is terrible if, for example, the locals no longer have access to certain beaches because they are now reserved for tourists.

We further call on companies to involve local entrepreneurs from day one. They also need to be part of what is sold in a hotel gift shop, for example. If there is local art and the community wants to exhibit it, they should be given a chance.

We also want guests to be educated on how to respect local communities. Sacred sites must be marked. The rules of behaviour must be clear. Many guests actually want to learn about the local culture. In hotels, this can easily be done in passing – if they have a lift, it can be used through posters or small videos running on a screen. Informative brochures can be displayed at reception or in the breakfast room.

Another aspect is the guided tours. It is crucial that the tours are led by locals so that they can decide for themselves what they want to convey and how. In general, it is about finding out how the local communities want to be involved and then finding a good and respectful way of working together.

**Can you share best practice examples from your members?**

One hotel in Belize set up a three-shift solution so that there was always childcare

for everyone in the community involved with that hotel. Someone from the staff was always there for the children while others were at work or had free time.

Another example is one of our certified hotels in Thailand. They use a dehumidifying system developed by a start-up company to produce drinking water for guests from the humid air.

**How does Green Globe assist certified businesses in effectively communicating their sustainability initiatives to customers?**

We have an entire PR department that focuses solely on this. As soon as the companies are certified, we have to communicate this, on social media, through videos or our newsletter. We also work with platforms such as booking.com. For a hotel to be listed there preferentially, it must be certified by a third party, for example by Green Globe. This also helps to ensure that more people choose sustainable hotels.

**Looking ahead, what are the biggest challenges and opportunities facing the sustainable tourism industry?**

Whether war, escalating climate crisis or pandemic – the tourism sector is always one of the first economic sectors to be hit hard by global crises. But it is also a very resilient sector that bounces back every time. And it's a very old industry. People will always be travelling one way or another.

What is clearly recognisable is that holiday destinations are increasingly shifting away from mass tourism because the environment simply can no longer cope with it. What's more, the younger generation is thinking twice about travelling to faraway places. They don't want to fly all the way to the Maldives just to sit in a resort and relax. If they are travelling abroad, then they really want to experience the country in question. This also means that local tourism will play a bigger role.

But I don't think they will stop travelling altogether. The question for them is simply: how can we travel in the most sustainable way?



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## FEMALE EMPOWERMENT

# The spice islands

Zanzibar is one of Africa's most popular tourist destinations. By guiding visitors through their spice gardens, women are also beginning to benefit from this popularity in an otherwise still patriarchal society.

By Kizito Makoye

Most mornings, Fatma Ismail Haji walks through the mangrove swamps along the coast of the Indian Ocean to her spice garden. With a curved knife and a basket in her hand, the 43-year-old spice farmer from the island of Pemba off the coast of Tanzania harvests cinnamon bark.

"You have to be very careful not to destroy the inner layer of the bark, which contains the cinnamon flavour," says Haji. Back at her home in Makoongwe, Haji begins the meticulous process of cinnamon ripening,

where the cinnamon is dried in the sun, sorted, rolled and ground before being sold.

Some of the cinnamon bark is processed into a fine powder, which preserves its rich flavour. For every kilogramme of this cinnamon powder sold, Haji receives around 4 dollars. "The demand is quite high, and we are seeing a lot of interest from buyers from all over the world," she says.

Pemba is politically part of the semi-autonomous state of Zanzibar. Nutmeg, cinnamon, cardamom, black pepper and cloves are the most popular spices cultivated on the islands of the Zanzibar archipelago.

Haji belongs to a women's cooperative on the archipelago. In Zanzibar's conservative Muslim society, deep-rooted cultural norms have long restricted women's opportunities to work and earn an independent income. Women were generally limited to

domestic tasks such as childcare and housework. Today, however, a growing number of women in Zanzibar are seizing opportunities to earn a decent income and improve their livelihoods.

## NOT JUST SOUVENIRS

This also means that they combine spice cultivation with another important economic sector on the island. Many women are no longer just spice farmers, but also tour guides. Tourism accounts for an estimated 27% of Zanzibar's gross domestic product, generates around 80% of foreign exchange earnings and creates an estimated 60,000 jobs. Zanzibar is known for its natural beaches, rich cultural heritage and thriving marine life.

At the same time, the archipelago is known as the 'Spice Islands'. But spices are no longer just popular souvenirs. The global trend is towards holidays where authentic local experiences are an important part of the journey.

Zanzibar's spice farmers are benefiting from this. Guided spice tours offer visitors an insight into the island's agricultural heritage, and tourists can experience the cultivation of aromatic spices first-hand.

The business is of immense economic and cultural importance. It promotes sustainable development, strengthens local communities and preserves traditional farming methods. Tourists who explore spice markets and visit gardens enrich their own experiences – and the local economy.

## A CHANCE FOR WOMEN

Many of the island's spices were introduced by Persian traders in the 8<sup>th</sup> century and later by the Portuguese and Chinese. They found the islands' climate and fertile soil ideal for growing a range of spices.

To this day, spice cultivation is a livelihood, especially for small farmers. "My family struggled to make ends meet. We have many mouths to feed. But since I started growing spices and doing tours, everything has changed. I earn enough money to feed my family and I can proudly say that I am not only surviving but thriving," Haji states.

"It makes a lot of sense that not only men, but women too are working and putting food on the table," says Amina Hassan Jamal, who also works as a spice farmer and



Spices secure the livelihood of women in Zanzibar in many different ways.



tourist guide. With her new income, Jamal can provide healthier food for her family, educate her children and offer them better medical care. “Starting the spice business was the best decision ever. I literally count the money every day,” says Jamal.

But the work of female spice farmers is still not without its challenges. Social, economic and political rights for women in Zanzibar are enshrined in the constitution, but women’s rights groups say that women tend to have inferior land rights compared to men. Their access to land is often indirect and insecure, as they rarely acquire land in their own right.

In a society where patriarchal norms still prevail, women face obstacles that prevent their full economic participation. Discriminatory land-ownership systems, limited access to credit and unequal access to resources continue to hinder their progress.

“Some men in our community still see women as inferior,” Haji complains. “They think we belong in the kitchen and not working in the fields. But we prove them wrong.”

### CLIMATE-PROOF BUSINESS

Apart from its role in empowering women on the islands, spice cultivation has another advantage. While the Zanzibari agricultural sector in general is increasingly affected by the worsening impacts of climate change, spice cultivation is more resistant to the negative effects of extreme weather conditions. Spices such as cloves, nutmeg and cinnamon show remarkable resilience to fluctuating temperatures and erratic rainfall patterns.

The plants have adapted to Zanzibar’s unique microclimate over the centuries. They have deep root systems that can access groundwater during periods of drought, as well as robust structures that can withstand strong winds and rainfall. In addition, spice plants often have natural defences against pests and diseases, which are exacerbated by climate change and destroy more susceptible crops. The availability of staple crops such as maize and rice suffers from reduced yields and increased vulnerability to weather extremes, emphasising the crucial role of spice cultivation in maintaining Zanzibar’s agricultural productivity in times of climate crisis.

Abdalla Mohammed Juma, Director of the Tourism Department at the Zanzibar

„The global trend is towards holidays where authentic local experiences are an important part of the journey.“

Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Heritage, emphasises the threefold importance of spice cultivation for tourism in Zanzibar, the empowerment of local women and the islands’ agriculture. “By growing different plants and using more sustainable farming methods, the female spice farmers are supporting their families, gaining independence and contributing to boosting the economy – and they help to make Zanzibar an attractive tourist destination with a wide range of activities.”

On their tours, Haji and other women give visitors an insight into Zanzibar’s rich world of spices and explain details ranging from the pollination of vanilla to the colouring effects of the lipstick tree. The tourists learn about the entire cultivation process of spices, from planting to harvesting, and about the many uses of these aromatic plants.

They also have the opportunity to taste traditional dishes such as pilau rice, which are prepared with freshly harvested spices. In addition to the culinary use of spices, the tours also explore their medicinal qualities and their role as a remedy in traditional medicine. Visitors learn about cures such as cloves for toothache and nutmeg for insomnia.

Not least because it is their source of income, Zanzibar’s spice farmers are committed to preserving their environment. Through organic farming methods and

conservation efforts, they work to maintain the island’s fragile ecosystems. The spice farmers avoid the use of chemical pesticides. Instead, they use natural pest-control methods, such as beneficial insects that hunt harmful pests or organic plant-derived repellents. Moreover, farmers use compost, animal manure and green manure (cover crops that are ploughed back into the soil) to naturally enrich the soil. These practices improve soil fertility and structure, promote healthy plant growth and increase the resilience of the ecosystem.

To prevent the soil from being depleted and to reduce the risk of pests and diseases, farmers also practise crop rotation. This involves alternating different crops on a particular piece of land from one season to the next. By growing different spices and other crops at the same time, farmers create a more balanced and sustainable agricultural system. This diversity can also minimise the risk of crop failure.

Farmers moreover ensure that the cultivation of spices does not harm the environment. This includes setting quotas and timing harvests to allow for natural regeneration.

At the same time, it is undeniable that tourism itself poses considerable ecological challenges for Zanzibar. As important as the industry is for the islands, it can be just as dangerous for the sensitive ecosystems if no attention is paid to sustainability and mass tourism takes centre stage. Numerous analyses show that the influx of tourists can lead to the depletion of natural resources, environmental pollution and the destruction of sensitive habitats such as coral reefs. This environmental pressure exacerbates the climate-related vulnerabilities that Zanzibar already faces, such as rising sea levels and the increasing frequency of extreme weather events.

Tourism is crucial for the islands’ economic growth. However, it is equally important to make sustainable tourism the norm to ensure the long-term health of Zanzibar’s ecosystems. “Our future depends very much on how we protect the environment,” says Haji.



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## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

# Double-edged sword

**Nepal must grasp the opportunities that tourism offers. However, it must also limit cultural and environmental harm.**

By Rukamane Mahajan

Nepal has many majestic mountains, including the world's highest, Mount Everest. The country also has a long history. Lumbini, for example, was the birthplace of Gautama Buddha. Nepal's nature abounds with biodiversity, and its subtropical forests are the habitat of rhinoceroses, tigers and other wildlife. The traditional culture celebrates hospitality. The fact that costs for accommodation, food and other essential things are comparatively low also helps to make Nepal an attractive tourist destination.

The government considers this sector to be a mainstay of the economy. The national foreign-exchange reserves benefit massively from foreign visitors. Even in 2022, a year marked by the travel bans of the

Covid-19 pandemic, tourism contributed six percent to gross domestic product and employed a little over 1 million people.

Tourism allows local economies to flourish, providing livelihoods to people, some of whom live in remote mountain areas. Different kinds of businesses are involved, from hotels and trekking agencies to local restaurants and handicraft shops. All of them offer employment opportunities – hospitality staff, tour guides, porters, cooks and salespersons. Farmers who supply fresh produce and artisans who sell local crafts benefit too.

Tourism is a major incentive to build infrastructure – and not only in the capital city Kathmandu (see box). The government focuses on improving roads, bridges and airports to make remote areas more accessible. Electricity, water and communications infrastructure matters too. To a considerable extent, local communities benefit from such infrastructure development, and large

hotels and other facilities that are built offer employment opportunities.

## PROS AND CONS

Nonetheless, tourism is a double-edged sword, and infrastructure expansion is a good example. In some cases, new hydropower schemes flood valleys, and the obstruction of white-water rafting is only one side effect. The government has approved the construction of cable cars to make some mountain locations more accessible to old people, parents travelling with children and persons with disabilities. The new transport systems will change the landscape and cause more crowding in places with fragile ecosystems.

Many foreign visitors want to experience the mountains as well as subtropical eco-systems, but their very presence harms the environment. People have been complaining about solid waste and human excrements along trekking routes for a long time. Mount Everest is increasingly littered with garbage. According to a BBC investigation of 2015, moreover, some 200 dead human bodies must be scattered on its slopes. Mountaineering is dangerous, and many bodies are never recovered. Experts reckon that about 300 persons have died on their way up to or down from Mount Everest's summit from 1990 to 2019.

In many areas, mountain climbing has actually become more dangerous due to global warming. The glaciers are dwindling. The risk of sudden glacial lake outburst floods is growing, and communities downstream suffer the impacts. Most tourists come to Nepal by airplane, so they contribute to the greenhouse-gas emissions that drive global heating. As the snow disappears and the landscape changes, tourists may find Nepal less attractive.

Cultural tourism has pros and cons too. On the one hand, foreigners come to experience Nepal's heritage, appreciating the nation's culture and traditions. On the other hand, tourism can erode the essence of culture and traditions. The commercialisation of cultural practices can be deeply disturbing, for instance when souvenir shops turn sacred objects into mere merchandise.

International hotel chains and other western-style hotels typically have standardised architecture that lacks Nepali design elements. Their menus only include a few



**For Nepal's tourism destinations, domestic and Indian visitors matter increasingly.**

Nepali dishes, if any at all. Small, locally-owned guesthouses offer a more authentic cultural experience, but many tourists bypass them. Generally speaking, the lifestyle of Nepal's cities is becoming more "modern", which is synonymous with "western".

In past decades, Nepal's tourism sector focused on international tourists. In recent years, however, internal tourism has been surging. The number of visitors from India has been increasing too. Himalayan mountains are important in Hindu mythology, as the gods are believed to reside on Mount Kailash. Snow-covered mountain slopes also feature prominently in Bollywood movies. They seem like cool heaven to people suffering the summer heat in a tropical country.

That both domestic and Indian tourism is growing in Nepal shows that prosperity has begun to spread in both countries,

which are actually quite similar in many ways. One implication is that lesser-known destinations in Nepal are getting more visitors. Accordingly, livelihood opportunities should improve there, but both the natural environment and the local traditions may be disrupted.

Cultural change can be useful too, for example in regard to gender equality and justice. In 2017, the Tourism Entrepreneur Women's Association of Nepal (TEWAN) was founded. It offers skills training as well as coaching for leadership positions. Women have indeed been increasingly finding opportunities in the sector, mostly in hospitality, souvenir sales and eco-tourism initiatives.

They are often concentrated in lower-level positions, but many would like to rise to better jobs. Trekking guides and porters have traditionally been men. There are is-

ues about fair pay, and women in particular tend to be paid less. TEWAN shows that the traditional power balance has begun to change in the tourism sector.

Nepal needs the advantages of tourism, including revenue, job opportunity and infrastructure development. In the end, the key is sustainable and responsible tourism – fostering a symbiotic relationship between tourism, development and local communities. To prevent the over-commercialisation of nature, culture and environment, Nepal must pay attention to keeping development sustainable.



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## A brief history of tourism in Nepal

The history of Nepal's tourism industry is fascinating, closely linked to the country's political and social development. Until the 1950s, Nepal was basically an isolated kingdom under autocratic Rana rule. Strict rules limited foreign visitors.

The tourism sector began to flourish after the fall of Rana rule. In 1953, Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay were the first persons to climb to the summit of Mount Everest. Their achievement put Nepal on the global tourism map. Relevant infrastructure developed, including airports, airlines and trekking agencies. To a considerable extent, moreover, rural roads, power supply and piped-water systems have improved around popular destinations.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Nepal became popular among young counter-culture travellers from western countries. The "hippie era" was a colour-

ful chapter in the country's tourism history. Nepal later kept attracting a growing number of people interested in culture, nature, adventure and, in some cases, Asian spirituality.

The tourism sector, however, suffered when armed internal conflict rocked the nation from 1996 to 2006. Things improved after the fighting stopped and a new political order was confirmed by a new constitution. Quite obviously, incidents like plane hijacking or the royal massacre had made tourists avoid Nepal and go to other places.

Efforts were made to promote tourism. They included the Nepal Tourism Year (2011) and the Lumbini Visit Year (2012). 2020 was supposed to be the Visit Nepal Year, but the Covid-19 pandemic proved severely disrupting. The results included job losses and hardship for masses of people who-

se livelihoods depend directly or indirectly on tourism.

Today, Nepal's tourism industry is showing signs of recovery. To attract more international visitors, the years 2023 to 2032 have been declared the Tourism Decade. The government has allocated the equivalent of more than €80 million to the development of this sector. In 2023, more than 1 million

tourists (1,008,614) arrived in Nepal by airplane. Nepal's tourism sector is showing a good sign of recovery after being severely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the past, Nepal's tourism industry mostly catered to visitors from far away. A recent trend, however, is that Indian travellers have started to come (see main story). RM



By climbing Mount Everest, Tenzing Norgay and Sir Edmund Hillary put Nepal on the tourism map in 1953.



Surfers in Ahungalla on Sri Lanka's southern coast.

SRI LANKA

## Rebounding after multi-pronged crisis

**Tourist arrivals have increased rapidly in Sri Lanka in the past two years, and experts expect a still larger influx in this year's tourism season. An upturn in the hospitality industry would support the national economy.**

By Arjuna Ranawana

Sri Lanka has long been one of Asia's most popular tourist destinations. However, the sector was hit by several massive problems in recent years, including not only the Covid-19 pandemic, but also terror attacks, a severe financial crisis and a political meltdown (see box). Masses of people were plunged into poverty. According to experts, the economy has begun to get better again, and tourism can be an important part of the upswing. Vipula Wanigasekera, a former director-general of the Sri Lanka Tourism Authority (SLTA), predicts: "This winter is going to be a major success."

For the picturesque Indian Ocean Island, tourism is the third largest foreign-

exchange earner and an important source of direct and indirect employment. Tourism revenues had peaked in 2018, when 2.5 million visitors left the equivalent of more than \$5.6 billion in Sri Lanka. The livelihoods of more than 3 million people depend on tourism. The industry directly employs nearly 490,000 persons, according to the national central bank.

The Hotels Association of Sri Lanka (THASL) points out that, in contrast to the revenues of export industries like tea and apparel, the money generated by tourism businesses largely stays in the country. This sector is therefore seen as a particularly important engine for driving the economic recovery after the deep slump.

Last year, the number of arrivals rose back to 1.5 million, according to the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA). That was more than twice as many as recorded in 2022, but still 1 million fewer than in 2018.

Early data for this year suggest that Sri Lanka is on track to once again surpass the

Maldives as a tourist destination. In terms of visitors, it had lagged behind that Indian Ocean archipelago in the past four years. Some observers say that a diplomatic row between India and the Maldives made more Indian travellers opt for Sri Lankan destinations.

For some time now, Indians have been making up the largest segment of tourists in Sri Lanka. Many of them, industry watchers say, are coming to the island for business purposes or family events. However, the trend seems to be changing, with more well-heeled Indians enjoying vacations in Sri Lanka. Big Indian private-sector corporates, moreover, often book resort hotels for their annual retreats.

Russians have been the second largest group of tourists in recent years. According to government statistics, their number was actually larger than that of Indians in the first months of 2024.

### HOW TO ATTRACT HIGH-SPENDING VISITORS

Tourism veterans want Sri Lanka to refocus on high-spending tourists. The main target group should not be people who go "shopping in our supermarkets", says Wanigasekera, the former SLTA chief. In his eyes, Sri Lanka should do more to market its destinations to visitors from Germany, France, Spain and the United Kingdom, for example, since "mass market" tourism from India, Russia and China is less rewarding.

Indeed, new luxury hotels are being built. They will offer high-end services and exclusive amenities. One of the investors is Angeline Ondaatje, a veteran hotelier. She has a keen interest in European guests. In her experience, many of them, and especially Germans, are interested in Buddhist spirituality and Ayurvedic medicine. In her eyes, this may be the lasting impact of Hermann Hesse, the novelist and Nobel laureate of 1946, who found South-Asian spirituality fascinating. What is clear, however, is that tourists who receive traditional medical treatment or take meditation classes tend to stay longer than others.

Ondaatje would like to see better promotion of Sri Lanka among travellers overseas, and especially in Europe. “The Tourist Board has not rolled out a concerted campaign in decades,” she complains.

There are many attractions that such a campaign could highlight. One is Arugam Bay in the north-east, which is considered to be a surfer’s paradise because of its high waves. Wildlife sanctuaries have a great diversity of unique species, and they could serve as stronger traveller magnets too. While individual hotels emphasise ecotourism, the sector as such is generally more focused on growth. Given the desperate need that has

marked people’s lives in recent years, many Sri Lankans can be forgiven for prioritising short-term welfare and thinking that long-term sustainability can wait for better times.

Meanwhile, the government has begun offering beachfronts and islets for development to the tourism sector. However, it is prohibited to sell land to foreigners. That may complicate the development of new properties for tourism, which is now considered to be a very urgent issue.

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## Sri Lanka’s successive and interlocking crises

Covid-19 caused hard times in the hospitality sector everywhere. In Sri Lanka, however, its devastating impact was reinforced by several other issues.

In 2019, bombs went off on Easter Sunday in three hotels and three churches in Sri Lanka. The Islamist terror attacks killed 260 people. Sri Lanka felt ripped out of a ten-year period of relative peace since the end of the civil war between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil

Eelam (LTTE) and government forces. One consequence of the bombings was that the number of tourist arrivals declined from their peak in 2018.

Things are more complicated than it seemed at the time. Evidence is now emerging that although the attacks were carried out by Islamic extremists, the bombing was masterminded by government intelligence operatives. The goal was to create a fear psychosis

to help get Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who denies such allegations, elected to the presidency.

Things got much worse because of Covid-19, of course. In 2021, the number of foreign visitors declined by 92% to a mere 200,000. Gloom and doom spread in the industry. Hotels and resorts stopped operating, leaving thousands of staff unemployed. The livelihoods of those providing ancillary services, for instance in souvenir shops and smaller eateries, were hit too. A few hotels close to Colombo’s international airport were repurposed as quarantine centres for international travellers.

Compounding the suffering, the government became unable to service its debts, went into default and triggered a traumatising financial crisis in 2022. Part of the problem was the dwindling of foreign-exchange revenues, including from the tourism sector. The lack of forex reserves meant that it became impossible to import essential goods such as food and fuel. Sri Lankans became used to lining up for many hours and all too often in vain – in the hope of getting goods.

The default proved that the government had taken ex-

cessive loans and invested the money poorly, and the Rajapaksa clan, which had dominated the political system for many years, lost their grip on power. In view of mass protests, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa fled the country. Parliament elected a replacement in veteran politician and former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe. To steady the ship, Wickremesinghe sought support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The bail out, however, went along with a harsh reform agenda. The good news is that it also proved to be a turning point.

The mere fact that the IMF was willing to provide fresh money to Sri Lanka was a reassuring factor. Tourists began to trickle back to the country. The Hotels Association of Sri Lanka hailed the president’s success in securing IMF funding as a first step towards restoring economic stability. Its top leader, M. Shanthikumar, said: “The news of the IMF funding will, to a large extent, negate the perception created by the extensive publicity given by local and foreign media during the crisis period which impacted the recovery of tourism post the pandemic.” He was right.

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Protesters inside Sri Lanka’s presidential palace in July 2022.



The development of tourism in Baltistan is progressing: lake near the town of Skardu.

PAKISTAN

## Tourism boom in Baltistan

**More and more Pakistani vacationers are discovering the remote mountainous region in the country's north-east. The trend is bringing buying power into the region and creating jobs, but also threatening villages' social structure. Land use changes harbour the risk of conflict too.**

By Felix Kugele

Baltistan, in Pakistan's extreme north-east, has been attracting visitors since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In addition to the world's second-tallest mountain, the K2, the region also boasts lakes, picturesque villages and historical sites, including medieval fort-

resses and mosques, petroglyphs and paintings from the pre-Islamic era. In summer, the climate in the valleys is mild.

As part of the Kashmir region, which is disputed between Pakistan and India, Baltistan is extremely remote. There are tall mountain chains to the north, and the ceasefire line with the Indian part of Kashmir is located to the east and south. Only a single road to the west and, recently, regular flights connect Baltistan to the rest of Pakistan. As a result, the region is economically underdeveloped.

Until a few years ago, Baltistan was primarily sought out by foreign mountain climbers – a small group that aims to reach

the glaciated regions as quickly as possible and spends little time in lower-lying areas.

That changed dramatically with the sharp increase in Pakistani tourists beginning in about 2020. Two crisis situations – the Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting high inflation – initially drove many wealthy Pakistanis to vacation in their own country. Social media fuelled the boom. Now, there are an entire series of “must sees” in what had been a rather neglected region.

Domestic vacationers are looking for different experiences than mountain tourists. They are less interested in athletic ambition than in a sociable and comfortable vacation with friends and family. That includes hotel stays, trips to viewpoints and attractions, picnics and short walks – all reached by car and with good accommodations. Particularly wealthy visitors simply have an entire vacation house built for them. Correspondingly, this type of tourism

is concentrated in inhabited valleys with existing infrastructure.

The lifestyle of the local people, the Balti, has always centred on agriculture that is adapted to the region's particular climatic conditions. Because the valleys are arid, agriculture is only possible with irrigation. At the same time, the mountain streams are wild and unpredictable. For that reason, the Balti have developed an elaborate network of canals over the centuries. Each village has its own set of rules precisely adapted to its location, with varying "canal services", irrigation times and water conveyance duties for each household and field plot. In order for this system to function, it is essential that all the participating people in the village cooperate.

The new tourism industry is leading to new demands for resources. Land is desirable in particular in order to build hotels, re-

**„In order to prevent possible negative impacts, state actors and civil-society organisations should use targeted training and further education initiatives to enable the Balti to become entrepreneurs in the tourism industry. Doing so would keep significantly more profit in the local economy than is currently the case.“**

staurants and vacation homes – preferably in easily accessible places with good views. In some places in Baltistan, land prices have increased many times within a few years. Both local property owners and investors, who almost always come from other parts of the country, profit. Many locals also find work in the tourism industry; the rather modest wages are nevertheless progress for them. Local land buyers, however, are faced with fewer choices and higher prices.

A few tourist building projects are being constructed in traditional Balti architecture, including some vacation houses and the Serena Shigar Fort Hotel, which is housed in a renovated fort. Local craftspeople and planners can benefit from such projects. It remains to be seen, however, whe-

ther this architectural style will play a large role in future.

### AN UNEQUAL DISTRIBUTION OF PROFITS

The monetary profit from tourism will likely be very unevenly distributed in future too. Foreign entrepreneurs will probably siphon off the largest share; a smaller share will remain local in form of moderate to low incomes. This unequal economic distribution is both the norm in the tourism sector internationally as well as in the Pakistani economy in general. It is not fundamentally questioned in Baltistan or in the rest of the country.

The social and ecological downsides of the tourism boom in Baltistan are already beginning to emerge. If tourism continues to grow, the current irrigation systems will reach their limits. Tourism infrastructure will have different water demands than agriculture, but its owners or operators will no longer necessarily assume the current unpaid, but generally obligatory canal-maintenance duties. However, the cultivated landscape of the villages can only exist thanks to the daily work of a great many hands. Left to itself, the land would deteriorate into a desert-like wasteland within a few months.

Changes in land use have the potential to create conflict – for instance if, out of habit, herders want to drive their animals over land that is newly designated as hotel property. Already, tourists' cars are clogging the centres of some villages. Currently the first hotels are also being built on attractive but unsuitable sites, for instance in flood zones or on slopes that could give way – a risky undertaking, including for the region's reputation, if disaster should strike.

### SOCIAL TENSIONS

Moreover, the tourism boom is emphasising social inequalities – and creating new ones. When wealthy Pakistani tourists or investors visit Baltistan, they usually bring strongly hierarchical behaviours with them. The Balti, as comparatively poor farmers, are considered socially inferior to the outsiders. Thus, a much more socially fragmented culture is intruding into a less hierarchical village society. The Balti have largely accepted this so far, but occasional grumbling can be heard.

I myself experienced a striking example of this while on a visit to Baltistan in

2022: a tourist Jeep encountered a flock of sheep along with a shepherd on a one-lane road. The flock moved forward at its usual slow pace, which the visitors thought was



too slow. They told their driver – a Balti – to drive faster, and as a result a sheep was killed. The shepherd demanded compensation, which the tourists were unwilling to pay for a long time – after all, they argued, the shepherd could have let them pass. The tourists were clearly unprepared to admit that the shepherd could have the same right to use the road as they did.

Despite such incidents, many Balti ultimately welcome the tourism boom because they appreciate the new income opportunities it brings to the mountainous region. In order to prevent possible negative impacts, state actors and civil-society organisations should use targeted training and further education initiatives to enable the Balti to become entrepreneurs in the tourism industry. Doing so would keep significantly more profit in the local economy than is currently the case. At the same time, it is important to quickly identify natural resources like springs, waterways, lakes and particularly fertile soil that are in need of protection. From there, socially and ecologically sustainable land use can be developed that would maintain local livelihoods for a long time – both for residents and tourists.



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**A local vendor on the beach of Isla Mujeres.**

the authorities of the indigenous peoples with the support of the federal authorities, was signed by the Mexican government in August 2023. Therefore, these areas should not be affected by economic or tourist activities.

## DRUG TOURISM

However, the sacred sites of the Wixárika communities are still endangered – mainly due to drug tourism. The Wixárikas or Wixaritari live in the ranges of the Sierra Madre Occidental, mainly in the states of Jalisco, Nayarit, Durango, Zacatecas and San Luis Potosí. Every year, the Wixaritari make a pilgrimage of several hundred kilometres through the desert of San Luis Potosí. The pilgrimage also includes the search for peyote for their ancestral ceremonies.

Peyote – or hikuri – is an endemic and psychoactive plant that has sparked the curiosity of tourists. This plant is sacred to the indigenous people, as it is a way to connect with their ancestors and regenerate their soul. Although the peyote plant is under special protection according to Mexican Norm 059, it has declined due to illegal trade and excessive demand. It is estimated that the peyote population has decreased by 40% in places frequented by tourists.

Not only are regulations needed to protect the natural livelihood of peyote. It is also necessary for the Wixaritari families to be able to opt for tourism models that preserve indigenous rituals.

## PART OF THE TOURISM LANDSCAPE

Overall, indigenous communities play an important role in Mexico's tourism. Many of them participate in the tourism industry by selling and marketing their handicraft products, music, dances, ceremonies and regional cuisine.

Craft activities in particular have become a means of self-employment. According to the National Fund for the Promotion of Handicrafts, it is estimated that more than 1 million people make a living from selling handicraft products – although often from hand to mouth. The artisan sector was one of the sectors most affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The closure of markets, especially tourist ones, has reduced the sources of income of thousands of families and increased their vulnerability.

## RESPECTFUL TOURISM

# Their slice of the cake

**Mexico owes many of its tourist attractions to its wealth of indigenous communities. It is important that they are included in the country's tourism industry in a sustainable, respectful and empowering way.**

**By Pamela Cruz**

For centuries, the indigenous peoples of Mexico have inhabited areas with a great biological and cultural diversity, which today are quite often popular tourist destinations.

The Mexican constitution recognises the indigenous peoples (see box). Nevertheless, they are confronted with numerous problems – above all with the fact that in practice they have only limited rights over their territory or that its self-determined administration is not effectively guaranteed. Currently, the areas inhabited by indigenous peoples in Mexico are being transformed by the overexploitation of natural resources in connection with transnational mining companies, agricultural expansion and, not least, tourism.

Tourism megaprojects such as the Tren Maya are part of the problem. Its aim is to bring tourists to the Riviera Maya and back again, offering economic prospects to some of the country's poorest communities.

The project is almost finished. Once completed, it will run through 34 stations in a 1,554 kilometres loop, including some of Mexico's most famous tourist destinations such as Cancún, Tulum and Palenque.

Many activists and indigenous organisations reject the government's flagship project. From the outset, indigenous peoples were not adequately consulted, which is why it is argued that free, prior and informed consent is lacking. The construction has not only damaged the natural resources in its course but has displaced indigenous people from their territories as well.

Tourism is furthermore leading to profound changes in social dynamics, including the increasing abandonment of indigenous languages and traditional occupations such as beekeeping. The social divide is also widening as not all people have access to the economic benefits of tourism and decent work.

Meanwhile, some indigenous movements want to defend their territories. A recent case is that of the Wixárika, Náayeri, O'dam or Au'dam and Mexikan peoples, who in 2022 submitted a proposal for a decree from the Mexican president to recognise and protect their sacred sites and pilgrimage routes. The decree, which was drafted by



The revival of the artisan economy required the joint work of several organisations. One example of these efforts is ‘Ensamble Artesano’, a cooperation platform that was launched in 2020 in response to the pandemic. This initiative brought together partner organisations and artisan groups from various parts of Mexico. By 2023, it had already generated a direct economic benefit of more than €2.7 million for more than 5,600 artisans. The vast majority of them (71%) are indigenous. This initiative is still in operation.

Artisan cooperatives provide access to formal markets that are otherwise difficult for artisans to access. One such example is ‘Jolom Mayaetik’ in the state of Chiapas (‘Maya weavers’ in the Tsotsil language). The cooperative was founded in 1991 in San Cristobal de las Casas and accommodates at least 250 indigenous Tsotsil and Tzeltal female weavers. Their designs are based on traditional Mayan symbolism and techniques. Through the cooperative, these wo-

men are given access to training in order to adapt their creations to the requirements of official markets.

### COMMUNITY-CENTRED ALTERNATIVES

Such sustainable and community-based initiatives must be the alternative to exploitative and harmful forms of tourism in Mexico.

Community-based tourism focuses on emphasising traditions and cultural identity. Local people plan and manage the tourism projects to bring visitors closer to their own culture and share their customs and traditions. This community-orientated model aims to distribute economic benefits more equitably while protecting local heritage.

The state of Yucatán is a role model here. In its six tourist regions, there are a large number of cooperatives and social and family businesses run by Mayan communities. These companies develop tourism experiences and products. One example is the

cooperative association ‘Co’ox Mayab’ (‘Let’s go to the Maya region’). Co’ox Mayab was founded in 2015. Today, it comprises nine social enterprises dedicated to community-based tourism.

In 2023, the Secretariat of Tourism Development of the State of Yucatán, UNESCO in Mexico, Airbnb and Co’ox Mayab launched a capacity-building programme for community-based tourism. The aim of this collaboration is to strengthen Mayan communities as owners and mediators of their ancient culture. To this end, groups, collectives and tourism cooperatives were trained in heritage management, sustainability, tour development and other areas.



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## Mexico’s indigenous peoples

According to statistics from the 2020 Population and Housing Census, there are 23.2 million people in Mexico who identify as indigenous. According to official figures, they are divided into 71 ethnic groups. This corresponds to 19.4% of the total population aged three years and older.

Sixty-eight indigenous languages are spoken in Mexico, which are divided into 364 variants. The most widespread are Nahuatl (22.4%), Mayan (10.5%) and Tzeltal (eight percent). Of the total Mexican population, only 6.1% speak one of these languages, which corresponds to 7.4 million people. The majority of speakers of indigenous languages (87.2%) also speak Spanish. Four states in the south of the country account for half of the total

number of indigenous language speakers: Oaxaca, Chiapas, Yucatán and Guerrero. This is according to data from the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) from 2022.

As a multicultural nation, Mexico recognises the indigenous peoples as „those descended from the peoples who inhabited the current territory of the country at the beginning of colonisation and who have preserved their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions or parts thereof,“ as stated in Article 2 of the Politi-

cal Constitution of the United Mexican States.

Nevertheless, indigenous peoples continue to face discrimination. A national survey on discrimination published in 2023 found that 28% of indigenous people aged 12 and over reported being victims of discrimination, while 26.9% of indigenous people aged 18 and over reported being denied some of their rights. Another study by El Colegio de México on ethnic discrimination in Mexico concluded that discrimination practices are sometimes deeply normalised and appear to be triggered often by ethnic characteristics such as speaking an indigenous language or wearing traditional clothing, among other markers. Against this background, the state has a special responsibility to protect the languages, cultures, customs and traditions of its native peoples (see main text). PC



A woman wears a Wixaritari mask during Día de los Muertos, the most famous manifestation of indigenous and syncretic culture in Mexico.



Delegates from Chinese tour operators and media houses at an airport in Zanzibar in 2023, as part of Tanzania's efforts to open up the country's tourism market to China.

## GLOBAL TOURISM INDUSTRY

# A not very sustainable recovery

**The global tourism industry is recuperating from the coronavirus pandemic, but with major regional differences. The least developed countries in particular lag behind. Among the biggest challenges are lack of investment and the climate crisis.**

By Konstantin Auwärter

The global desire to travel is back. People are travelling as much now as they did before the Covid-19 pandemic, according to the latest World Tourism Barometer published by UN Tourism (formerly UN World Tourism Organization – UNWTO). In the first quarter of 2024, the number of international arrivals (overnight visitors) worldwide reached 97% of 2019 levels. Excluding inflation, revenues from international tourism in 2023 were only just below pre-pandemic levels.

International travel dropped by 72% in 2020 as a result of the pandemic, with devastating consequences for the tourism industry worldwide. Since then, it has staged a slow but steady recovery. However, the re-

gional differences are considerable. In 2023, the countries of the Middle East saw 22% more international arrivals than in 2019, while Europe, Africa and America continued to register a shortfall. The biggest deficit – a 35% fall against 2019 – was noted in the Asia and Pacific region.

The UN report also shows a disparity between rich industrialised nations and poorer parts of the world. In 2023, the former registered more than 90% of 2019 travel volume, while the figure for emerging economies remained around 84%. The least-developed countries, at less than 81%, are proving the slowest to recover – despite a number of positive examples such as Ethiopia (30% growth) and Tanzania (plus 20%).

The World Economic Forum's "Travel & Tourism Development Index 2024" (TTDI) picks up on these differences too. The TTDI measures the development of tourism in 119 countries based on economic, political, environmental and social factors. High-income countries perform considerably better in the TTDI ranking than low-income coun-

tries. A number of low- and middle-income countries – including Côte d'Ivoire, Tanzania and Indonesia – significantly improved their index scores compared to 2019. However, the TTDI authors note that there are still marked differences in levels of participation in global tourism.

There are multiple reasons for this: in many countries, more investment is needed – in better healthcare systems and working conditions, local infrastructure and information and communication technologies – to facilitate access to the international market. The report's authors also find that developing countries' cultural and natural resources are less well developed – a fact underlined, for instance, by the relatively small number of UNESCO World Heritage sites in sub-Saharan Africa. This historical underrepresentation makes it difficult to protect important sites and sustainably develop tourism infrastructure. Places recognised as World Heritage sites could attract visitors even in a difficult economic environment.

## CLIMATE CRISIS AND OTHER CHALLENGES

One of the biggest challenges facing the travel and tourism industry is the climate crisis. According to the TTDI report, the sector was responsible for eight percent of global

„In many countries, more investment is needed – in better healthcare systems and working conditions, local infrastructure and information and communication technologies – to facilitate access to the international market.“

greenhouse-gas emissions in 2019 and UN Tourism calculates that emissions from tourist travel could increase by 25% between 2016 and 2030. At the same time, many regions that depend on tourism are severely affected by rising sea levels, destruction of ecosystems and increasing extreme weather events.

UN initiatives and tourism associations have long been calling for a comprehensive transformation of global tourism in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In the “Glasgow Declaration

on Climate Action in Tourism”, numerous companies and institutions pledged in 2021 to contribute to meeting the Paris climate targets. The TTDI researchers find that tourists’ travel behaviour has certainly changed in some areas: they travel shorter distances and use alternative forms of transport to air travel. According to the report’s authors, however, this is not primarily due to increased environmental awareness; the main reasons are economic, due to factors such as global inflation and fluctuating fossil-fuel prices. In addition, there is growing uncertainty over geopolitical conflicts.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) reports that carbon emissions from global air travel – including travel for purposes other than tourism – reached around 80% of pre-pandemic levels in 2022 and will probably exceed the 2019 figure in 2025. Furthermore, the return of visitors means that old problems such as overtourism and seasonality have resurfaced in many places.

It was often said during the pandemic that there could be no going back to “business as usual”. In some areas, measures have

already been taken to make the tourism sector more environmentally and socially sustainable and therefore more resilient to crisis. They include access restrictions and tourist levies to ease the burden on places that are particularly under pressure. Others should follow suit here, because the climate crisis demands swift and comprehensive action – in tourism as well as in other sectors.

### LINKS

**UN Tourism: World Tourism Barometer.**  
<https://www.unwto.org/un-tourism-world-tourism-barometer-data>

**World Economic Forum: Travel & Tourism Development Index.**  
<https://www.weforum.org/publications/travel-tourism-development-index-2024/>



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