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FOCUS

Climate action

For the entire 12 months from February 2023 to January 2024, global temperatures were on average 1.5° Celsius above the pre-industrial level. We do not know whether they will drop below this threshold, which was spelled out in the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, ever again. That can happen, but we have no guarantee. Extreme weather events are wreaking havoc in ever more places. There are options for preventing harm, and they require international cooperation. We must take action.

Title: Installing a solar panel in Nairobi.
Photo: picture-alliance/photothek/Thomas Imo





Our focus section starts on page 17 and directly pertains to the UN's 13th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG13): Climate Action. For obvious reasons, SDG13 has a bearing on the entire SDG agenda.

On the edge

Since June 2023, every single month has been the hottest of its sort on record, some of them by a large margin. At the same time, the atmosphere's carbon concentration is still growing as greenhouse gas emissions keep increasing. We recently breached a limit of great symbolical relevance: for the entire 12 months from February 2023 to January 2024, global temperatures were on average 1.5° Celsius above the preindustrial level.

This does not mean that the goal of the Paris agreement, which is to keep global heating below the 1.5° threshold long term, is no longer achievable. Temperatures may yet drop again. Climate trends are measured in decades, not months.

Business as usual, however, would mean that the 1.5° goal will be missed long term. This outlook may feel quite discouraging. Ambitious climate goals make sense, but they imply a risk of undermining confidence when they are not reached. Nonethe-

“Our planet is quite complex. It is impossible to precisely predict tipping points and their impacts. Since we do not understand these risks well, we must urgently limit them.”

less, we need better climate protection in order to limit global heating to the extent possible and prevent the worst catastrophes. Every 10th of a degree matters. 1.6° is safer than 1.7°, and 1.7° is safer than 1.8°.

Extreme weather events mark our time. According to Save the Children, an international non-governmental organisation, climate-induced floods, storms, wildfires and landslides killed at least 12,000 people last year. More than half lived in countries with low and lower middle incomes.

Unless climate protection improves fast, extreme weather will get worse. The hotter Earth becomes, moreover, the more likely we become to reach tipping points, after which important systems change irreversibly for a long time. Even at current temperatures, some systems may collapse, according to the Global Tipping Points Report. Examples include the Greenland and West Antarctic ice sheets, warm-water coral reefs and permafrost regions. The impacts would be catastrophic. The Atlantic meridional overturning circulation (AMOC) has already weakened. Its end would mean colder temperatures in Europe, but even hotter temperatures in poorer world regions.

Our planet is quite complex. It is impossible to precisely predict tipping points and their impacts. Since we do not understand these risks well, we must urgently limit them. It is essential to reduce carbon emissions. Policymakers must set the conditions for the transition to a climate-compatible economy, ensuring a just transition and communicating clearly why some uncomfortable changes are necessary.

Subsidies for fossil fuels are absurd, for example. Nonetheless, however, influential political forces in both Germany and France currently want farmers to keep benefiting from such subsidies. That would not reduce emissions but send the dangerous message that things can keep going on as usual.

At both national and international levels, we need more cooperation and less polarisation. Wars like the ones in Ukraine and Gaza are not only devastating in humanitarian, political and economic terms. They also devour resources and attention needed for climate protection.

On the upside, many people around the world want to take action for better climate protection. Solar and wind power are becoming increasingly more important. Lawcourts, moreover, are forcing governments and private-sector companies to assume climate responsibility. Efforts to keep the planet liveable must not ease off. And that is true even if the 1.5° goal proves unachievable long term.



JÖRG DÖBEREINER
belongs to D+C/E+Z's
editorial team.

euz.editor@dandc.eu



Awarding the German Africa Prize 2023 to the National Women's Convention for Peace in Cameroon.

PEACEBUILDING

Involving women in peace process

In the past years, Cameroon has been rocked by violent conflicts, which have particularly affected women. A platform of women's organisations is campaigning for a peace process with a special focus on women's needs.

By Epah Mfortaw Nyukechen

Since 2014, the political situation is fragile in Cameroon. The Islamist terrorist group Boko Haram harasses people in the Far North region. In 2016, armed separatist groups began a war of independence in Cameroon's English speaking Northwest and Southwest regions. Furthermore, the East region hosts thousands of refugees from the Central African Republic, posing a security challenge for Cameroon. Additionally, there is conflict between indigenous people over access to land.

Civilians in the conflict areas have experienced unspeakable violence at the hands of the perpetrators. The horrors in-

clude extra-judicial killings, beheadings and rape. Even though these conflicts vary in scope, intensity and nature, they have in common that women suffer the most. They have been sexually assaulted and frequently exploited as a weapon of war.

This victimisation leads to isolation, alienation and prolonged emotional trauma. Many women had to bury loved ones. "We have bandaged the wounds of our sons; wept and comforted our daughters who have been raped and battered and saved them from being used as human bombs," victims wrote in a "call for peace", adding: "We hid in bushes, suffered the cold, starved for days as we run away from guns and killings. We have been cruelly deprived of everything including our dignity."

While women pay a disproportionately heavy price in armed conflicts every day, they are still largely excluded from official peacebuilding processes. This is the reason why in January 2021, the National Women's Convention for Peace in Cameroon was

formed after writing the call for peace. The platform unites around 80 women's organisations and networks from all ten regions of the country. The organisations work with internally displaced persons, promote education for children in conflict zones or engage in the prevention of gender-related violence. They also help traumatised victims and relatives, take in refugees and act as mediators between armed groups and the military.

The activists are convinced that a lasting peace cannot be achieved without the participation of women and the inclusion of gender perspectives. They represent Cameroon's complete spectrum of women, including peace activists, displaced women and girls, victims and survivors of war-related violence, academics and women with all kinds of societal backgrounds. Their slogan is: "We build an alliance of good will that is stronger, louder and in greater numbers than those people who profit from war and conflicts."

For the past three years, the Convention has been actively advocating for the peaceful resolution of conflicts and lasting peace in Cameroon. The Convention has organised three unprecedented events:

- In 2021, 1,800 women from all 58 Divisions of Cameroon met in Yaoundé to launch a united "Call for Peace";
- The Parliamentary Encounter of the 2021 Convention in the chamber of the National Assembly;
- Initiation of the 2022 peace negotiations which assembled all official stakeholders.

The documents that have emerged from these events include:

- the Ethical Peace Pact,
- the Principles for Peace Negotiations,
- the Cameroon Peace Treaty.

They are all available at the Convention's website. The calls on policymakers are:

- End hostilities immediately and permanently, and thus give meaning to the African Union campaign "Silence the Guns" for a conflict-free Africa, prevent genocide, make peace a reality for all and rid the continent of wars, violent conflicts, human-rights violations and humanitarian disaster.
- Pursue a continued and inclusive dialogue that addresses core issues around peace, solidarity and humanity in Cameroon.

- Ensure the equal and permanent involvement of women peace mediators and negotiators in peace processes at all levels, while enforcing their protection at all times.
- Create additional centres for psychosocial support and trauma-healing and expand the existing ones.

The Convention is the largest and most far-reaching initiative of active peace-builders at local, national and international levels in Cameroon and it has received national and international recognition. UN Secretary-General António Guterres spoke about it in his report to the Security Council on 21 November 2021. The Convention is also the 2023 recipient of the German Africa Prize, which was presented in Berlin in November 2023. The prize is awarded to outstanding individuals and organisations from the African continent who are particularly committed to democracy, peace and human rights.

In addition, the publication “Peace by Piece – Building Peace in Cameroon through Women’s Action” was launched on 15 Febru-

ary 2023 in a ceremony in Cameroon presided by the Minister for the Promotion of Women’s Empowerment and the Family and attended by representatives of national institutions, the diplomatic corps, political parties and civil society.

The convention is supported by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES), which is affiliated with the Social Democratic Party of Germany. Its Cameroon office serves as the secretariat of the convention, which is supported by various institutions in Germany such as the Federal Foreign Office and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.

At the same time, the Convention remains a grassroots-based initiative of women from Cameroonian civil society. In consequence, the Convention also gets support from members who offer voluntary services and expertise in different domains.

The Convention wants Cameroonian women to play a leading role in building, negotiating and defending peace. It pledges support for all the peace efforts undertaken

by the government and all its partners in Cameroon and abroad, including civil society. It calls on all key stakeholders to the conflicts to undertake concrete and immediate actions to end violence.

LINKS

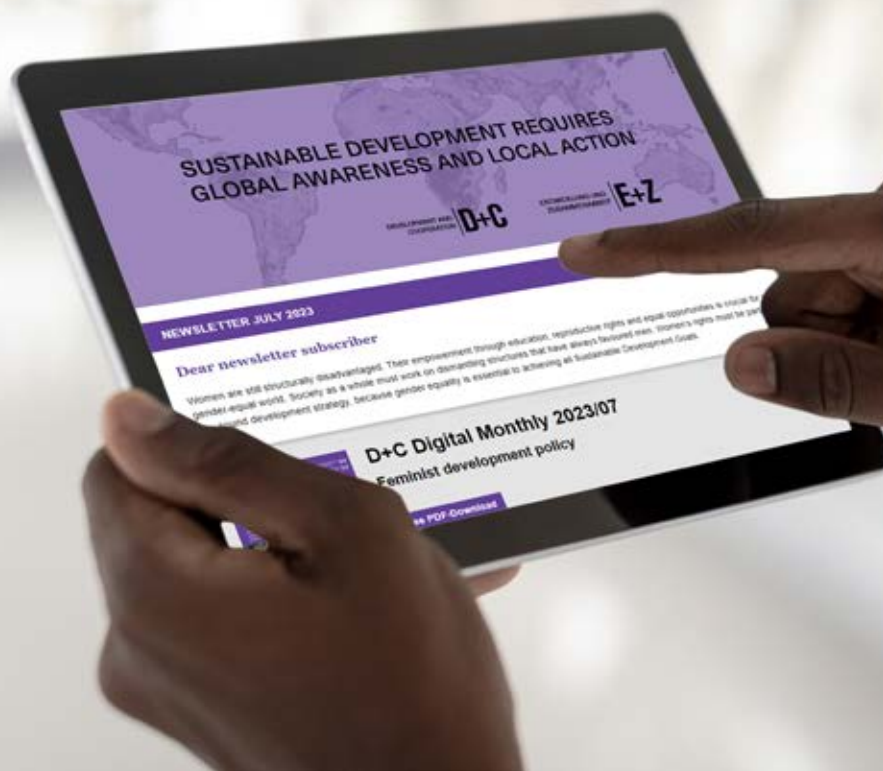
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EPAH MFORTAW NYUKECHEN is a programme assistant at the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES). He wrote the article in

the name of the National Women’s Convention for Peace in Cameroon with the support of members of the Convention and FES.
epah.nyukechen@fes-kamerun.org

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The Prime Minister of Barbados, Mia Mottley, spoke at COP27 in Sharm el-Sheikh about her Bridgetown Initiative to reform development financing.

GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

Reforming development finance

Macroeconomic conditions have changed, so the way that development goals are financed needs to be reformed urgently. Policymakers and international financial institutions have launched a number of initiatives in a search of solutions. These include debt restructuring and debt cancellation, the reform of multilateral development banks and greater mobilisation of domestic resources.

By Kathrin Berensmann, Yabibal M. Walle, Christoph Sommer and Sabine Laudage Teles

The international community will not achieve its 2030 Agenda. It is well short of its goal of ending poverty by 2030 and implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Covid-19 pandemic, geopolitical tensions and violent conflicts as well as climate and debt crises have slowed

and sometimes reversed progress toward the SDGs and substantially widened already large financing gaps. These crises fuelled inflation, which prompted central banks to significantly increase key interest rates. That has made it more difficult for developing countries to access international financial markets and has added to their debt burdens (Berensmann et al. 2023).

According to World Bank estimates, the total spending needed for developing countries to cope with climate change, pandemics and conflicts will be around \$2.4 trillion a year between 2023 and 2030 (WB/IMF 2023). To raise that sum, the development finance system needs to be reformed and adapted to the changed macroeconomic environment (Berensmann et al. 2023).

Against this backdrop, a whole string of conferences and initiatives were organised last year in search for innovative solu-

tions. They included Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley's Bridgetown Initiative, the Summit for a New Global Financial Pact initiated by France's President Emmanuel Macron, the Spring and Annual Meetings of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Financing for Development Forum, the G7/G20 meetings, the Africa Climate Summit and the UN Climate Conference in Dubai. Those forums identified a number of important issues that they wanted to address.

DEBT RESTRUCTURING AND RELIEF

All initiatives recognise the need for debt restructuring and, if necessary, debt cancellation for highly indebted countries. World Bank and IMF estimate that more than half of all low-income countries are currently heavily indebted. At the end of 2020, the G20 launched the Common Framework for Debt Treatment (CF) to tackle the debt crisis. It is the only multilateral mechanism for debt relief and restructuring currently available. So far, however, only four countries have made use of the instrument: Ethiopia, Zambia, Ghana and Chad. In light of this,



Zambia is one of the few countries to have utilised debt relief via the G20 Common Framework for Debt Treatment: market in Ndola.

the CF should be reformed so it can be implemented more swiftly. All public and private creditors need to be included, and debt agreements must be made transparent.

Moreover, the CF should be made available not only to low-income countries but also to middle-income countries. What is more, debt and climate risks should not be considered separately but addressed simultaneously. IMF and World Bank debt sustainability analyses should incorporate climate risks more comprehensively and take account of investments in climate change adaptation. In the medium term, debt restructuring and relief should be linked with climate crisis management (Berensmann 2023).

INCREASE IN OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT AND CLIMATE FINANCE

At the same time, most initiatives agree that official development and climate finance should be increased. We believe it is crucial that donors should reach the official development assistance (ODA) target of 0.7% of gross national income in full by 2030 and, as an interim target, at least halve the current shortfall by 2026. In addition, more ODA should flow to the poorest countries. Donors

should provide ODA in addition to climate finance – not in place of it – and report climate and development finance separately where possible.

REFORM OF MULTILATERAL DEVELOPMENT BANKS

In December 2022, the World Bank's shareholders agreed on a reform process that should result in more investment in climate protection and other global development goals. Strong support for the move came from key actors such as the USA and Germany. Remarkable milestones in that reform were reached at the 2023 summit in Marrakesh.

First of all, the Bank expanded its mandate beyond poverty reduction and shared prosperity to include the imperative of ensuring a “liveable planet” (WB/IMF 2023). Second, World Bank President Ajay Banga announced in Marrakesh that up to \$157 billion more lending capacity could be provided over a decade. This was made possible by a basket of measures, including balance sheet optimisation, the injection of hybrid capital and a portfolio guarantee mechanism.

However, while discussions continue, a number of issues still need to be resolved at upcoming summits.

- First, other multilateral development banks (MDBs) are urged to initiate or accelerate their own reform processes and expand their mandates to promote global public goods. However, they should ensure that scarce subsidised (concessional) funds are not diverted from key development objectives. To avoid jeopardising poverty reduction goals, it is crucial to balance the expansion of mandates with a strengthening of financial capacity (Walle and Brandi, 2023).
- Second, there is an urgent need for MDBs – including the World Bank – to substantially increase their financing capacities. By utilising callable capital, for example, they could absorb more risk and expand their lending operations. To this end, they should expand the terms for callable capital and agree on clearer procedures and mechanisms for its call with credit agencies and shareholders.
- Third, the idea of channelling the IMF's special drawing rights (SDRs) through development banks is a challenging but promising way of expanding MDBs' financing capacity. The recent proposal by the

African Development Bank Group (AfDB) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) merits major consideration at the upcoming summits. SDRs are reserve assets created by the IMF in 1969. IMF members can convert these book credits into other currencies or use them as foreign exchange reserves. SDRs are cheaper for member countries than borrowing on the markets. Moreover, there are no conditions attached to transactions. This innovative mechanism suggested by the two MDBs, which is structured as a hybrid capital instrument, can be treated as equity on MDBs' balance sheets. Rechannelling SDRs to development banks has a significant advantage because leveraging can increase their value for lending operations by more than fourfold.

DOMESTIC PUBLIC RESOURCES

The mobilisation of domestic resources was not at the forefront of every initiative. However, tax revenue is the most important source of development finance, and a fiscal buffer makes countries more resilient, so reforms at national and international level are important:

- First, bilateral and multilateral donor organisations should support countries' efforts to create efficient tax administrations and tax systems.
- Second, technical development cooperation should drive forward the digitalisation of tax administrations and the collection of tax administration data. Data and transparency are needed to assess existing tax structures more effectively and design future tax systems. Two successful initiatives in this area are "Tax Inspectors Without Borders" – which sends tax experts to train tax administration staff in partner countries – and the automatic exchange of tax information, which increases transparency to combat cross-border tax evasion and avoidance.
- Third, international tax cooperation should be improved. A promising move in this direction was made in November 2023 with the adoption of a United Nations resolution giving the UN more scope of action on international tax cooperation. In recent years, international tax cooperation has been reformed primarily by implementing the OECD/G20 project on base erosion and profit shifting (BEPS) (Laudage 2023). Many low- and middle-income countries

participating in the Inclusive Framework on BEPS still need support in implementing the BEPS reforms, which aim to combat tax avoidance, improve the coherence of international tax rules and tax the digital economy more heavily. The African Union estimates that Africa loses \$50 to 80 billion a year through illicit financial flows (AU 2019).

Climate targets can be incorporated into these reforms by abolishing unnecessary tax expenditures such as fossil-fuel subsidies in the short term and implementing more green tax reforms (e.g. carbon pricing and environmental taxes) in the long term (Berensmann et al. 2023).

BETTER INVOLVEMENT OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Most of the initiatives had a special focus on mobilising private capital. Approaches such as blended finance seek to strengthen and broaden the contributions of private capital, especially international private capital. But private international capital flows such as foreign direct investment or portfolio investment in low- and middle-income countries (excluding China) fell sharply in 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic.

After a brief recovery in 2021, investors even withdrew capital from these countries in 2022 as inflation and interest rates rose. In view of the difficult macroeconomic environment, greater attention should therefore be paid to mobilising domestic private savings for investment. Domestic savings already finance the bulk of private investment. Moreover, they reduce dependency and vulnerability to shocks on the international financial market.

The channelling of savings for investment can be encouraged by public development banks. Because of their proximity to and extensive knowledge of local markets, these banks can create "safe" domestic investment opportunities and help prevent the outflow of domestic resources into hard-currency assets abroad. In addition, the progressing digitalisation in the financial sector has the potential to give more people access to formal (digital) savings options, so more domestic savings can be mobilised and harnessed for financing investment (Berensmann et al. 2023).

The current global economic situation is making development finance even

more important and is increasingly putting it in the spotlight of attention. Summits can help strengthen demands for not only more but also adequate finance for development. To do so, future summits need to be well coordinated and agreements followed up.

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KATHRIN BERENSMANN is a senior researcher and project lead at the German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS).

kathrin.berensmann@idos-research.de



YABIBAL M. WALLE is a senior researcher at IDOS.

yabibal.walle@idos-research.de



CHRISTOPH SOMMER is a researcher at IDOS.

christoph.sommer@idos-research.de



SABINE LAUDAGE TELES is an associate researcher at IDOS.



Kamala Harris – woman, Black and Indian American – representing the USA at the Dubai climate summit in December 2023.

IDENTITY POLITICS

The limited usefulness of “BIPoC”

That a term can help to assess social dynamics in the USA does not mean it is useful elsewhere. One example is the acronym BIPoC. It stands for “black, indigenous and people of colour”. It makes some – though limited – sense in North America but is really not helpful in India or large parts of Africa. Migration from there to the US makes everything even more complicated.

By Hans Dembowski

In the USA, BIPoC broadly covers communities that suffer discrimination. Nonetheless, it is controversial even in North America because not every person who belongs to a minority wants to be lumped into one big category to form an opposite to white people. Making matters more complicated, there are “bi-racial” people with white and black parents.

Does that make them coloured in the same sense as, let’s say, migrants from India are? In South Asia, of course, the BIPoC

acronym is useless. What matters most in India is which caste someone belongs to. That is common knowledge around the world. What is less well understood is how complicated the system is. Most foreigners do not know that Indian languages use two different terms for what outsiders call “caste”:

- The “varnas” are the categories used in Hinduism’s holy Scriptures, and they distinguish religious leaders (Brahmins) from Kshatriyas (nobility, often with military skills), Vaishyas (who are engaged in commerce and finance) and Shudras (peasants and artisans).

- The more important term, however, is “jatis”, which basically stands for something like clans.

Jatis permeate all faith communities and not only the Hindus, as the Varna system does. On the other hand, not all Hindus have a place in the Varna system. The lowest jatis are outcast(e)s who do not belong into the four categories. They are now common-

ly called Dalits, which means “the broken ones”. Their history is marked by brutal suppression and exploitation.

How exactly a jati fits into the Varna system can be a matter of dispute. There are regional differences. Moreover, there are hierarchies within the Varna categories. Some Brahmins are more prestigious than others, and again regional differences matter very much. Whether the Brahmins are really the top category, is not that clear either. The international perception is based on how Brahmin authors described the system. I doubt that powerful monarchs or prosperous moneylenders considered the Brahmins they hired for religious services to be their superiors. That is not what employers normally do when they pay someone to work for them.

The jati system, however, is quite strong. Even today, people tend to marry within their own social group.

In the USA, of course, Indian immigrants become Asian Americans or Indian Americans (not to be confused with American Indians). Some of them are in positions of great influence. Sundar Pichai is the CEO of Google-parent Alphabet and Satya Nadella is the CEO of Microsoft. Both belong to Brahmin jatis. What non-Indian Americans have begun to learn in recent years is that

Indian immigrants bring along the jati system to the USA.

Complaints about caste discrimination in tech companies have actually led to legislation to protect Dalits. These rules serve to protect one kind of persons of colour from another kind, which shows that the BIPOC acronym sometimes does not even fit in the country where it originated. It is certainly no coincidence that both of the CEOs mentioned above are Brahmins, which does not mean, however, that they personally have promoted caste-discrimination. There are many Brahmins in India who support progressive causes.

Basing policies on identities is generally problematic. The reason is that identity is something subjective. Identity is neither God-given nor natural. Who and what the person identifies with depends on many things, and social stratification certainly plays a role, but that role changes over time. Societies do not stay the same. The more identities are politicised, the more rigid they

become, which makes it harder to achieve equality at the individual level.

The USA is actually a good example for identities being less fixed and more fluid than often assumed. Kamala Harris is the first Black vice president, but also the first Indian American and the first woman to hold that office. Her accent, however, is typical of university town scholars, which is no surprise, given that she grew up in Berkeley, where the main campus of the huge University of California lies. Migrants' children pick up the accent of the place where they live, not their parents', who, in Harris' case, were academics.

Her mother was a Brahmin immigrant scientist from India. She worked at one of the University's most prominent laboratories. Her father, an economist, was from Jamaica and taught at Stanford University, the prestigious private Californian university. As is common in the USA, her parents divorced when she was a child. In India, that would have been a scandal.

On the US west coast, it was no big deal. In India, by the way, Harris would most likely not have been accepted as the bride in an arranged marriage. After all her father was not Brahmin, so he did not belong to any of the regionally defined Brahmin jatis. He did not have any Indian ancestors at all.

In BIPOC terms, Kamala Harris is both Black and a person of colour but must also be suspected of promoting white supremacy. As vice president, after all, she represents the world power deemed to be imposing its racist standards on the world in an imperialist manner. In the USA, of course, white supremacists resent her. The BIPOC concept does not help to really understand her role – whether at the national or the international level.



HANS DEMBOWSKI
is the editor-in-chief of D+C/
E+Z.

euz.editor@dandc.eu

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

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Aboriginal art: Painting in layers and overpainting with dots are traditional techniques. The picture is entitled “Let’s Go to Mining”.

INDIGENOUS IDENTITY

Making indigenous people seen through art

During the colonisation of Australia, Europeans drew arbitrary borders and claimed the authority to interpret culture and history – with no regard for indigenous peoples. In an exhibition in Cologne, Indigenous Australians show their cultural diversity, history and identity. In view of the dominance of western culture, they look for ways to convey their own perspective.

By Marcel G. Seyppel

In recent years, Germany has increasingly focused on coming to terms with its own history as a colonial power. Among other things, questions of redress for injustice have been discussed, for example in the context of the genocide perpetrated in the former German colony of South-West Africa. There has also been a broad debate on the restitution of cultural assets. In its wake, German museums such as the Hamburg Museum am Rothenbaum – Kulturen und Künste der Welt (MARKK) and the Rauten-

strauch-Joest-Museum (RJM) in Cologne have returned Benin bronzes to Nigeria.

This discourse must be enriched by indigenous perspectives in particular. Ethnological exhibitions play an important role here, as demonstrated by a show at the RJM, which can be seen until 7 April 2024. Entitled “Revisions made by the Warlpiri of Central Australia and Patrick Waterhouse”, it features the results of years of artistic collaboration and presents them for the first time to a European audience.

Those involved in that collaboration included representatives of the Warlpiri, one of the First Peoples of Australia. Their homeland is the steppes of Central Australia, where artistic expression is nurtured at self-managed art centres. They collaborated with the British photographer and artist Patrick Waterhouse, who lived and worked with Warlpiri communities for five years.

The contradictions between indigenous and European cartography in Australia are the starting point for the project.

Otto Jungarrayi Sims, one of the artists, points out that the Europeans dissected the country with arbitrary lines and imposed state borders. “They didn’t understand the diversity of indigenous groups inhabiting this country. They did not know we had our own stories, songlines, boundaries, and nations,” he says. Songlines are mythical routes passed down by song, which together map Australia from the perspective of the Aborigines connecting different time levels.

Before the collaborative art project with the Warlpiri started up, Patrick Waterhouse spent several years travelling around Central Australia. “I met First People artists from 16 to 90 years old and a multi-layered dialogue developed with families of artists speaking for themselves and their people,” he explains. The Aboriginal people allowed themselves to be photographed by Waterhouse and then worked on the images using their traditional dot painting technique.

That technique of painting and overpainting in layers can be traced back to pre-historic times. The Aborigines passed it on from generation to generation right up to the present day. The title of the exhibition “Revisions” is a reference to this: more than 50 predominantly female Warlpiri artists used the technique to paint over and decorate a range of documents created by those who came later to Australia – and thus place the objects in a new locational context.

RECLAIMING IDENTITY

The documents include maps, satellite images, postcards, photographs of animals and landscapes. Over time, comic illustrations and paintings were added, many of them from museum and auction house archives. The RJM also contributed images from its Australian collection. A painting of James Cook, for example, is embellished with a single red dot on his nose. One exhibition wall features a display of overpainted, almost iconic photographic portraits of Warlpiri, expressing the people’s deep connection to their country.

“The Europeans brought their documents with them, in the form of newspapers, maps and texts,” says Otto Jungarrayi Sims. “This is our history. We have no paper. We carry our documents and our knowledge within us. In our hearts and minds.”

The diversity of the stylistic idiom in which the artists present their narratives is



Aboriginal people see themselves as guardians of the land and nature.

astonishing. Among the exhibits are three large, revised flags. They are positioned around the room in display cabinets and appear to float ten centimetres above the floor. Flags were used by the colonial conquerors in Australia as symbols of power and ownership. Now, Aboriginal people are using them in an artistic exploration of cultural oppression.

“Hijacking” objects to revise and re-define them is very different from cutting up, tearing down or replacing a national flag – or from throwing paint at a painting, as climate activists in Europe have recently done on a number of occasions. The exhibition does not present simple acts of erasure; the works it features are a manifestation of creative synthesis. The revised paintings symbolically combine the old and the new, people, animals and landscapes, reality and vision.

This revision fits in with global movements of marginalised and activist groups that use art to draw attention to grievances. For indigenous groups, this is primarily about the reconquest and reorientation of their identity, which has been actively or indirectly suppressed for decades through colonialism and exploitation.

Each picture bears the individual signature of the artist and embodies the identity of the respective ethnic group. Woven into the pictures are messages that are not immediately obvious to the viewer – for example, gender-specific aspects. The re-

vised images can be understood as puzzles in which different parts of the history of the Warlpiri are brought together.

Comprehension of the songline works and their context is aided by a film running in an adjoining room. However, the project manager of the exhibition, Oliver Lueb, emphasises: “We can only understand songlines up to a point. But it is important to revise their incorrect translation as ‘dream times’ or ‘dreaming tracks’. The white explorers and conquerors never understood that their real meaning lies in the connection of past and future in the present.”

The Warlpiri address problems of the past in the art on display but, in doing so, they also refer to problems of the present that need to be solved for a successful future. For example, they see themselves as “guardians of the land” – a role that includes preserving an intact environment. Environmental degradation and rapid biodiversity loss pose a threat not only to their world. The songlines are lifelines, identifying vital water sources, for example, in a country that is increasingly prone to drought. The exhibition includes a photograph of the Tasmanian wolf – “kaporunina” in Aboriginal language – which became extinct in 1936. Before its extermination, it was Australia’s largest predator. The artistically edited photograph is a reminder of the need to stop activities that are destroying the environment.

“Through art, we can tell our story,” says Warlpiri artist Otto Jungarrayi Sims, “the story of how we travelled this land, how we survived in this land.”

LINK

The exhibition “Revisions made by the Warlpiri of Central Australia and Patrick Waterhouse” can be seen at the Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum in Cologne until 7 April 2024. <https://www.rautenstrauch-joest-museum.de>



MARCEL G. SEYPPPEL is a freelance journalist and consultant.

drmseyppe22@gmail.com



“Revised” map of Australia.

Free school meals

Like other countries in East Africa, Burundi has to contend with high crop failures due to persistent droughts and extreme weather. Many people face starvation. The government tries to provide relief by offering school meals.

The drought is particularly bad in three provinces in the north of Burundi, especially in Kirundo. As a result, people are leaving the area in large numbers and children are dropping out of school. To alleviate the hardship, Burundi teamed up with the UN World Food Programme in 2009 to launch a programme to distribute free dinners at primary schools. This helps families and promotes development in rural areas.

Under the programme, smallholder families are able to sell their harvests to schools. To reduce the number of school dropouts across the country, the school-canteen programme has been extended to seven of Burundi's 18 provinces and is currently estimated to benefit 650,000 primary-school children.

This has a double benefit for smallholder families. First, they have the certainty that the food they produce will find a buyer and second, their children have an adequate diet. The school meals consist mainly of healthy local vegetables such as maize, cassava and beans.

The official responsible for school canteens at the Ministry of Education explains that the programme began with imported rice, beans and maize. "In 2013, we decided on a new strategy to supply school canteens with local produce."

The headmaster of a primary school where the programme has been running

for some time draws mixed conclusions. In the first few years after the introduction of the free lunch programme, he says, the children were happy about it and their performance at school was very satisfying. "But as family poverty increased, girls and boys lost interest in school and the number of school dropouts rose. Boys in particular looked for work in neighbouring countries." Many girls left school after becoming pregnant. The headmaster sees the school meals as a helpful measure, but he had expected more.

That observation is confirmed by declining official figures. An official from the Ministry of Education reports that 624,000 pupils in 820 schools benefited from the school-canteen programme in the 2018/19 school year, compared to 570,000 pupils in the 2019/20 school year and 400,000 in 500 schools a year later. Apart from the rise in family poverty, the decline in numbers is also due to a lack of government funding.

The number of primary-school children benefiting from the programme in Burundi is currently estimated at 650,000. The target is 2.8 million, however. Burundi needs to mobilise more resources to keep children in school and hope for better results.

The school-meals programme also offers opportunities for the agricultural sector including livestock farmers, because it enables them to supply food locally to schools. This promotes the development of rural areas.



MIREILLE KANYANGE

is a journalist at Radio Isanganiro in Burundi.

mika.kanyange@gmail.com



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Sustainable development requires global awareness and local action.

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ENGAGEMENT GLOBAL gGmbH
Service für Entwicklungsinitiativen
Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 40
53113 Bonn
Phone: +49 (0) 2 28 2 07 17-0
Fax: +49 (0) 2 28 2 07 17-150
www.engagement-global.de

ADVISORY BOARD:

Selmin Çalışkan, Prof. Dr. Anna-Katharina Hornidge, Prof. Dr. Katharina Michaelowa, Dr. Susanne Neubert, Bruno Wenn

PUBLISHER:

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EDITORIAL OFFICE:

Dr. Hans Dembowski (DEM; editor-in-chief; responsible for content according to Germany's regulations), Jörg Döbereiner (JD), Dr. Katharina Wilhelm Otieno (KO), Dagmar Wolf (DW; assistant), Maren van Treel (MVT; social media)
Freelance support: Sabine Balk (SB), Ronald Ssegujja Ssekandi (Nowadays column), Jan Walter Hofmann (layout), Malcolm Bell (translation), Claire Davis (translation)
Phone: +49 (0) 69 75 91-31 10
euz.editor@dandc.eu

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Fazit Communication GmbH
c/o Cover Service GmbH & Co. KG
PO Box 1363
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Fax: +49 (0) 89 8 58 53-6 28 32
fazit-com@cover-services.de

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SEXUALISED VIOLENCE

In war as in peace

At the moment, awareness of sexualised violence in conflicts is mostly focused on its strategic aspects. However, it is also vital to address systemic discrimination and violence against women in peacetime in order to ensure effective prevention and support for survivors.

By Sara Fremberg

Sexualised violence in war has only been recognised as a severe human-rights violation since the 1990s. This recognition represented a milestone in the campaign to protect and uphold the rights of women and girls worldwide. Before that time, the dominant narrative considered sexualised violence in war “collateral damage”. Change came about in part thanks to the tireless commitment of activists and survivors who publicly discussed the violence they had experienced, for instance after the Bosnian War about 30 years ago. Their statements documented the horrific use of sexualised violence as a war tactic.

Now wartime rape is being discussed increasingly often, especially since Russia

expanded its war of aggression to include all of Ukraine in February 2022 and Hamas and other armed groups attacked Israel on 7 October 2023. The focus here is primarily on the strategic aspect of violence, that is, on the question of whether sexualised violence is deliberately used as a war tactic or “weapon”.

Prosecuting and condemning sexualised violence as part of a war strategy is important. Nevertheless, there usually does not need to be an explicit order to rape. Often it is enough if superiors in the military or armed groups tolerate sexualised attacks and create an atmosphere that encourages this type of violence. In addition, the mostly male perpetrators often have little or no prosecution to fear.

There is another reason why the focus on sexualised violence as a “weapon of war” falls short. Wars exacerbate what was already there: systematic discrimination and violence against women facilitated by patriarchal structures. In post-war societies, these misogynistic structures often emerge from the conflict even stronger. That means that sexualised violence exists on a contin-

uum and is also part of the reality of many women and girls in peacetime. Queer people, non-binary and trans people as well as boys and men also experience this violence.

Only when discriminatory power relations are recognised as the source of the violence can countermeasures be developed that meet the needs of all affected people and prevent new violence from being committed.

STILL STIGMATISED

Sexualised violence can have serious and long-term health and social consequences. Priority must therefore be given to the needs of survivors: they need holistic support in the form of physical and material security as well as stress- and trauma-sensitive psychosocial and medical care. They also need legal advice and opportunities to earn an income.

How strong and lasting the after-effects of trauma are depends on various factors, such as the experiences survivors have in their social environments. Many affected people are still not believed. Instead, they are ostracised and stigmatised.

Society as a whole needs to support survivors and fight sexualised violence. Politicians, the justice system and civil society must all take responsibility and contribute to documentation, investigation, commemoration and compensation.

It is also important to recognise false information and the instrumentalisation of survivors. If sexualised violence is frequently invoked in the context of war and crises, it can signal that political interests are being served alongside the needs of affected women. Often sexualised violence is discussed only for as long as it is politically useful. The patriarchal structures that also underlie peacetime society are too seldom recognised or questioned.

The goal must be to prevent sexualised and gender-based violence and address its causes. At the same time, the suffering of affected people must be acknowledged, along with the strength with which they have survived violence and injustice.



SARA FREMBERG
is the Head of Policy and
Communication at medica
mondiale.

sfremberg@medicamondiale.org



Demonstrators condemn the British broadcaster BBC's coverage of sexual violence against female Hamas hostages.



ECOWAS meets in February to discuss the decision by Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger to leave the community.

the weakening of the regional bloc has considerably strengthened the confidence of the military rulers. They are now turning to Russia, Iran and Turkey for economic support. Other countries such as Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates are also said to be interested in the Sahel region, where most people have adhered to the Islamic faith for centuries.

Russia, Iran and Turkey also continue to supply military equipment to the three countries. They know that the regimes urgently need support in their fight against the jihadists. Every now and then, there are successful strikes, but the terrorists fight back, decimating their troops.

Many eyes are now focusing on Nigeria as the leading power in the region. But President Bola Tinubu is keeping a low profile these days. Back in July 2023, shortly after the military seized power in Niger, he promised to send his troops there to reinstate Mohamed Bazoum, the deposed head of state. Now his reactions were more restrained, and he signalled readiness to talk to the renegade states.

However, the three countries are not willing to hold talks with ECOWAS so far. Some hopes are pinned on Togo, as the country has acted as a mediator in the past. In any case, ECOWAS has great interest in bringing back the defectors. It is worth noting that by mid-February the ECOWAS Commission had not yet received any formal notification of their intention to withdraw, so it declared withdrawal decisions “null and void”.

Until now, it looked as if the three heads of state wanted to remain members of the CFA franc zone for fear of currency chaos. But in mid-February, Niger’s General Tiani declared on the country’s public television that his ultimate goal was to abolish the “currency of colonisation” and join a new currency zone with Burkina Faso and Mali. Nobody really knows where the Sahel region is heading – nor whether some loosening of ECOWAS sanctions will make a difference regarding the renegade members’ stance.



KARIM OKANLA
is a media scholar and
freelance writer from Benin.

karimokanla@yahoo.com

MILITARY REGIMES

Leaving ECOWAS

On 28 January, the military regimes of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger announced their withdrawal from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) with immediate effect. This has grave consequences for the entire region.

By Karim Okanla

The three military leaders Assimi Goïta (Mali), Ibrahim Traoré (Burkina Faso) and Abdourahamane Tiani (Niger), who came to power in 2021, 2022 and 2023 respectively, issued a joint statement accusing ECOWAS of not supporting their fight against “terrorism and insecurity” but instead imposing “illegal, illegitimate, inhumane and irresponsible sanctions” and serving the interests of foreign powers. The three countries have been subjected to jihadist attacks for many years, in which tens of thousands of people have been killed or injured and even more displaced.

The military leaders have a point that falls on fertile ground in many places in West Africa: ECOWAS is increasingly perceived by the public as a union of presidents who are only interested in scratching each other’s back and colluding with western powers rather than representing the interests of West Africa.

However, the withdrawal from ECOWAS raises existential questions for the military regimes that founded the Union of Sahel States as a mutual defence pact last

September: How do the three landlocked countries intend to handle issues such as a common customs tariff, the import and export of goods or transit options?

The most worrisome issue being discussed on radio talk shows in the sub-region these days concerns freedom of movement and residence. Many citizens from Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger work in Côte d’Ivoire, for example. If the three countries confirm their joint decision to leave the regional bloc in the coming months, visa-free travel will become ineffective.

However, the withdrawal of the countries, which together cover an area of more than 2.5 million square kilometres, is anything but good news for ECOWAS as well. Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger are aware of their huge potential in mineral resources. The three countries mine gold and uranium, among other things.

ECOWAS has lost much of its credibility in public and there is no doubt that



CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

EU needs supply-chain directive

In December, the European Commission, Council and Parliament reached agreement on a Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD). However, Germany's market-liberal FDP, which is part of the Federal Government, has suddenly changed its mind, so Germany will now abstain from the final vote. Sustainable development would suffer internationally, should European supply-chain legislation fail. Germany's reputation would suffer too.

By Armin Paasch

Christoph Hoffmann, an FDP member of the Bundestag, claims that the CSDDD would make European companies withdraw from poorer countries and thus cause them harm. This assessment is based on a paper prepared for Gesamtmetall, an industry lobby. It states that German companies would have to cover additional fixed costs for auditing every single firm in their supply chains. It also warns of nebulous legal risks.

This assessment is factually wrong. In truth, companies are supposed to bear an obligation to identify risks relating to human rights and the environment in their supply chains. They would have to take preventive action accordingly. Probable, severe

and irreversible damages would be prioritised. Not every link in a supply chain would have to be audited in detail.

Researchers from the London School of Economics reckon that the CSDDD would only increase corporate costs moderately. Large companies would on average have to afford 0.005% of their turnover. Legal risks would not be nebulous either. According to the draft, European companies would only be liable if an actual damage resulted from the neglect of precisely defined diligence duties.

Experts expect that the EU directive and related German supply-chain legislation, which is already in force, will only rarely result in companies cutting business ties to poorer countries. Commodity supply is scarce, but demand is strong. It is often impossible, moreover, to source commodities from other places. The CSDDD will therefore most likely lead to improvements regarding the environment, human rights and labour law. While implementation may reduce profit margins, it will also prevent environmental harm and make the distribution of incomes more equitable.

The re-shoring of manufacturing to high-income countries is improbable too. Most likely, south-south competition to

achieve sustainability would increase. The CSDDD would slow down the trend of shifting production to the countries with the lowest costs. This trend is undermining wages, social protection and occupational safety. The directive would safeguard the right to organise and thus boost the bargaining power of workers and other groups.

As a matter of principle, the EU draft emphasises capacity building. Ending a business relation would only be the final emergency option after all others have failed. European companies would be obliged to fair business practices, enabling suppliers to:

- pay living wages,
- live up to human-rights principles and
- operate in an environmentally sustainable way.

European companies would have the duty to provide respective training and offer other support measures, especially when cooperating with small and mid-sized enterprises. Managers would not be able to simply pass on corporate responsibility to suppliers. Development cooperation could offer additional support to companies in low- and middle-income countries.

We must challenge the market orthodoxy according to which any kind of integration in global supply chains in itself drives development and prosperity in countries with low and middle incomes. That does not happen when transnational corporations use their oligopolistic power to minimise costs and thus limit value-addition in poorer countries. Where neither national nor international rules ensure living wages, trade-union freedom, human rights and environmental safety, broad-based prosperity is hampered. Child labour, forced labour, displacement, repression of trade unions, environmental destruction and greenhouse-gas emissions are the opposite of sustainable development.

According to the economist Marcel Fratzscher, who heads the prestigious think tank DIW in Berlin, Germany's abstention amounts to "moral failure". The nation's reputation would suffer should the CSDDD not be passed.



ARMIN PAASCH
works for Misereor, a Catholic development agency.

armin.paasch@misereor.de



Labour activists protesting in Dhaka in November 2023.



FOCUS

Climate action

The EU should set the right example

Interview with Mojib Latif (p. 18)

Melting glaciers and thawing permafrost in the Hindu Kush Himalaya region

By Syed Muhammad Abubakar (p. 20)

When flash floods follow drought

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Environment-friendly sponge cultivation in Zanzibar

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Emissions trading in Africa

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Solar power for Ghanaian hospitals

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What does “just transition” really mean?

By Georg Schäfer (p. 30)

Lawcourts insist on climate protection

By Roli Mahajan (p. 32)

Filipino climate protest.



The Guohua coal-fired power plant in northern China.

INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE PROTECTION

“You cannot always wait for everyone”

According to climate expert Mojb Latif, the climate crisis is pushing even rich countries to the limit. He is calling for governments to be more open with citizens – and for more international cooperation.

Mojib Latif interviewed by Katharina Wilhelm Otieno and Jörg Döbereiner

From a global perspective, 2023 was the hottest year on record. At the same time, greenhouse-gas emissions reached a new peak. What are the chances of still meeting the goals of the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement?

When you look at the geopolitical situation, the prospects are extremely poor. The climate crisis is a global problem: it is irrelevant where a gas like carbon dioxide escapes into the atmosphere – whether in Germany, China, the USA or elsewhere. It remains in the air for so long that it spreads all around the globe and has an impact everywhere.

The climate problem can only be solved if all countries work together. Significantly more international cooperation is needed. Many countries’ self-interest is strong, however. If we continue down this road, we will fall spectacularly short of the Paris goals.

On the other hand, we have all opportunities to solve the climate problem, which, after all, is primarily an energy problem. We have a surplus of renewable energy, we know how to use it and we also have the money to make the necessary investments. In a world in which everyone worked together and prioritised shared interests, the problem could be solved within a few decades.

In what areas has there been global progress?

Global CO₂ emissions are still growing, but not as much as they were 20 years ago. The reason could be various crises like the Covid-19 pandemic and damage to the global economy caused by conflicts like the war

in Ukraine. But climate-protection measures likely contributed at least somewhat. Something has happened, though not nearly enough. During the Covid-19 pandemic, we had the sharpest decline in global emissions since the end of World War II. However, it had hardly any impact on the CO₂ content in the atmosphere, which simply continues to rise. We have to get down to a fraction of today’s emissions. It is a Herculean task. Current efforts are completely inadequate. The question is whether one should speak of efforts at all, or rather of refusal.

At the latest climate summit in Dubai in December 2023, financing was provided for the first time for the new loss and damage fund. A decision was also taken to move away from fossil fuels. Isn’t that progress?

I do not understand why that was so celebrated in the media. The results of the summit are completely unacceptable. Much more needs to be done, including more support for poorer countries. The summit in Dubai was the twenty-eighth world climate conference. Since the first conference in 1995, global CO₂ emissions have exploded. You have to honestly ask: what is the point of these conferences?

With regard to CO₂ emissions, they are obviously not productive. It is positive though that they keep drawing the world’s attention to the climate issue. Moreover,

poor countries have a voice there. The 1.5-degrees Celsius goal was incorporated into the Paris Climate Agreement not least because small island countries insisted on it. I do not think that goal makes sense, however, because I believe it is unattainable. If it becomes clear that a target will not be met, many people will become frustrated.

If the escalation of the climate crisis can hardly be avoided now, should more funding go to adaptation?

The main goal of the Paris Climate Agreement is to stay well below 2 degrees Celsius of warming compared to pre-industrial times, which is still possible. The world urgently needs to reduce CO₂ emissions. We do not know what exactly will happen at, say, 1.9 degrees Celsius. The Earth system is too complex. The limit of predictability is one of three limits I describe in my book “Countdown”, with reference to the report “Limits to Growth” published by the Club of Rome. The second is the limit of adaptability. How can a country adapt to extreme events like the catastrophic flooding in Pakistan in 2022? It’s not possible. Third: the limit of financing. How can all of this be paid for, if even a rich country like Germany is reaching its financial limit? Other countries have much less leeway in their budgets.

It is clear that rich industrialised countries have a particular responsibility to uphold with regard to climate protection.

Germany and, to a lesser extent, the USA are among the countries that have lowered their emissions. However, they still emit too much and are responsible for a significant amount of historical emissions. Those of us in industrialised countries have to better understand that the climate crisis affects us too. It is foreseeable that countries will no longer be able to adequately compensate people following major climate catastrophes. That could cause enormous social tensions. Our economic and political system is on the line. Policymakers and citizens have not yet fully comprehended how explosive the situation could become.

Is that also true on a global scale?

Of course. The numbers paint a clear picture. Usually we talk about emissions, but what is really at issue is the CO₂ content in the atmosphere. And that is rising steeply year after year. This fact is hardly ever men-

tioned. Policymakers often give the impression that it would be enough to simply fly a little less and transition to electric vehicles. But we need systemic changes.

What role do the BRICS countries play – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, which expanded their circle last year and now also include oil-rich states?

They are essential to curbing global warming. However, Russia lives off fossil fuels, and I doubt that Vladimir Putin can be convinced to phase them out. China is now the largest emitter of CO₂. The country emits a good eight tonnes of CO₂ per capita per year, about as much as Germany and more than the EU average. Nevertheless, China does not seem prepared to reduce its emissions in the coming years. Despite a weakening economy, they grew in 2023 compared to the previous year.

India, the most populous country on Earth, still has extremely low per-capita emissions of about two tonnes of CO₂ per year. If India follows the same path to development as China, it would be a catastrophe. And we also must not forget that Africa has not even started yet.

Autocratic regimes have a considerable share of global CO₂ output. Recent history has shown, however, that they are largely unwilling to cooperate on environmental and climate protection. The major challenge is to convince them to change that.

How could that be done?

There must be an alliance of the willing. The countries that are serious about climate protection should go ahead and create their own economic area with strict sustainability criteria. The EU can serve as an example. You cannot always wait for everyone.

Is that realistic? Sustainability can be very expensive, and there would be significant competitive disadvantages.

Protective duties and similar instruments must be discussed. But if this economic area were to be successful, others might join quickly. We need the courage now to shape the future.

What do you think about the future of low-income countries?

These countries want to develop, and rightly so. We have to find models in which they work with industrialised countries to try to

“Autocratic regimes have a considerable share of global CO₂ output. Recent history has shown, however, that they are largely unwilling to cooperate on environmental and climate protection. The major challenge is to convince them to change that.”

do so sustainably. In the end, industrialised countries have to pay for it. Otherwise, we should expect that emerging countries will develop like industrialised countries once did, or like China has done more recently: with fossil fuels.

Given the rising concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere, there is discussion about capturing the greenhouse gas and storing it underground (Carbon Capture and Storage – CCS). In Germany, even environmental organisations are divided on this issue: some are in favour, while others see incalculable risks.

I would not like to make a wager like that on the future. While CCS projects are already being conducted, for instance in Norway, to date, there is no technology that could be applied risk-free on a large scale. We need to do more research in this area. But relying completely on it at the present time would be irresponsible towards future generations. I have the impression that many people simply do not want to phase out fossil fuels and see this technology as a lifeline. The safest path, however, is to not emit CO₂ in the first place.

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MOJIB LATIF

is a meteorologist and senior professor at the Christian-Albrecht University of Kiel (CAU) and at the GEOMAR

Helmholtz Centre for Ocean Research Kiel. mLatif@geomar.de



Vast amounts of ice and snow are melting in the Hindu Kush Himalaya region.

THE HINDU KUSH HIMALAYA REGION

“Third Pole” in crisis

Glaciers in the Hindu Kush Himalaya region are melting, permafrost is thawing and water availability in river basins is becoming unpredictable, a landmark report confirms. This poses threats to more than 1.8 billion people living in the mountains and downstream.

By Syed Muhammad Abubakar

The Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) region is also known as the “Third Pole” because it contains the largest volume of ice outside the polar regions. It covers more than 4.2 million square kilometres and is home to all of the world’s peaks above 7000 metres. It spans 3,500 kilometres across Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan.

Glaciers and snow from the HKH feed into 12 river basins, including 10 major transboundary rivers. They flow through 16 countries in Asia and provide freshwater services to about 240 million people in the HKH region and about 1.65 billion people downstream (see box).

The cryosphere is the frozen part of the Earth. It contains snow, glaciers, permafrost and glacial lakes. Up to 60% of the HKH region features seasonal cryosphere,

and it is transforming in various ways, according to a report by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD). ICIMOD is an intergovernmental organisation headquartered in Kathmandu, Nepal, with presence across the HKH member countries as listed above.

1. Glaciers are rapidly melting. Comparing the period from 2000 to 2009 with the period from 2010 to 2019, their mass loss has increased by 65%. Global warming between 1.5 and 2 degrees Celsius will cause glaciers in the HKH to lose 30 to 50% of their volume by 2100. As glaciers recede, glacial lakes expand. The possibility of Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs) is expected to increase three-fold by the end of this century. GLOFs can also be transboundary events, meaning that their impacts can be felt across country borders.

2. Permafrost is thawing. Permafrost is frozen soil, rocks and sand held together by ice. Scientists estimate that about 8,340 square kilometres of permafrost area was lost in the western Himalaya between the period from 2002 to 2004 and the period from 2018 to 2020. About 965 square kilometres was lost in the Uttarakhand Himalaya (India) between the

period from 1970 to 2000 and the period from 2001 to 2017.

3. Downstream water availability is becoming more uncertain. Glacial melting, permafrost thaw and more erratic snowfall are making water resources less predictable in the region. Some river basins have experienced a decrease in run-off, whereas others have witnessed an increase.

4. Extreme weather is becoming more common. A combination of slow-onset events, like sedimentation and erosion, and fast-onset hazards, like floods and GLOFs, can cause extreme-weather events to cascade in ways that are difficult to address.

5. Temperatures are rising. The mean temperature across the HKH is gradually increasing, with an average trend of 0.28 degrees Celsius per decade. Increased warming rates at higher elevations are being witnessed in nine of the 12 river basins.

Even though it can be difficult to attribute specific events to climate change, scientists agree that human-made global warming is the driving force behind the changes in the cryosphere. Policymakers need to assess them in order to analyse the subsequent changes on ecosystems and livelihoods and formulate effective adaptation strategies.

COMMUNITIES AT RISK

Approximately 129 million farmers in the Indus, Ganges and Brahmaputra river basins depend on water from glacier melt and snowmelt to irrigate their crops, especially during spring and summer. As glaciers continue to melt, most HKH river basins are expected to reach “peak water” by the middle of the 21st century, which means that there would be an increase in water availability. However, this will be followed by a decrease in overall water availability by the end of this century, posing a significant threat to the livelihoods of a vast number of people dependent on these river basins for agriculture and other purposes.

As a result of changes to the cryosphere, mountain communities are facing crop losses, fodder shortages, livestock deaths, a decrease in the availability of medicinal plants and species migration to higher elevation, among other things. In many areas of the HKH, communities have already abandoned agriculture and pastoralism due to changes in water availability

and other factors. This has increased the socioeconomic vulnerability of mountain communities and exacerbated food and nutrition insecurity.

EVALUATING CLIMATE IMPACTS

The authors of the report recommend evaluating the current and future impacts of climate change. With regard to permafrost, governments of the HKH member countries should focus on monitoring the ground, especially where infrastructure or communities are vulnerable to thawing.

Regarding glaciers, measuring the thickness of ice and debris, ice temperatures and glacier velocity is important. Models of glacier processes should be improved and better interconnected with hydrological models. More information is needed on how

glacier change can be attributed to human activities.

Since the contribution of different water sources to river flows is changing, policymakers should prepare for seasonal shifts in water availability. They should develop adaptation strategies to tackle extreme weather events.

Moreover, mountain communities need to be provided significant resources and technological support to adapt to these environmental challenges. It is crucial for climate-change adaptation policies to be inclusive and implemented fairly, considering both social and ecological aspects.

Intensifying cross-border cooperation is necessary to effectively preserve the common heritage of the HKH region as indicated by the HKH Call to Action published by ICIMOD. The authors state that “transbounda-

ry cooperation in the HKH is lacking mainly because the focus of intergovernmental initiatives has been on political and economic interests, rather than social and environmental well-being at the regional scale.”

LINKS

ICIMOD, 2023: Water, ice, society, and ecosystems in the Hindu Kush Himalaya.

<https://hkh.icimod.org/hi-wise/hi-wise-report/>

ICIMOD, 2020: The HKH Call to Action to sustain mountain environments and improve livelihoods in the Hindu Kush Himalaya.

<https://www.icimod.org/hkh-calltoaction/>



**SYED MUHAMMAD
ABUBAKAR**

is an environmental journalist based in Pakistan.

s.m.abubakar@hotmail.com

Ecosystems at risk

The Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) region has four global biodiversity hotspots: the Himalaya, the Indo-Burma, the Mountains of Central Asia and the Mountains of Southwest China. They exhibit a rich diversity of ecosystems, including high-elevation rangelands, wetlands and peatlands, which host an abundant wildlife. Some species are endemic, which means they can be found nowhere else on Earth.

The HKH's cryosphere – glaciers, permafrost and other frozen areas – helps to maintain ecosystems functional and support biodiversity. This, in turn, is crucial for the direct and indirect benefits people obtain from ecosystems, including nature-based trade, health aspects and tourism. Such benefits are called ecosystem services.

However, the cryosphere is changing significantly. The change induced by the climate

crisis is directly putting at risk people in mountainous areas as well as farmers downstream who depend on these water resources for drinking and irrigation, as the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), an intergovernmental organisation, points out in a report (see main



Himalayan blue sheep herd hunted by snow leopard in Rumbak valley, India.

text). The authors stress that these changes have severe impacts on ecosystems and biodiversity. This affects communities as well since their lives are intertwined with nature.

HKH member countries have already made important efforts to safeguard biodiversity. More than 40% of the HKH region are protected. However, 39% of the global biodiversity hotspots are still outside protected areas. This makes it

harder to safeguard them not only from climate change but also from anti-environment policies, land-use change, pollution, introduction of invasive species and expanding markets.

Such dangers are a major threat to biodiversity. It is estimated, for example, that nearly a quarter of the species endemic to the Indian Himalaya could be wiped out by 2100. Even if global warming is limited to 1.5 degrees Celsius, as envisioned under the landmark 2015 Paris Agreement, the HKH region may experience species loss and a decline in ecosystem services.

The HKH region, as a contiguous ecosystem, faces cascading impacts that can have dire consequences for all HKH member countries. Regional collaboration among governments is therefore imperative, along with investments in research, data sharing and implementing an interdisciplinary approach to extreme-weather events that takes into account nature-based solutions to build resilience. SMA



The picture was taken during the floods in the middle of Kakuma camp.

CLIMATE CRISIS

Floods in the desert

Extreme weather events show the effects of global heating. The worst affected are those most in need – for example in Kakuma in northern Kenya, one of the world’s largest refugee camps. Coordinated joint efforts by local actors are needed to improve the situation for people in the long term.

By Alba Nakuwa

Kenya experienced heavy rainfall in parts of the country between October and December 2023. This led to strangely mixed reactions of joy and devastation. For some people, it meant that the farming season could finally begin after long dry spells. For others, especially in the arid and semi-arid areas, it meant displacement, damage to property and the loss of livelihoods.

The massive downpours were accompanied by heavy storms and led to the flooding of lakes such as Lake Turkana. Rivers burst their banks which immediately caused landslides. Turkana County was particularly affected. Here, the rains also caused devastating damage to the Kakuma camp, the involuntary home of more than 250,000 people from more than seven countries in East and Central Africa.

“The combination of erratic climate patterns, deforestation and poor land use in the region has left it increasingly exposed to unpredictable weather events.”

The floods have exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in the region. At least 30,000 refugees were displaced by the floods according to the UN refugee agency (UNHCR). Many of those affected had not yet moved to permanent settlements where they would have the chance to start their lives anew after living in the refugee camp for – in some cases – decades.

Lomana Lotiang, a South Sudanese in Kakuma, is one of the refugees directly affected by the floods. The father of two runs a second-hand clothes shop in the camp. His source of income sank in the heavy rains, as did thousands of houses of other refugees. The neighbouring host community, the Turkana, had to watch as their livestock drowned.

“Originally, the UNHCR had relocated the displaced people to makeshift camps and a primary school after the heavy rains during the holidays,” says Lotiang. However, when the schools reopened, all people had to move from the primary school to the makeshift camps, which were already overcrowded. The poor infrastructure in the camp prevented the water from draining quickly and so standing water increased the risk of contracting waterborne diseases such as cholera and diarrhoea throughout Kakuma.

DEFORESTATION INCREASES RISKS

According to research by the Kenya Meteorological Department, floods that immediately follow a prolonged drought can be attributed to both natural and man-made factors. The combination of erratic climate patterns, deforestation and poor land use in the region has left it increasingly exposed to unpredictable weather events.

Most people in Kakuma and throughout Turkana County cut down trees for wood and charcoal, which they use for building fences or cooking. However, removing vegetation or cutting down trees reduces the natural resistance of the soil, as it is exposed and can therefore no longer absorb accumulating water. This increases the risk of flooding.

The fact that the UNHCR and others, especially state actors, often only become active with sometimes uncoordinated rescue missions when a natural disaster occurs, is also part of the problem. Much more combined efforts are needed from the authorities, the Turkana community and refugees in the camp that can gear the region towards a more holistic approach of sustainable land management.

Reforestation and the introduction of climate-resilient agriculture, such as the cultivation of drought-resistant crops, is a necessary step. However, the most important one is to promote education and awareness-raising campaigns in the affected communities so that they understand the risks associated with deforestation and subsequent droughts and floods.



ALBA NAKUWA

is a freelance journalist from South Sudan based in Nairobi.

albanakwa@gmail.com



Nasir Haji inspects her underwater sponge farm.

COASTAL COMMUNITIES

Sustainable sponges

In Zanzibar, women have taken up the cultivation of climate-resilient sponges in the Indian Ocean. They diversify economic activities in their communities and develop a sustainable source of income. In marine ecosystems worldwide, sponges play an important role in protecting biodiversity, including from global heating.

By Kizito Makoye

On the coast of Jambiani in Zanzibar, Hindu Rajabu is on her way to her floating sponge farm. She wears swimming goggles and a snorkel on her headscarf as she wades into the Indian Ocean. When the tide rises, she dives into the water to reach the buoys that hold the sponge farm in place.

Rajabu is a 31-year-old mother of two. The search for income has led her and other divorced women and single mothers in Zanzibar to the depths of the Indian Ocean to grow climate-resistant sponges.

Zanzibar, an archipelago off the coast of Tanzania, faces several challenges to its ecosystems and livelihoods. Like many coastal communities around the world, the

islands are suffering from the effects of global heating, including rising sea levels. This in turn leads to coastal erosion, threatening homes, infrastructure and agricultural land. In low-lying areas, saltwater intrusion is contaminating freshwater sources, affecting both drinking water and agricultural productivity.

Ocean warming, moreover, has an impact on marine ecosystems, including coral reefs and fish stocks. Coral bleaching, a phenomenon linked to rising ocean temperatures, poses a serious threat to the diverse marine life that relies on these ecosystems to survive. This impacts the fishing industry and food security in the region.

In addition, extreme weather events such as storms and hurricanes are becoming more frequent, causing damage to property and destroying livelihoods.

Sponge farming plays a crucial role in overcoming some of these challenges. Sponges are marine animals that contribute to the health and conservation of coral reefs and the entire marine ecosystem. They also provide an important habitat for numerous marine species and contribute to the conservation of biodiversity.

The sponges also provide an alternative and sustainable source of income for local communities. Traditional livelihoods in Zanzibar often depend on fishing and tourism, both of which can be vulnerable to environmental disruption. Sponge farming diversifies economic activities and reduces pressure on natural resources. Healthy coral reefs in particular are important for fishing, tourism and protecting the coastline from erosion.

Scientists have identified over 15,000 species of sponges. They may have been the first animal on earth and are thought to have existed for over 600 million years. They are resistant to warmer temperatures and filter impurities from the water, reducing marine pollution. A study published in the scientific paper *Microbiology and Molecular Biology Reviews* shows that up to 24,000 litres of seawater can be pumped through a 1 kilogramme sponge in a single day.

Sponges are used for bathing and cleaning. Natural sponges are the environmentally friendly alternative to harmful synthetic sponges, which contain microplastics that are dangerous to aquatic life.

Research has further shown that the spongy creatures play an important role in combating the climate crisis. Sponges are responsible for dissolving around 48 million tonnes of silicon every year, because their skeletons break down into microscopic pieces of the element. According to experts, the dissolved silicon helps to control the car-

bon cycle in the ocean and reduce the greenhouse effect.

SHRINKING SEAWEED INDUSTRY

When Rajabu reaches the buoys, she looks at the sponges floating on a thick polythene rope. She then cleans the rope with a knife to get rid of any hidden bacteria. “They are delicate animals, I handle them very carefully,” she says. To protect the sponges from higher temperatures, Rajabu ensures that they always remain under water. She spends four hours a day taking care of the floating farm.

Rajabu dropped out of school at the age of 17. She started a seaweed farm but earned barely \$30 a month – not enough to feed her children. The seaweed industry, which once formed the backbone of the Zanzibari economy and employed up to 20,000 farmers, mostly women, has suffered from the rising temperatures. Studies show that the yield and quality of the seaweed has declined drastically due to the sweltering heat, erratic rainfall and stronger winds. According to Zanzibar’s Ministry of Blue Economy and Fisheries, algae production in Zanzibar fell by 47% between 2002 and 2012 due to the climate crisis, disease and low prices.

Aziza Said, a marine biologist at the University of Dodoma, says sponges are more resistant to higher temperatures, easier to maintain and realise better market prices than seaweed. “They moreover enrich the seabed by releasing fatty and amino acids that can be absorbed by other organisms,” she adds.

Since joining the Swiss non-profit organisation marinecultures.org in 2020,

Rajabu has been earning a monthly salary of \$100. Christian Vaterlaus, the founder of marinecultures.org, set up the sponge farm in Zanzibar in 2009 to help impoverished seaweed farmers earn a better income and protect the surrounding ecosystems. “Single mothers have an especially difficult position in society because they don’t get any support,” he says.

Ali Mahmudi Ali, the project manager of marinecultures.org, says that the organisation has trained 13 women since 2009. “The training is necessary to improve their skills and knowledge of the changing weather conditions,” says Ali. As part of the training, the farmers also learn how to swim, dive, use the equipment, clean and care for the sponges, sort the sponges for sale, market them and keep accounts.

Nasir Hassan Haji is the chairperson of the Zanzibar Sponge Farming Cooperative, a women-led organisation that oversees production activities. She says that sponge farming is reshaping traditional gender roles in the deeply patriarchal Jambiani community, where women are usually confined to childcare and housework. It is a lifeline providing a chance of financial stability, especially for divorced women and single mothers.

Zulfa Abdalla used to spend hours weaving hats to earn a living and support her two children after her husband divorced her at the age of 23. “I never thought that one day I would learn to swim. Surprisingly, it has become my source of income,” she says. After barely three months, Abdalla harvested a bumper crop that earned her almost \$640. With some of the money, she bought



a bed, a wardrobe, a dressing table and renovated her mother’s house.

PATIENCE REQUIRED

Each sponge is sold for \$15 to \$30, depending on size and quality. The products are distributed to souvenir shops and hotels in Zanzibar and abroad. The farmers receive 70% of the revenue, while 29% goes to the sellers and the remaining one percent supports the Zanzibar Sponge Farmers’ Cooperative.

However, Vaterlaus says the actual economic yield of the sponges is low. According to him, the business is hardly scalable because the expansion of hatcheries for rearing baby sponges is limited and there is a lack of research funding.

Leonard Chauka, a molecular biologist at the Institute of Marine Sciences at the University of Dar es Salaam, says that although sponges are useful for the environment, their production and distribution are costly and require patience. “Growing sponges takes a long time, and farmers have to wait at least one year for the sponges to reach a saleable size,” says Chauka.

Despite these challenges, marinecultures.org is planning to start sponge farming on Pemba, an island next to Zanzibar, and in Tanga on the mainland coast of Tanzania.

Rajabu says her sponge income has helped her buy a piece of land on which she will build a three-bedroom house. “I have always dreamt of building my own house. Now my children will have a place to call home,” she says.



Harvested sponges are being packed for sale.



KIZITO MAKOYE is an environmental journalist from Tanzania.

kizmakoye@gmail.com



The Kenyan Ogiek community filed a lawsuit to challenge the eviction from Mau Forest, their home, in favour of planned carbon offsetting schemes.

CARBON CREDITS

Africa is chasing billions

Africa's drive for carbon credits continues to gather pace. Despite the prospect of generating significant revenue and green jobs, there is concern about the effectiveness, transparency and ethical implications of the current carbon markets on the continent.

By Wanjohi Kabukuru

The outcome of the 28th annual Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP28) in Dubai in December was a disappointment to many who had expected it to drive reform, not least with regard to the two main approaches to carbon pricing: carbon markets and taxes.

Important milestones were achieved at COP26 in Glasgow in 2021. Countries agreed to support the transfer of emission reductions, incentivise the private sector and pursue non-market approaches to climate adaptation and mitigation. However, little was achieved at COP27 in Sharm el-Sheikh, and things came to a standstill at COP28.

This is particularly frustrating for Africa, where hopes were high in the run-up to COP28. Two months before the conference, the countries of the continent had agreed on a common position in the Africa Cli-

mate Summit Declaration, which proposed a “global tax system including a carbon tax on fossil fuels, maritime transport and aviation”. Africa accounts for four percent of emissions but remains among the regions most affected by the climate crisis.

The global markets for carbon credits and offsets have suffered some serious reputational damage in the recent past. Broadly speaking, emission credits are permits for emissions authorised by a governing body to participants (e.g. companies or countries) in a regulated trading system with a cap. Emission offsets are created, for example, when a company invests in environmentally friendly projects to avoid emissions. These offsets can be traded on voluntary markets.

Despite criticism, revenues from carbon taxes and trading schemes totalled \$95 billion last year, according to the World Bank. The Bank's recently published report “State and Trends of Carbon Pricing for 2023: International Carbon Markets” shows that financial flows in the carbon markets have increased.

Research conducted by private-sector entities Trove Research and International Emissions Trading Association indicates that \$17 billion were invested in carbon markets between 2020 and 2022. As of 2023, the global market for carbon credits is estimated

to be worth almost \$403 billion, according to a study by InsightAce Analytic, another firm. Africa has its eye on this money flow. It can help to close the huge gaps in its climate finance.

“Studies show that with \$20 per tonne of nature-based carbon credits, \$82 billion could be generated annually. That's about one and a half times the money Africa receives in official development assistance,” said Claver Gatete, executive secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa, on the sidelines of COP28. According to Gatete, the UN agency is currently in talks with member states to ensure that Africa's participation in carbon markets is based on “high integrity credits” which make sure the continent is able to unlock benefit-sharing policies, deployment of sustainable decarbonisation pathways and investments in nature-based solutions.

“NEXT MAJOR EXPORT”

In 2021, Gabon became the first African country to receive payments totalling \$17 million from the Central African Forest Initiative to reduce emissions by protecting the rainforest in its Congo Basin.

This triggered a continental race for sovereign carbon-offset programmes. At COP27, Kenyan President William Ruto declared that his country's “next major export” would be carbon credits. He said this as he joined other African heads of state to unveil the African Carbon Markets Initiative, which aims to unlock \$6 billion in annual revenues by 2030 while creating 30 million

green jobs in Africa and generating 300 million carbon credits.

A few weeks after COP27, Ruto launched an ambitious tree planting initiative that aims to plant 15 billion trees and restore about 5.1 million hectares of degraded and deforested land in Kenya by 2032, with the aim of obtaining carbon credits.

In 2023, the Kenyan leader hosted the first Africa Climate Summit in Nairobi and also positioned it as a platform for developing the continent into a hotspot for carbon credits. The summit ended with pledges for carbon credits worth \$ 650 million under the African Carbon Markets Initiative.

The pledge was led by Middle Eastern conglomerates, notably the UAE Carbon Alliance and UAE's Blue Carbon Company, which signed multi-million-dollar land deals with several African governments to secure and manage forests, wetlands, peatlands, swamps and grasslands, as well as coastal mangrove forests. The governments' promise is to conserve these areas

and generate carbon credits. In return, the conglomerates will sell the carbon credits to companies and governments that want to compensate for emissions and thus fulfil their climate pledges.

There are currently two types of carbon markets:

- In compliance markets, governments set up and regulate an emissions trading system defined by a geographical area with an emissions cap. This is the case with the EU Emissions Trading Scheme. Under such a system, companies and countries that have exhausted their emission quotas can buy unused emission allowances from other companies to continue emitting beyond their quotas. They can also purchase "offset credits" from other countries outside the geographical scope of the scheme.

- In voluntary carbon markets, there is little or no regulation. Companies set their own emission targets and buy carbon credits from willing sellers to cover or offset their carbon emissions.

In Africa, it is mainly the voluntary market that is well established, as countries are slow to create a legal framework that enables a thriving compliance market. However, the voluntary market on the continent is controversial and has been criticised for being opaque, discriminatory, unfair and ineffective in terms of development and climate policy. The environment minister of Congo-Brazzaville, Arlette Soudan-Nonault, described it as an "unregulated Wild West".

Kenya currently dominates the voluntary carbon market in Africa with projects such as a mangrove restoration initiative and the Northern Rangelands Trust's carbon projects, according to Kenya's special climate-change envoy Ali Mohamed. Other countries with similar projects include Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, the Gambia, Ghana, Madagascar, Mozambique, Senegal, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Seven weeks after the 2023 summit in Nairobi, the Kenyan government began

Italy's castor-oil plans for Africa

The latest supposedly green trend being touted in Africa as a climate-friendly energy alternative to fossil fuels are castor-oil plantations. Castor oil is considered a raw material for biofuels. Its cultivation has recently increased significantly on the continent. Plantations are sprouting up in many places.

The Italian mineral oil company Eni has been at the forefront of this "green solution" in Kenya, Angola, Mozambique and Côte d'Ivoire by establishing castor-oil plantations and extraction mills.

As the pressure to reduce emissions increases, major oil companies are seeking to diversify their products and utilise greener alternatives to meet their net-zero targets by 2050. According to scientists at Ken-

ya's Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology working with Eni, the castor oil

plant is a "low-maintenance, drought-resistant crop with low environmental impact" that will significantly reduce carbon emissions. However, the fact that castor-bean seeds also produce ricin, a toxic substance

that is poisonous to wildlife, livestock and humans, seems to be ignored by all sides.

The call for castor-oil plantations, reminiscent of the jatropha biodiesel plants that failed to deliver the expected results a decade ago, has led the Italian multinational energy company to build two biofuel extraction plants in Kenya as part of its € 700 million budget to invest in green energy in Africa by 2026. Moreover, a biofuel strategy is included in the € 5 billion "Mattei Plan" for Africa, which is being driven by Italian prime minister Georgia Meloni and aims to turn the European country into an "energy hub" between Europe and Africa.

The Mattei Plan – named after the founder of Eni, Enrico Mattei – will be based on five main pillars: education and training, agriculture, health, water and energy. The latter is the most important for Italy. WK



Italian prime minister Giorgia Meloni welcomes Kenyan president William Ruto at the Italy-Africa conference in January.

forcibly evicting the Ogiek community from their homes in the Mau forest complex, blaming them for the deforestation of more than 2500 hectares. The government plans to fence the forest and plant 4.3 million trees. However, the evictions were temporarily halted by the Environment and Land Court two weeks after they began.

SERIOUS FLAWS

It is not only in Kenya that Africa's call for carbon credits, which are touted as nature-based solutions, is being criticised by climate policy think tanks, the scientific community and civil society. They slam various projects on the continent for lack of transparency, lack of equitable revenue sharing, greenwashing and dispossession of indigenous and local communities.

In 2023, the human-rights group Survival International published a report exposing serious flaws in the Northern Rangelands Grassland Carbon Project, one of

Kenya's many initiatives, including lack of prior informed consent and financial probity, opaque benefit-sharing, lack of scientific rigour and governance concerns.

The Oakland Institute, an independent policy think tank based in the US, has warned in its 2023 report that Africa faces "devastating social and environmental impacts", including "the prevalence of corruption and fraud in voluntary carbon markets".

According to Anuradha Mittal, Executive Director of the Oakland Institute, the fixation of Kenya and other countries on voluntary carbon markets ignores their failures. Mittal argues that these markets have not led to a reduction in carbon emissions. "Conflicts of interest, fraud and speculation plague these markets, while the expansion of carbon offset programmes and tree plantations leads to the expropriation of community lands to make profits for investors," she said. "The expansion of carbon markets does not benefit Africa, but perpetuates the status quo of resource ex-

ploitation, greenhouse-gas pollution and power imbalance."

A coalition of civil societies led by Power Shift Africa and Climate Action Network International also published a damning report stating: "Carbon markets benefit polluters, fossil-fuel companies and market brokers. They drive pollution beyond climate limits and are neo-colonial barriers to realising genuine African development pathways."

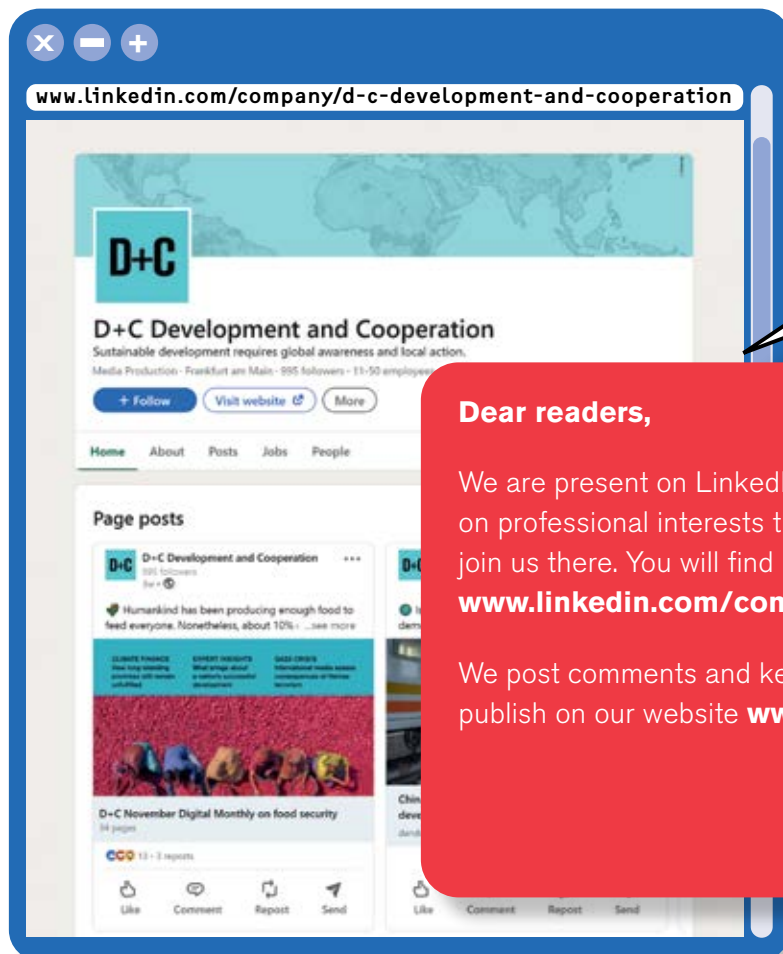
If Africa's participation in the carbon markets is to truly benefit the continent, its people and its nature, the situation must develop differently. Fair cost sharing, transparency, respect for indigenous land rights and truly sustainable projects without greenwashing must take centre stage.



WANJOHI KABUKURU
is a Kenyan journalist and specialises in environmental affairs.

wkabukuru@gmail.com

<https://twitter.com/wanjohik>



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Solar modules at St. Dominic Catholic Hospital in Akwatia in the south of Ghana.

RENEWABLES

Solar energy for health facilities

In rural Ghana, many health centres are either not connected to the electricity grid or face blackouts affecting their work. Solar photovoltaic systems are a climate-friendly way to provide much-needed energy. A German-Ghanaian research project has analysed key technical and socio-economic aspects.

By Jonas Bauhof

Solar photovoltaic (PV) hybrid systems provide electricity by harvesting the sun's energy while having a battery or diesel generator as a backup. They can either be connected to the grid or serve as standalone systems. During the Covid-19 pandemic, such systems proved a good option to quickly electrify off-grid facilities and thus guarantee important services such as cooling for vaccine storage. Adequate healthcare generally requires reliable electricity for instruments and light, among other things.

The advantages of using solar energy to supply health facilities include crucial climate aspects. For example, solar PV systems can improve the resilience of health

systems to climatic challenges such as extreme weather events which affect the conventional power supply. As solar PV systems increasingly replace diesel generators, they help to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions and improve the local environment.

Solar PV (hybrid) systems are increasingly applied across sub-Saharan Africa including in Ghana, where interest in new forms of renewable energy grew in the late 1970s and early 1980s, driven by severe drought and energy security crises (Pedersen 2022). First solar panels were funded through bilateral or multilateral donor structures and set up in religious missions.

However, in the following decades, solar energy was not prioritised, not least because oil and gas resources were discovered in Ghana. In 2021, solar energy accounted for less than one percent of Ghana's electricity mix which mostly relied on natural gas (62.6%) and hydropower (34.1%) according to data by the International Energy Agency (IEA).

From 2019 to 2023, the German-Ghanaian interdisciplinary research project EnerSHelf (Energy-Self-Sufficiency for Health

Facilities in Ghana) has analysed both technical and socio-economic aspects to improve the dissemination of PV-based energy solutions for health facilities in Ghana. The results show that it is important to understand details of electricity demand and technical challenges as well as barriers perceived by health facility managers, government officials and public stakeholders. EnerSHelf has been funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASPECTS

While most health facilities in Ghana are connected to the grid, reliable electricity supply remains a challenge. Not only can this be dangerous for patients – life-saving instruments can fail, for example – but it can also be a financial burden as blackouts can cause damage to medical equipment. Interviews with health facility managers as well as other data collected by EnerSHelf suggest that standalone solar PV systems can help bolster the reliability in electricity supply when they are combined with grid supply.

Even though solar PV has become cheaper, costs and lack of information are still major barriers which keep health facilities from adapting such systems. Solar PV hybrid systems are particularly expensive because they consist of various components like solar panels, a battery system, grid integration and a diesel generator.

To lower the costs, it can be advisable to cooperate with public initiatives for the installation of mini-grids. This reduces the costs of procuring the system and developing the technical capacity to operate it. A mini-grid functions as a single system which is not connected to a main power grid. It can be powered by one or more energy sources.

TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Technical equipment used in healthcare facilities is very sensitive. This is why planning a solar PV system requires an overview of the highest energy consumption during a day, the so-called load peaks. If these are not covered by the energy supply, instruments can be damaged, which can result in disrupted health services. Data collected by EnerShelf in Ghana suggests that the maximum load can be almost twice as high as indicated by the national grid operator. It can also be useful to include the base load of the surrounding community into the plan-

ning to fully take advantage of the capacity of a solar PV system.

Other technical aspects include forecasts of solar irradiance and climatic conditions at a given place. The EnerShelf team has carried out analyses in this field to be able to advise various stakeholders. It has also developed a web-map which practitioners and governmental stakeholders can use to explore optimised solar-mini-grids setups in off-grid or weak-grid areas in Ghana.

Moreover, one of the project partners developed a planning tool that helps with the dimensioning of PV-solar hybrid systems. The tool is publicly available and does not require technical expertise.

Ultimately, considerable political will is needed to further expand solar PV energy production in Ghana. If adequately planned, it can play a pivotal role in supplying health facilities with reliable and affordable electricity. It can strengthen the supply in both rural and urban areas and have a positive effect on the quality and distribution of health services in Ghana.

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JONAS BAUHOF

worked as a research assistant at the University of Applied Sciences Bonn-Rhein-Sieg and as a project

assistant at European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes (EADI) for the EnerShelf project.

jonas.bauhof@gmx.de

Rural challenges

Ever since the introduction of solar panels to the commercial market, costs have decreased significantly. Standalone solar power is widely regarded as a rather inexpensive and quick solution to provide electricity to rural health facilities in developing countries because the investments required are low compared to a grid connection.

While solar photovoltaic (PV) systems have great advantages (see main text), they come with their own challenges, especially in rural settings without grid connection. Systems which are meant to continuously deliver electricity need a battery storage to ensure electricity during periods without sunlight or unfavourable weather conditions. Since

batteries are rather expensive, storage capacity is often limited, and an additional diesel generator is needed.

Moreover, to ensure an adequate lifespan of the batteries, they need to be kept cool, which often requires air conditioning. Installing solar PV systems in remote areas can also be particularly expensive due to transportation costs.

Among the programmes aiming to improve healthcare by using solar PV systems in developing countries is the Solar for Health initiative, promoted by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) since 2017. According to UNDP, the initiative has supported about 1000 health centres and storage facilities in 15 countries, for example by supplying so-

lar equipment and support for installation as well as maintenance, technology transfer and developing innovative finance mechanisms.

The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the need for adequate healthcare provision, which relies on electricity to store vaccines, sanitise instruments, run medical devices and have light during the night. In response, the World Bank provides grants to least-connected countries – many in sub-Saharan Africa – as a part of its Energy Sector Management Assistance Program. Funding includes the electrification of healthcare facilities with the help of solar panels and battery storage.

Moreover, during COP27 in Sharm el-Sheikh in 2022, the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) and the World Bank pledged a total of \$1.1 billion in investments into

the electrification of health facilities, food storage and agriculture. The World Bank aims to reach 100,000 health facilities with solar electrification by 2030. JB

LITERATURE

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Ecuadorians protest in Quito against the government's measures to abolish fuel price subsidies in October 2019.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Making the ecological transition just

The shift towards a global CO₂-neutral economy can only succeed if it is done in a socially just way. It is often unclear, however, what exactly that means. Alternative jobs, social security and regional structural policies are essential.

By Georg Schäfer

There is no doubt that the global economy has to undergo an ecological transition. Global heating is advancing. In order to limit temperature increases to no more than 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels, CO₂ emissions must be reduced. For years now, trade unions have not been the only voices calling for decarbonisation to be achieved in a socially just way. The slogan is “just transition”.

Striving to attain climate neutrality and preserve biodiversity is by no means

socially just and participatory per se. Jobs in CO₂-intensive industries are sacrificed, for example. However, the ecological transition should not make affected people worse off. Instead, they should benefit. Otherwise, social resistance could slow down efforts to reform.

When the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) called for a just transition in 2010, its goal was to secure and expand decent work as part of the ecological transformation. Jobs that are lost in the coal industry, for example, should be replaced by jobs in the renewable energy sector and other industries. The International Labour Organization (ILO) also spoke out in favour of a just transition and published corresponding guidelines in 2015. The focus is on decent work for all, social inclusion and poverty eradication.

The principle of just transition can also be found in the preamble to the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement and has been reaffirmed at successive climate conferences. Discussions on this topic have emphasised that:

- regions so far dependent on fossil fuels are particularly affected,
- the ecological transition can only succeed through broad social dialogue and
- poorer countries should receive external support.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Since the 2021 climate conference in Glasgow, industrialised and lower-income countries have formed various energy partnerships (see box). Controversial discussions are currently being held on issues like whether mineral oil and natural gas are necessary and justifiable transition technologies.

International debate has also yet to produce a consensus regarding social challenges. The ILO guidelines are very broadly formulated, so different actors can focus on what suits them best. Practice has shown, however, that three main aspects are relevant in transition processes:

1. **Alternative employment:** Expanding renewable energies creates jobs, but simply retraining employees in the fossil fuel sector is not enough. New jobs are not necessarily emerging in the same places where coal was mined, but sometimes far away, depending on a country's solar and wind energy potential. In such cases, jobs of similar quality must be created locally and outside the energy sector as well.

2. **Social security:** Ecological reforms can lead to price increases. Governments should take social security measures to raise acceptance among citizens. Subsidising fossil fuels less or taxing them more can lead to protests.

For example, the government of Ecuador had to revoke its cancellation of fossil fuel subsidies in October 2019 following massive protests. The government had failed to cushion its decision with social measures. Precise social security measures

– like cash transfers for needy households – are usually more effective and cheaper than price subsidies, which rich households also profit from unnecessarily.

3. **Regional structural policies:** The withdrawal from fossil fuels is causing regions around the world to lose their former industrial core. In order to prevent a downward spiral, significant investment in regional structural change is needed. Such measures would include renaturing fossil fuel extraction sites (like coal mines), expanding infrastructure, promoting education and research and establishing new industries.

Just transition is more than a synonym for sustainable development. If the transition to a more climate and environmentally friendly world is truly to be made fair, the three aforementioned points must be given special attention – and the necessary funds must be made available.

LINKS

GIZ 2021: Just Transition to a green economy – employment, economic, and social consequences of the transition to an ecologically sustainable economy in developing countries.

<https://www.iisd.org/publications/report/just-transition-green-economy>

IISD 2022: Just Energy Transition Partnerships: An opportunity to leapfrog from coal to clean energy.

<https://www.iisd.org/articles/insight/just-energy-transition-partnerships>



GEORG SCHÄFER

is an expert on sustainable economic development, employment promotion and poverty reduction. He worked

in German development cooperation for many years.

geo.schaefer@t-online.de

Cooperation for a just transition

Multiple international conferences, especially climate summits, have focused in recent years on how humanity can emit less CO₂. The emphasis has been on withdrawing from fossil fuels in favour of renewable energies.

Particularly coal-producing countries with low incomes often lack the budgetary resources to finance an ecological transition. They therefore depend on support from wealthier countries. In order to ensure a just transition (see main text), various countries have formed energy partnerships with each other.

The first of these Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETP) was concluded as part of the UN climate conference in Glasgow in 2021. South Africa joined with an international partners group made up of the USA, the United Kingdom,

France, Germany and the EU. The group announced that it would provide South Africa \$8.5 billion to phase out coal. However, according to a plan by South Africa from 2022, financing a just transition in the country would cost \$98 billion over the next five years, which is more than ten times as much. In the same document, the possible conditions of the external package are indicated as follows: 63% concessional loans, 18% commercial loans, 15% loan guarantees and four percent grants.

During the EU-Africa summit in Brussels in early 2022, the EU announced that it would support just transitions in African countries, including JETP projects in Egypt, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Morocco and Senegal. In mid-2022, during the G7 summit in Elmau under German presidency,

more JETPs were concluded, this time with India, Indonesia, Senegal and Vietnam. The International Partners Group (IPG) which was formed for this purpose comprises the G7, including the EU, as well as Denmark and Norway.

At the end of 2022, the international partners promised \$20 billion to the partnership with Indonesia, made up of half public and half private funding. The IPG announced \$15.5 billion for the partnership with Vietnam and €2.5 billion for Senegal. At the climate conference in Dubai in 2023, Indonesia, Senegal, South Africa and Vietnam reported on the partnerships' progress.

Such energy partnerships focus on

- the withdrawal from fossil fuels (coal, mineral oil and natural gas) through the expansion of renewable energies (solar, wind, hydropower and biomass),
- the promotion of energy efficiency and

- the use of conversion and storage technologies, in particular green hydrogen.

However, the concept is not yet clearly enough connected to the idea of a just transition. Sometimes "just" is simply used as a decorative adjective when the emphasis is primarily on technological and economic challenges. It is also unclear whether JETP financing concerns funds that have already been committed as part of official development assistance (ODA) and international climate financing – or additional funds. The portion of these funds that will target the "just" aspect is still uncertain too.

Germany itself wants to phase out coal by 2038 at the latest, ideally by 2030. Forty billion euros have been budgeted for state support for structural changes in lignite regions and at the locations of hard coal-fired power plants. According to experts, the total cost of Germany's coal exit could be twice as high. GS

CLIMATE LAWSUITS

Legal battles for climate justice

More and more activists and communities, including children and adolescents, take states to court for not taking sufficient action on the climate crisis. Some of them are successful.

By Roli Mahajan

Litigation is gaining importance as an effective tool for climate action. According to the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), a total of 2180 climate-related cases were filed as of December 2022, compared to 884 cases in 2017. Although by far most of them have been brought in the US, climate litigation is picking up worldwide. Cases in the global south amount to 5.2% of the total number, while international and regional cases represent 5.8% (UNEP 2023).

This text deals with lawsuits filed against states in various countries. However, companies are being sued for climate-damaging behaviour too.

1. Young plaintiffs challenge European governments: It was one of last year's most prominent court hearings: six Portuguese claimants aged from 11 to 24 challenged the inaction of 33 European governments on the climate crisis before the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). According to the plaintiffs, this is a battle for their very right to life and family life, protected by Articles 2 and 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The case is pending. It can be considered as one of the world's largest climate legal actions where claimants argue that extreme weather events, rising temperatures and disrupted ecosystems threaten their safety and very existence. They claim that inadequate climate action endangers their future, jeopardising their right to life. As they face an uncertain future burdened by a heating planet, they state that their right to a stable and predictable family life is violated too.

The case has ignited public debate about intergenerational equity and the urgency of climate action. If the plaintiffs are proved right, European governments

might have to implement stricter emission-reduction policies and invest in cleaner infrastructure. The ripple effects could be felt globally, inspiring similar legal action and strengthening the link between climate action and human rights.

2. Taking the German government to court: In Germany, young climate activists have already successfully challenged the

In 2022, however, the plaintiffs went on to sue the German government before the ECHR. They argue that the country's climate policy remains inadequate.

3. Norwegian oil remains in the ground: Another example of a successful climate lawsuit comes from Norway, a major oil-producing nation. In January, the Oslo District Court invalidated three permits for new offshore oil and gas fields issued by the Norwegian government. The court ruled that the approval lacked sufficient environmental impact assessments. Greenpeace and Natur og Ungdom (Young Friends of the Earth Norway), a youth NGO, had taken the Norwegian government to court. The fields



Six young claimants pose outside the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg where they challenge the climate inaction of various European countries.

government's plans on climate action. They went before the country's Federal Constitutional Court which made headlines in 2021 when it ruled that parts of Germany's Federal Climate Protection Act were incompatible with basic human rights. The judges pointed out that the legislation failed to protect future generations from the impacts of global heating and that it did not distribute the carbon budget fairly between current and future generations. The German government had to react, and it did so by tightening up the Federal Climate Protection Act.

hold a combined 875 million barrels of oil equivalent.

The court emphasised that it is necessary to assess future emissions during the approval process to ensure transparency and democratic participation. Norway's Energy Minister, Terje Aasland, said the government disagrees with the judgment and may appeal.

4. Court rules in favour of activists in Montana: On the other side of the Atlantic, 16 young activists from the American state of Montana filed a lawsuit against their state

in 2020 demanding their right to a clean and healthy environment. In August 2023, a Montana state court ruled in favour of the plaintiffs, stating they had proven that as children and youth, they are disproportionately harmed by fossil fuel pollution and climate impacts.

The case revolved around a clause within the Montana Environmental Policy Act, which prohibits officials from considering climate impacts when deciding on new energy projects. The claimants highlighted the harmful effects of fossil fuels on Montana's ecosystem and public health as well as the connection between fossil fuel extraction and a diminished future for Montana's youth.

It was the first time a US court held the government responsible for breaching the constitution based on climate change. The ruling mandated Montana to consider climate change impacts before approving any new fossil fuel projects. The state is challenging the decision in the Montana Supreme Court, which in January refused to pause the state court's ruling. Government officials are doubtful about the practical consequences of the ruling.

5. Kenyan communities want to hold government accountable: Another landmark legal battle, one of the first of its kind in Africa, is being fought in Kenya by a group of 66 local residents and Kituo Cha Sheria, an advocacy group. On behalf of their community, they seek compensation for the government's alleged failure to develop policies and take necessary measures to respond to the climate crisis. The Environment and Lands Court in Kabarnet, Kenya, is deliberating whether the government can be held accountable for climate change-induced displacement and property loss suffered by residents in the Rift Valley.

The residents were displaced in 2020, when Lake Baringo, one of the country's largest freshwater lakes, reached unprecedented heights and flooded crucial areas. They claim that the inundation exposed them to increased risk of water-borne diseases including malaria, cholera and typhoid as well as attacks by crocodiles and hippos.

The plaintiffs and their communities argue that the surge in water levels was caused by heightened rainfall and increased inflows from rivers as a result of

global warming. This view is supported by a government task force that investigated the situation. It attributed the cause of the rising waters to climate change. In view of the claimants, the government either failed or refused to implement crucial adaptation strategies including early flood warning systems.

The court's judgement will determine the government's liability for climate-related damages. Even more importantly, it will also address the issue of compensating individuals adversely affected by environmental calamities. The case is expected to set a significant legal precedent in the intersection of climate change, government accountability and citizen compensation in Africa.

LINK

UNEP, 2023: Global climate litigation report.
<https://www.unep.org/resources/report/global-climate-litigation-report-2023-status-review>



ROLI MAHAJAN
 is a freelance journalist based in Lucknow in North India.

roli.mahajan@gmail.com

Vanuatu's questions to the ICJ

Worldwide, there are more and more examples of citizens and communities that successfully take legal action on climate issues (see main text). However, states can do so too. In March 2023, the tiny Pacific Island nation of Vanuatu led an initiative to submit a resolution to the UN General Assembly requesting an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the UN's highest judicial body.

The aim was to ask the ICJ about:

- the legal obligations of states regarding climate change and
- the legal consequences for states which have caused

significant harm to the climate and other parts of the environment, with respect to other states – especially Small Island Developing States (SIDS) – as well as to peoples and individu-



Alatoi Ishmael Kalsakau, Prime Minister of Vanuatu, spoke at the UN general assembly in March 2023.

als of present and future generations.

The UN General Assembly adopted the resolution, and the questions have been officially submitted to the ICJ. The court is expected to provide its advisory opinion in 2025. While non-binding, the ICJ's answer is expected to

carry significant weight in the debate on emission reduction on a national level and climate funding for poorer countries. It could strengthen existing international legal frameworks and guide states in crafting more effective national climate action plans.

Vanuatu is one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change. Rising sea levels, extreme weather events and ocean acidification threaten the very existence of the island nation and its people. Together with other SIDS, Vanuatu has been constantly campaigning to keep global temperature rise below 1.5 degrees Celsius compared to pre-industrial levels to protect its people. **RM**

LINK

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

In an exhibition in Cologne, indigenous Australians showcase their cultural diversity, history and identity.

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Photo: Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum