

D+C

DIGITAL MONTHLY

DEVELOPMENT AND
COOPERATION

D+C

ENTWICKLUNG UND
ZUSAMMENARBEIT

E+Z

International
Journal

ISSN
2366-7257

2023 04

EMPLOYMENT

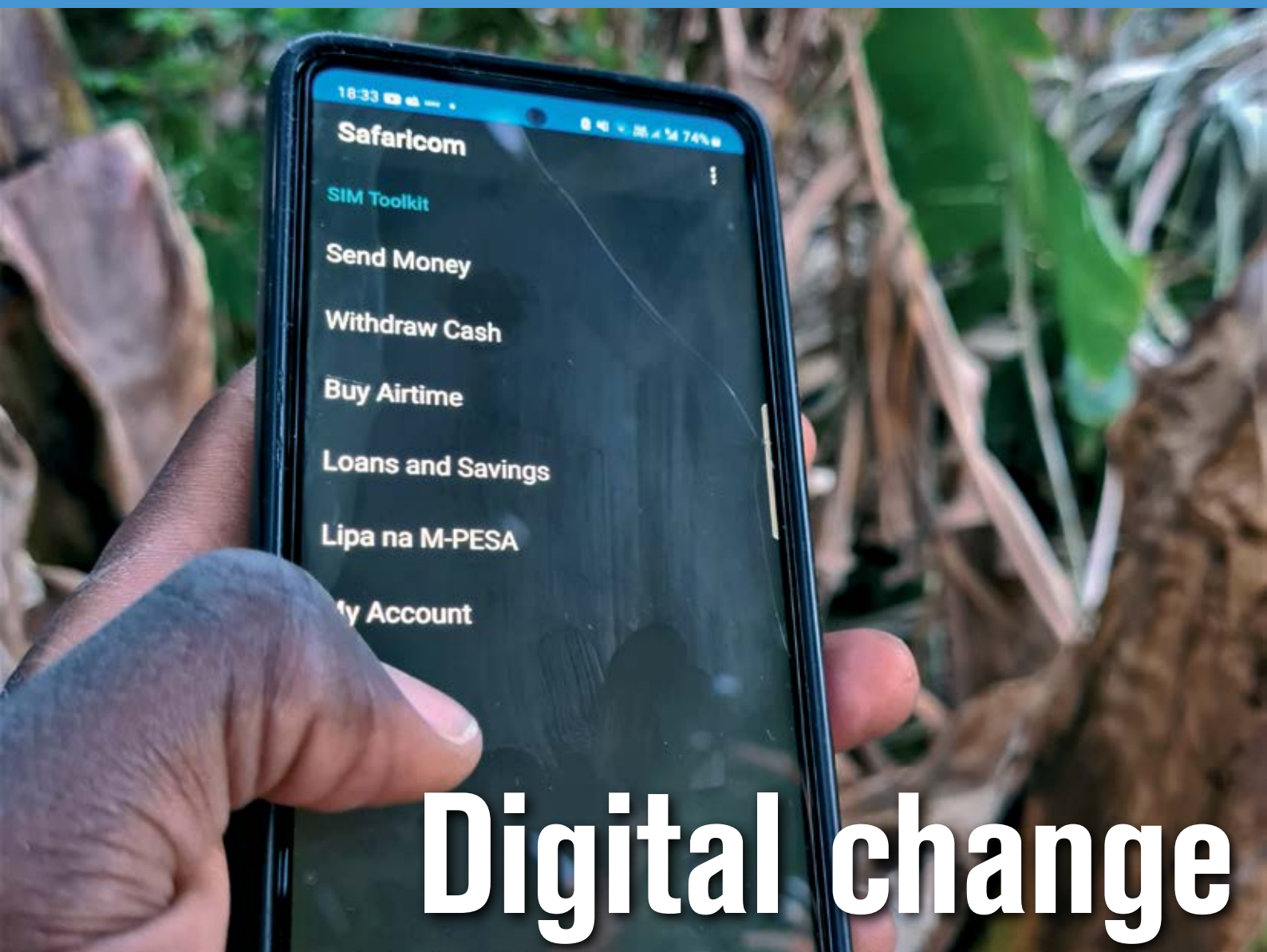
Girls With Tools: Ugandan initiative transcends gender conventions

WTO AND IMF

Indonesian economist says what is wrong with multilateral institutions

OIL PRICE

Despite raging Ukraine war, crude has become cheaper again



Digital change

Editorial

- 3 **HANS DEMBOWSKI**
Digitalisation requires private dynamism and state action

Magazine

- 4 **RONALD SSEGUJJA SSEKANDI**
Girls with tools: innovative approaches to vocational training in Uganda
- 6 **BIRTE MENSING**
When journalists depend on NGO support, the reputation of Africans often suffers
- 7 **INTERVIEW WITH IWAN J. AZIS**
Indonesian economist makes proposals regarding how to fix the WTO and the IMF
- 10 **AUDREY SIMANGO / MASTHEAD (IMPRINT)**
Nowadays: Inclusive communal meals in Zimbabwe

Debate

- 12 **ZOHRA COSIMA BENAMAR**
Why oil price has dropped to pre-Ukraine war levels again
- 13 **FABIO ANDRÉS DÍAZ PABÓN**
Economic growth as such is not what African countries need
- 14 **HANS DEMBOWSKI**
Why Ajay Banga, Joe Biden's candidate for the World Bank's top job, is a promising choice

- 15 **PRINCE THOMPSON**
Though Nigeria's presidential election was a mess, the news for ECOWAS was rather good

- 16 **JEWISH VOICES**
US and UK based newspapers assess Israel's ongoing crisis

Focus: Digital change

- 19 **MARVA KHAN**
Educational shortcomings in Pakistan
- 21 **JAYLAN ELSHAZLY**
How e-commerce benefits African businesswomen
- 23 **TIAN XIA AND NATHALIE SPATH**
Digital solutions help to tackle the climate crisis
- 25 **ADAZE OKEAYA-INNEH**
Digitised devices failed to make Nigeria's presidential election transparent and trustworthy
- 27 **CHARLES MARTIN-SHIELDS**
Electronic options for improving government services
- 29 **MELANIE ASSAUER, ERIC KIRUHURA AND CHRIS JANSEN**
How digital platforms make disaster relief easier
- 31 **ROLI MAHAJAN**
Internet freedom is in decline internationally
- 32 **HANS DEMBOWSKI**
Chatbots cannot "think outside the box"

FOCUS

Digital change

Even in low-income countries, digital devices have become part of daily life. Technology offers great opportunities. Progress in this area is faster than in many other fields development agencies and policymakers focus on. There are, however, downsides. Not all promises come true. A worrisome trend is declining freedom on the Internet. What impacts artificial intelligence will have remains to be seen, but there are definitely reasons not to trust it blindly.

Front page: Navigating digital payment system on Kenyan smartphone. Photo: KO





 **Our focus section on digitalisation starts on page 18. It pertains to the UN's 9th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG9): Industry, innovation and infrastructure. It has a bearing on the entire SDG agenda.**

debate, at both national and international levels. The companies make the rules. They are free to decide whether they want to ban liars and propagandists, and it is up to them whether they apply their own rules consistently. All too often, they do not. Hate speech remains unchecked in many cases. Anti-democratic propaganda abounds. Content moderation is typically not done in African or Asian languages.

Freedom House, the Washington-based pro-democracy initiative, warns that an increasing number of governments are restricting civic liberties online. Human rights are indivisible, however, and need to be defended in international and multilateral settings.

Humanity is facing huge challenges including global heating. Digital technology can help us get a grip on some of the problems. But if we want technology to serve the common good, we cannot simply leave application to market forces. Regulation must not obstruct progress, but it must ensure that oligarchic corporate interests do not become obstructive. And that, obviously, applies to artificial intelligence too.

Private dynamism and state action

Digital technology has spread fast in the past two decades, even in least developed countries. It was largely driven by the private sector. Mobile phones are small gadgets and comparatively cheap. Users neither require an expensive fixed-line network nor a full blown electric power utility. In doubt, a solar recharger will do.

Digital progress was more dynamic than in many other sectors that development agencies and policymakers focus on. Today, many cities in low and middle income countries have tech hubs where start-up companies develop useful applications which help to improve people's lives.

It is well understood that private companies made mobile telephony and mobile money feasible in Africa after the turn of the millennium. What is less commonly known is that they enjoyed support from donor agencies. For example, the DEG, an investment fund that belongs to Germany's development bank KfW, was an early shareholder of Celtel, the pioneering company which was led by Mo Ibrahim and first launched mobile phone networks in sub-Saharan countries. Later, DfID, Britain's Department for International Development, supported the development of M-Pesa, Kenya's mobile money system.

Unfortunately, DfID was merged into Britain's foreign office in the course of Brexit. It no longer serves as an innovating force in international development affairs.

For nations to make the most of digital technology, governments must play their role. Formal education is becoming increasingly important. Yes, some apps serve illiterate people, but those who read have access to far more information. International discourse is held in languages like English, French and Spanish. Those who only speak a vernacular cannot take full advantage of the World Wide Web.

In its early stages, the digital economy thrived in a largely unregulated sphere. Even in the 1990s, Silicon Valley companies were still known for not doing much lobbying in Washington. Now they are lobbying giants. The anti-trust proceedings against Microsoft were the turning point. In yet another episode of economic history, it had become clear that leaving things to market forces would lead to monopolistic dominance. Accordingly, the tech companies now want to shape political discourse.

We actually need better international regulation. Profit-maximising corporate giants are running social media platforms that have become indispensable for public



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

euz.editor@dandc.eu

Adaze Okeaya-inneh is a broadcast journalist and screenwriter from Lagos and currently working in Abuja. She is an alumna of the University of Ibadan, where she studied communication and language arts. In this issue, she reports how digital approaches failed to make Nigeria's recent presidential elections transparent and trustworthy (page 25).



It is her first contribution to D+C/E+Z. She has promised to write again in the future. We are proud to give space to a strong female voice from Africa.

► All contributions to our focus section will also appear on our website www.dandc.eu, where you will find other related content as well.

JOBS

Vocational education for girls

In Uganda, many obstacles prevent young women from getting a proper education. A social enterprise facilitates girls' access to vocational training.

By Ronald Ssegujja Ssekandi

When it comes to education, girls and women are discriminated against in many parts of the world. Uganda is no different, although the government has made efforts to enable good education for all (see box). Additionally, civil-society organisations and social enterprises are striving to make a change.

The Smart Girls Foundation, a social enterprise located in Uganda's capital Kampala, runs a programme which provides vocational education to girls in order to allow them to find meaningful employment. "Our 'Girls With Tools' programme is unique because it trains females in careers that are considered to be for males," says Jamila Mayanja, the founder and director of the Smart Girls Foundation.

Key areas include machinery welding, automotive mechanics, electric installation, carpentry, construction and home painting. The programme also has courses in traditional arts and craft skills like tailoring and basket weaving. "On top of the technical-skills training courses, our girls also get additional workshop trainings that include entrepreneurship, life skills, gender issues and financial literacy. We also partner them with local workshops and garages to provide them with job opportunities and encourage them to start their own businesses in these sectors once they have completed the course," Jamila Mayanja says.

The programme runs cohorts of 100 to 200 young women. The curriculum runs for six months to one year, after which the girls are helped to find an internship. That is often their first employment experience.

NEW TRAINING FACILITY

Tuition fees for the programme are paid by families that can afford them, while scholar-

ships are provided for girls that can't afford the costs. In 2019, Girls With Tools received funding from a local telecommunications company, MTN Uganda, to support enrolment of more girls into the programme. The MTN Foundation facilitated the setup of a new training facility to train 400 girls annually. The facility has a service bay, a washing bay and a classroom block as well as a computer lab. The foundation hopes that

21-year-old Khayinza Shalom is taking a course in electrical installation. She remembers that when she decided to do the course, she got a lot of negative feedback from her family and friends who criticised that she was pursuing a "masculine career". "Here at the Foundation, when I met other girls and women doing these jobs, I got motivation. I had to shut out these negative voices," she says.

One year down the road, Khayinza Shalom has already made some money working on domestic electrical installations and repairs. She has even co-founded a local company called "Solar Girls Africa" which invents new solar-powered appliances. She hopes that she will be able to contribute to



Three participants in the Girls With Tools programme.

this investment will lead to 40 new women-led businesses per year.

32-year-old Nakijjoba Sharifah is an engineering and mechanical works student at the programme. "I have for long admired engineering work, and thanks to Girls With Tools, I can pursue that dream," she says. "Whereas most people consider this a job for men, the new generation is changing this perception," she adds.

Sharifah says that doing engineering work is her way of proving to society that women can do much more than housework. "With my experience now, I can do what any man can do. I love what I do, and I expect that my life will be better soon," she says.

the wide usage of clean energy in Uganda and thus help reduce the country's carbon emissions. Shalom encourages other girls to step up and get involved in careers formerly considered to be for men. For her, this is the only way they will change the gender bias at work.

SMART SOLAR BAGS

Smart Girls Foundation also addresses issues that keep girls away from school. Menstruation is one example. The tailoring class is manufacturing reusable sanitary towels made from locally available materials, which are distributed to the girls attending

the programme. These cost less than the single use synthetic sanitary towels available on the market.

The programme is also producing a storage backpack in which the young women can keep their reusable sanitary towels. "It is helpful in instances when the girls cannot access wash facilities. They can safely store away these sanitary items," Jamila Mayanja says. She adds that the backpack has transformed from a cloth bag into an eco-friendly item made from recycled plastic. The new material can better withstand Uganda's tropical climate, especially on rainy days.

Most of the girls who use the backpack are from poor backgrounds, so their access to electricity is limited too. The bag therefore also comes with a rechargeable solar light. The girls can charge it during daytime and use it to light their way home or to study in the evening hours.

The backpack, the reusable sanitary towels as well as other items such as electric desk lamps are available for sale at the foundation's offices. The revenue supports the work of the foundation.

Some of the graduates have already gained employment in Uganda. Nabatanzi Flavia, 24 years old, used to be an electri-

cal engineer trainee at the programme. She now has gotten a full-time job at a global machinery engineering firm, Mantrac Limited, which supplies and services power generators. She attributes her placement to Smart Girls Foundation which helped her gain marketable skills.



RONALD SSEGUJJA SSEKANDI
is a Ugandan author and edits D+C/E+Z's *Nowadays* column.

sekandiron@gmail.com

What keeps girls out of school

In the past two decades, Uganda has made strides to promote universal access to education. The country runs a free primary and secondary school initiative, which also strives to reduce overall costs involved in educating children. However, this programme has not been entirely successful. Education remains largely a privilege for those who can afford it.

Girls tend to be especially disadvantaged. Of the several traditional cultures in Uganda, many used to look at girls as mere brides and reduce their skills development to domestic labour. Over the years, efforts have been made to eliminate gender discrimination, but progress remains slow. One important issue is the lack of access to menstrual-hygiene tools such as sanitary towels. It prevents girls from attending school regularly, especially those from poor households.

Moreover, early pregnancy matters. According to Uganda's ministry of health, about one-quarter of young women become pregnant before they are 20 years old. Covid-19 ap-

parently made things worse. A study by the Forum For African Women Educationalists (FAWE), a civil-society organisation, found that during Uganda's first lockdown, between March and June 2020, pregnancy among girls aged 15 to 19 increased by more than 25% and even more than tripled for those aged 10 to 14.

Poverty is one of the main causes of unequal access to education for girls. While access to primary and secondary education is basically free, many

poorly funded public schools still find a way to charge non-tuition fees, for example for meals or special schools events. Moreover, learners must bear the costs for school supplies such as books, pens and school uniform clothing.

Families lacking resources traditionally prioritise boys over girls when it comes to education. The latter are then expected to do domestic chores as they prepare for marriage. The Global Partnership for Education, a multi-stakeholder funding platform, reports that especially in rural areas, local traditions dictate that girls can be married off for

a sum of money, which is given to the daughter's family as payment. This "bride price" is an incentive for families to reduce women and girls to a marketable commodity.

Outside the established formal education system, vocational education offers a chance to gain skills for practical jobs (see main text). It is usually related to a specific trade, occupation or vocation. In Uganda, a Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) policy was designed in 2019 to address the country's skilling challenges by training Ugandans in vocational skills to prepare them for the job market. Emphasising vocational education is seen as a solution that will produce job creators rather than job seekers. In Uganda, 19.8% of young people are not in employment, education or training, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO). RSS



Pupils in Kampala, Uganda's capital.

LINK
Research Findings of the Forum For African Women Educationalists (FAWE), Uganda Chapter, 2021:
<https://faweuganda.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/COVID-19-Impact-Study-on-Girls-and-Women-Report-2020.pdf>



Visiting a Welthungerhilfe project in Kitui County, Kenya, for journalistic research.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS REPORTING

Difficult dependencies

Journalists' work is increasingly intertwined with that of civil-society organisations. This has an impact on the image of African countries abroad.

By Birte Mensing

In crisis regions and low-income countries with a volatile security situation, two groups of professionals are invariably present: non-governmental organisations' workers and journalists. The first provide assistance at various levels, the second report on the situation at hand. Their joint presence gives rise to a number of difficult dependencies.

"The media and NGOs cannot be separated," says Kenyan-born Jeremiah Kipainoi, who has worked as a journalist for the British BBC and other media organisations. For the past three years, he has been head of communications for the British "Global Media Campaign to End FGM", a worldwide campaign striving to eradicate female genital mutilation. He explains: "The media use civil-society organisations and their local presence to access stories; and NGOs need

on-the-ground media coverage to show sponsors, for example, that the money they provide is used wisely."

At the same time, the media raise awareness of civil-society organisations' work and thus reach policymakers. Kipainoi points out that media coverage of female genital cutting frequently leads to perpetrators being tracked down and arrested nowadays. He also notes that media presence gives NGOs credibility, which in turn boosts sponsors' willingness to support their work.

These interdependencies and reciprocal impacts have consequences for the image of Africa that is conveyed to the rest of the world. Mel Bunce, head of the journalism department at the City University of London and co-author of the book "Humanitarian Journalists", says: "The media focus on crisis and suffering has virtually erased the perception that people in African countries are capable of taking action themselves."

According to Bunce, "humanitarian journalists" are driven by the same motives as many NGO workers: "Their ultimate desire is to make the world a better place." That

motivation becomes problematic, however, if reporters stop questioning NGO work. And that happens because journalists often owe certain organisations a great deal, including access to individuals, stories and, ultimately, assignments.

LACK OF RESOURCES

Moreover, NGOs are often an editorial office's most important source of information on crises and conflicts in areas where those organisations operate. Because of budget cuts, many media outlets now have few or no correspondents of their own. This increases their dependence on civil-society organisations.

Against this backdrop, Bunce notes that more and more photographers travelling to crisis zones are paid not by the media houses but by NGOs. "The pictures they take are then produced under the guidance of the NGOs, which determine what is shown," the professor says.

Money from philanthropic foundations also plays an increasingly important role. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, for example, spends millions of dollars a year on journalism. "Foundations tend to invest in reporting on broad topics, rather than very specific content," says Bunce.

The question of how international news reporting is funded raises another matter of concern: How do such dependencies affect the perspective taken in a report? Many NGO spokespersons in African countries are European or American. If the close cooperation between them and the reporting journalists on the ground means that only their voices are heard, the reality of life of local people goes largely unnoticed, once more fostering the impression that Africans cannot speak for themselves and that they need to be helped and make no contribution to solutions themselves.

LINK

Scott, M., Wright, K., & Bunce, M., 2022: Humanitarian journalists: Covering crises from a boundary zone. London, Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003356806>



BIRTE MENSING
works as a freelance
journalist in Nairobi.

birte.mensing@web.de

Press visits to crisis zones

Martina Dase works for the international children's rights organisation Save the Children. Together with her colleagues in countries where the organisation operates, she regularly arranges press visits in crisis zones to draw attention to the plight of children there.

Somalia, for example, is in the grip of a famine. Anyone wishing to travel to the East African country to report on the situation faces a massive organisational and budgetary challenge. Security arrangements are complicated, armoured cars and armed security guards are standard requirements. The terrorist militia al-Shabaab controls many areas and regularly

carries out attacks that claim dozens of lives, especially in the capital Mogadishu.

To permit reporting even in these difficult circumstances, Dase and her colleagues in Somalia help by making the arrangements for press visits, footing the bill and recouping their outlay from the media houses

later on a pro rata basis. Because several teams always travel together, the costs can be shared.

In countries like South Sudan, difficulties are compounded by the fact that it is not easy to obtain a journalist visa or film permit. This is where civil-society organisation contacts can help. Organisations like Save the Children have been working in some countries for decades and virtually vouch for reporters. However, to avoid jeopardising

operations on the ground, journalists must accept some agreements, Martina Dase explains. For example, they are asked to be transparent about who else they talk to in the country – and what they talk about. Most then at least marginally mention the civil-society organisation they are travelling with in their reporting, not least to show gratitude for the assistance it provided.

According to Dase, Save the Children is not interested in showing the same typical pictures of children over and over again. The idea is to give reporters access to more complex stories. However, the former filmmaker is aware of serious limitations: "Our own movements in crisis regions are restricted. There is only so much reality we can access and show." BM



Mogadishu street after a militant attack in late February: journalists cannot move around in Somalia without security guards.

GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

"Not really learning from experience"

According to Iwan J. Azis, the WTO is slowly withering away and the IMF has not become as open-minded as its rhetoric would suggest. The Indonesian professor at Cornell University shared his views with Hans Dembowski in an interview.

Iwan J. Azis interviewed by Hans Dembowski

Four years ago, you told me that the World Trade Organization (WTO) was in a bad shape (see D+C/E+Z Digital Monthly 2019/03, p. 18). Among the reasons were

that then US President Donald Trump was launching a trade war with China and also blocking the nomination of adjudicators for the WTO's dispute-settlement panels. Have things improved?

No, they have become worse. There are several signs of dysfunction. The dispute-settlement panels remain understaffed and ineffective. That makes the WTO look toothless. Indeed, China and the USA are effectively dealing their trade relations bilaterally, not through the WTO rules. At the same time, there is a trend towards concluding what I would call plurilateral trade deals,

with some, but not all WTO members taking part.

Please give some examples.

At this point in early March, 53 countries are involved in the Information Technology Agreements (ITA), 23 rely on the Trade in Services Agreement (TISA), and 19 have joined the Government Procurement Agreement. In regard to wind turbines, solar panels and things like that, 40 have started to negotiate an Environmental Goods Agreement (EGA). Joint rules for e-commerce have been accepted by 17 countries. In some cases, the USA, the EU and China are involved. They obviously have an interest in a rules-based system, but are neither willing to accept every existing rule nor believe they can achieve much by involving all WTO members in talks.

So the trade landscape is becoming increasingly fragmented. It has been becoming more complex for quite some

time due to the propensity of the USA and the EU to conclude bilateral trade agreements with individual countries or regional blocs.

Yes, and that does a disservice to the least developed countries with particularly low capacities.

So should we declare the WTO dead? My impression is that nobody wants to do that. After all, the WTO may yet prove useful and anyone who abandons it would appear to act destructively.

I agree, so what we are observing is the WTO's slow withering away.

makes the federal government subsidise climate-friendly investments in the USA. EU leaders have expressed concern about the policy. They fear the US is poaching investors to the detriment of related industries in Europe. Most likely, the EU and the US will find some common ground and agree on policies that suit both sides, but I wonder whether they will involve emerging markets and developing countries in that kind of deal.

Well, the White House certainly does not want to involve China in any agreement that would boost Chinese companies in ways that the US cannot control. The IRA

the state. Multilateral institutions have done so too, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for example. What difference does that make?

So far, I'm afraid it has not made much difference at all. If you consider the IMF's history, there really are three distinct periods, and that basically applies to the World Bank, its sister institution, as well:

- From the end of World War II until the 1980s or so, both supported considerable government action and emphasised international macroeconomic stability such as fixed exchange rate.
- What followed was the era of structural adjustment, during which they focused on market dynamism and insisted that borrowing countries must balance their budgets and achieve price stability at the national level. The budget cuts often caused considerable hardship, especially when public education and health care suffered. In the longer run, the structural-adjustment approach proved untenable. The supposedly "unleashed" market forces did not trigger the kind of growth that would have allowed shared prosperity. Many poor countries could not even repay the debts incurred to implement structural adjustment. Around the turn of the millennium, debt relief became inevitable in many cases.
- The third period, however, really only began with the global financial crisis of 2008. The rhetoric of the IMF changed, but its core ideology basically remains the same.

Please elaborate.

Take the research the IMF does. I find it striking that the empirical data is often quite interesting, but the conclusions tend to be 'geared' towards the structural-adjustment mould. For example, an IMF report will typically state that the macroeconomic stabilisation was good so poverty could be reduced. The robustness of such results are still questionable, and they never explore the other way round, that macroeconomic stability resulted from the government not being overburdened by escalating crises, worsening poverty and deteriorating political stability. IMF rhetoric has become less rigid, but the markets-always-know-best paradigm is so deeply ingrained that the institution is not really learning from experience.

A while ago, Malina Stutz and Kristina Rehbein from erlassjahr.de, Germany's



"China's state kept playing a strong role in many sectors, including infrastructure and education": celebrating Tsinghua University's 110th anniversary in 2021.

What can and should governments do to change that trend?

They would have to accept momentarily the trend of plurilateral agreements and making sure no basic rules are breached and focus on the global common good. To reach a global agreement they could settle for lower and less ambitious targets. That would be the realistic approach to achieving broad consensus.

Part of the problem is that US President Joe Biden is rediscovering an active role for the state in the economy. His Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) is, to a large extent, a law that

indirectly acknowledges the importance of industrial policy which the USA opposed in the past. More generally speaking, environmental protectionism will further diminish the role of the WTO. The imposition of some kind of climate tariffs somewhere would also erode competitive advantages of low-income countries. We need a transition to clean energy, but it must benefit the weakest too.

The international economic order that emerged after the fall of the Berlin Wall was based on market-orthodox ideas. However, not only Biden has rediscovered a role for

debt relief campaign, criticised the IMF on our platform. According to them, the IMF's policy regarding individual countries has not changed in spite of public statements that the climate crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic necessitate stronger state action. Do you agree?

The message sounds correct, but I'm not sure I agree with every detail of their argument. I'd like to raise a different point. The country that was most successful in reducing poverty in the past 40 years was China. The fall of global poverty was primarily due to that one country which did not necessarily follow the IMF advice. It liberalised markets in an experimental way, but China's state kept playing a strong role in many sectors, including infrastructure and education in



"If an economy cannot cope with external shocks like a series of extreme-weather events, it is not stable": flooding in Pakistan in 2022.

particular. Chinese policies resulted in very high growth rates for a very long time. The result was impressively broad-based prosperity. That experience nonetheless did not have a discernible impact on IMF thinking.

My impression is that China is becoming increasingly totalitarian under President Xi Jinping. I am not sure we can still speak of developmental regime.

I do not know. Perhaps you are right that he is no longer running a developmental regime. But does that undo the material progress made under his predecessors? Of

course not. Multilateral institutions should do their best to learn the lessons of China's rise.

Does it matter that the USA, the EU and Japan are the dominant shareholders of the IMF?

Let me put it this way: it is not surprising that this institution generally serves the interests of its dominant shareholders. One issue in which this became abundantly obvious was quantitative easing. The IMF never challenged the ultra-loose monetary policy which high-income countries adopted to cope with the crisis of 2008 despite its significant impact on the global liquidity. It wouldn't have accepted anything similar in an emerging market or developing country.

But it didn't really have any sway over the high-income countries. It really only has an influence on policymaking when a government needs its money.

Well, the IMF did not challenge the European Central Bank's loose monetary policy in the context of bailing out Greece. Quantitative easing really had tough long-term impacts. It contributed to the surge of inflation in the past two years, worsened the inequality, and it has exacerbated debt problems in many countries. The reason is that private-sector financiers handed out loans in middle-income countries in search of

higher returns than they could get in high-income countries.

The IMF has been warning for some time that an increasing number of countries' sovereign debts look unsustainable. Where restructuring negotiations have begun, China has developed a pattern of arguing that it will only forgive loans if the World Bank does so too, arguing that World Bank loans are ultimately western loans. China's stance makes it harder to involve private-sector creditors. Would it be a solution to exempt AIIB loans too? After all, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank is a Chinese-dominated multilateral institution that in some ways resembles the western-dominated World Bank.

I think that might make sense, but I really do not know what western governments would accept.

Chinese leaders always insist that the People's Republic is a developing country, but the way they are handling debt issues hurts developing countries.

China is a very unusual country. I don't think it fits into any commonly used category. What is obvious, however, is that its government is keenly aware of its national interests. Sometimes they coincide with those of least-developed countries, and sometimes they don't.

What needs to happen for the IMF to become more open-minded?

Get away from groupthink. While their research quality is quite good, the conclusions should be derived more carefully, less doctrinaire and not forced to support the groupthink. Macroeconomic stability matters, yes, but what kind? It is about more than mere financial figures. If poverty worsens, the system is not stable. And if an economy cannot cope with external shocks like a pandemic or a series of extreme-weather events, it is not stable either. IMF research must ponder these issues, so the institution will learn the necessary lessons.



IWAN J. AZIS
is a professor at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York and visiting professor at the University of Indonesia in

Jakarta.

<http://iwanazis.com/>

Communal meals unite rich and poor

Whereas Zimbabwe is a very classist country, when it comes to social norms, certain traditions and customs cut across class lines. One such custom is “mahwau-ro”, a practice of serving meals on fresh banana leaves.

This long tradition is one of the remaining reminders of the possibility of an equal society. Among the Ndaou ethnic group, communal functions are often attended by large numbers of people. At these events, be it a wedding, funeral or any such big gathering, food is often served to attendees. The large numbers cannot be served on ceramic or plastic plates or in bowls, so their beef tripe, soup, corn or vegetables are put on “mahwau-ro”, fresh banana leaves.

The Ndaou people are found in Chimanimani, eastern Zimbabwe. They are united by the common tongue Shona. “Everyone eating meals on banana leaves – rich or poor – at a public occasion is our way of visualising a fair society,” says John Muchadziya, a prominent local chief in Rusitu village of eastern Zimbabwe. “It’s a tradition that I think is over 50 years old. Much of it has got to do with the fact that bananas and other fruits grow lavishly here in Chimanimani.”

Chimanimani, located along the border with Mozambique, receives some of the country’s highest rainfall, and its lush dark red soils are perfect for raising bananas, avocados, pineapples and other fruits. The use of fresh banana leaves is

therefore tied to the availability of this natural substitute.

The Ndaou people have grown to attribute this tradition to being a motif for equality in their society. As the gap between the rich and poor continually grows bigger, such rare occasions like eating together no matter if rich or poor represents something meaningful.

Jaibhesi Manhandu, a local sociology teacher in Chimanimani, believes that the practice of eating meals on banana leaves is not just out of tradition. It is also a result of widespread poverty. For long, it was almost impossible for anyone holding a mass public event to have enough crockery to serve hundreds of people at funerals, weddings or family marriage ceremonies. Despite her beautiful weather and fertile soils suitable for agriculture, Chimanimani remains one of Zimbabwe’s poorest districts.

For many Zimbabweans around the world, eating meals off mahwau-ro is melancholic. For Sibongile Ziyebangwa, a London based nurse who grew up in Chimanimani, it is immaterial what may have given birth to the tradition. She says: “Whatever it is – I enjoy dishing out my goat tripe and soup and yam pudding on green banana leaves. It has that organic mealtime feeling you won’t find anywhere in the world.” She adds: “I make sure once every year I fly back home to Zimbabwe to enjoy fabulous traditions like these and so many others – and of course the food!”



AUDREY SIMANGO
is a freelancer working in South Africa and Zimbabwe.
thefoodradio@gmail.com

MASTHEAD / IMPRINT

D+C DEVELOPMENT AND COOPERATION

Sustainable development requires global awareness and local action.

Vol. 50, 2023

D+C is the identical twin of the German edition E+Z

Internet: www.DandC.eu

ISSN 2366-7257

The production of this Digital Monthly was finalised on 30.03.2023.

D+C Development and Cooperation is funded by Germany’s Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and commissioned by ENGAGEMENT GLOBAL. D+C does not serve as a governmental mouthpiece. Our mission is to provide a credible forum of debate, involving governments, civil society, the private sector and academia at an international level. D+C is the identical twin of E+Z Entwicklung und Zusammenarbeit, the German edition.

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

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:
Fazit Communication GmbH
Executive directors: Jonas Grashey, Hannes Ludwig

ADDRESS OF THE PUBLISHER AND EDITORIAL OFFICE:
Pariser Straße 1, D-60486 Frankfurt am Main, Germany

This is also the legally relevant address of all indicated as responsible or entitled to represent them in this imprint.

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

Disclaimer according to § 5,2 Hessian Law on the Freedom and Rights of the Press: The shareholder of the company is FAZ Fazit Stiftung.

ADVERTISING AND SUBSCRIPTION SERVICE:
Fazit Communication GmbH
c/o Cover Service GmbH & Co. KG
PO Box 1363
D-82034 Deisenhofen, Germany
Phone: +49 (0) 89 8 58 53-8 32
Fax: +49 (0) 89 8 58 53-6 28 32
fazit-com@cover-services.de

PRINTING:
Westdeutsche Verlags- und Druckerei GmbH
Kurfürstenstraße 46
D-64546 Mörfelden-Walldorf, Germany

Opinions expressed by authors indicated in bylines do not necessarily reflect the views of ENGAGEMENT GLOBAL, the publisher or the editor and his team. Provided that they indicate the original source, third parties have the permission to republish in complete or abridged versions the manuscripts published by D+C Development and Cooperation and E+Z Entwicklung und Zusammenarbeit. However, those who do so are requested to send the editorial office two hard copies and/or the links to the respective webpages. This general permission does not apply to illustrations, maps and other items with explicitly and separately marked copyright disclaimers.

PRINT SUBSCRIPTION PRICES (INCL. MAILING CHARGES):
single issue: € 2.20
annual subscription, Germany: € 14.00
annual subscription, world: € 18.00





www.linkedin.com/company/d-c-development-and-cooperation



D+C

D+C Development and Cooperation

Sustainable development requires global awareness and local action.
Media Production · Frankfurt am Main · 547 followers

See all 8 employees on LinkedIn

[+ Follow](#) [Visit website](#) [More](#)

[Home](#) [About](#) [Posts](#) [Jobs](#) [People](#)

Page posts

D+C D+C Development and Cooperation 547 followers 3h · 🌐

Ten years after #Tunisia's first free #elections, it increasingly looks as though its young #d...see more



EU must not simply watch Tunisia's democracy die
Development and Cooperation on LinkedIn · 37 retweets
by Hans Dembowski On 25 July, Tunisia's president Kais Saie...

[Like](#) [Comment](#) [Share](#) [Send](#)

Join us on
LinkedIn!

Dear readers,

We are present on LinkedIn, the social-media platform that focuses more on professional interests than entertainment. We would like to ask you to join us there. You will find us at

www.linkedin.com/company/d-c-development-and-cooperation

We post comments and keep people briefed on important items we publish on our website **www.dandc.eu**

DEVELOPMENT
AND COOPERATION | **D+C**

ENERGY PRICES

Uncertain times

The oil price is back at pre-Ukraine-war levels. There are several reasons.

By Zohra Cosima Benamar

After the Russian invasion in Ukraine the oil price exceeded \$120 per barrel last year. At around \$80 now, it has dropped to pre-war levels again. This trend needs to be explained.

Russia used to be an important energy supplier for Europe. Last month the EU's full oil embargo against Russia took force. Moreover, the G7 (Group of the world's seven largest western economies) has adopted

move stopped the price hike and reduced supply shortages. In the meantime, oil production in the US has recovered from the Covid-19 slump, easing price pressures. The US is refilling its strategic reserve and exporting fossil fuels. As a result, European economies were able to close their demand gap by importing from the US.

However, many countries are not taking part in western sanctions. They import energy at discount prices from Russia, which reduces the international price pressure. The main importers are not European countries anymore, but rather China and India.

els, their location becomes the legal place of origin. Apparently, Indian companies find this business model quite interesting.

Due to exceptional discounts and the extended shipping routes, Russian export revenues from crude have gone down significantly. The export volume, however, is basically stable.

In November 2022 OPEC+ (the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies) decided to reduce oil supplies (see my article in the D+C monthly digital edition December 2022). Concerns that this decision would trigger a price hike, turned out to be wrong. Indeed, global oil demand decreased in the fourth quarter of 2022, just as OPEC+ had anticipated.

There were several reasons. Pandemic impacts are still a drag on the global economy. Moreover, recent interest rate increases in the US and Europe are slowing down consumption, which weakens the economy and reduces oil demand. The interest rate adjustments are designed to fight inflation, yet could cause a recession. So far, the economic outlook for the US looks good as the labour market has been quite resilient. Accordingly, oil demand is likely to increase. As oil production forecasts for the US are higher than initially expected, US demand will most likely be covered and the international supplies boosted. What impact the current bank-sector turmoil will have on the economy remains to be seen.

Finally, the Ukraine conflict is speeding up Europe's transition to clean energy. Investments in this sector have increased. Germany aspires to rely fully on renewable energy for electricity supply by 2035. In the long run, this development will dampen oil demand and hence reduce the oil price.

Currently, the oil market seems relaxed, but that can change fast. It is particularly difficult to assess what further impact sanctions on Russia will have. Moreover, the end of China's Covid-19 lockdowns will most likely lead to an increase in oil demand, which could raise the oil price. Such a turn, however, could be mitigated by OPEC+ production adjustments.



Oil tanker in Novorossiysk in October 2022.

a \$60 price cap on Russian oil. Generally speaking, both measures impede Russian oil sales on the international markets and thus put oil supply under pressure. Normally, a further price hike would be expected, but that has not happened so far.

Since the beginning of the war, crude oil prices increased rapidly, further fueling inflation. To counter the trend, US President Joe Biden released a significant amount of the Strategic Petroleum Reserves. That

Via considerable detours, Russian oil is still flowing to western countries however. Russian oil is only banned, if it is purchased under the minimum price set by the G7. Moreover, the original source of crude can be hidden, for instance by loading the commodity onto different tankers at foreign ports. According to Bloomberg, a Russian shadow fleet is in the making. Moreover, when foreign refineries blend Russian oil with oil from other countries to produce fu-



ZOHRA COSIMA BENAMAR
is a PhD candidate in the field of geopolitics and energy policy at the ISCTE University Institute of Lisbon.

Zohra_Cosima_Benamar@iscte-iul.pt

POVERTY REDUCTION

The Janus face of growth

Millions of people in Africa plunged deeper into poverty due to the multiple and compounded socio-economic crises caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and inflationary pressures brought by war in Europe. It is now important that we do not parrot slogans about how economic growth is either nefarious or heavenly for Africa. Things are more complicated than that.

By Fabio Andrés Díaz Pabón

Before the pandemic, Africa experienced economic growth in the first two decades of the new millennium. However, according to the World Bank, the poverty headcount ratio – the percentage of the population earning less than \$6.85 per day – did not fall more than five percentage points, from 92% to 87% of the continent's population. So who actually benefited from the economic growth during these years?

The fruits of this rather blooming period went to the richest on the continent. Between 1980 and 2017, the income of the poorest in Africa grew at 0.73% per year, while the income of the richest thousandth grew at an annual rate of around three percent, as research from the African Centre of Excellence for Inequality Research and the Agence Française de Développement shows.

This means we need to acknowledge that economic growth in its current shape is and will be insufficient. Even in an ideal, sustainable and equitable form, economic growth is not a magic wand that will eradicate poverty and inequality in Africa.

Truly sustainable and equitable growth should be part of comprehensive approaches that involve the state, society and the support of international actors who are genuinely interested in an economically strong African continent. This also means discussing how wealth is distributed. If the majority of the population remains trapped in poverty while wealth increases for a few, a discussion needs to take place about the way in which taxation and social security systems should uplift people from poverty and reduce inequalities.

At the same time, the urgency of climate change is fuelling discussions on de-growth, post-growth and the nature of growth altogether. However, acknowledging these debates about how the economy must grow to ensure the survival of the planet should not mean sacrificing Africa and its people to the overarching goal of sustainability – especially since it is the wealthiest

economic insecurity and weak social protection systems marked by inequalities and exploitation. While we tend to associate poverty and inequality with income related metrics, the realities of poverty and inequality are about rights (i.e. to own property), opportunities (i.e. access to education) and services (i.e. health, public transport) which are an obligation of states and a central feature of development.

The ever more urgent task for activists, researchers, government officers and policy makers is now to unpack the complex relations between growth, poverty and inequality in a way that makes it possible for economic growth to really benefit the people on



Economic growth that is not sustainable widens the gap between rich and poor in Africa.

10% of the world's population that accounts for 48% of global carbon emissions.

Moving further into this millennium, the ongoing legacies of colonialism and post-independence economic paths continue to condition the interaction between poverty, economic growth, and inequality in Africa. These legacies are especially marked by the persistence of inequalities of opportunity and remuneration.

It should therefore be obvious that the rising poverty and destitution across Africa since 2020 is not merely the result of the pandemic, climate change, inflation and food insecurity.

Way before 2020, millions of people on the continent were already vulnerable. That means their lives were and still are determined by the lack of social mobility, eco-

the continent. Economic growth in its current shape, that is to say, cannot be expected to be inclusive and sustainable for Africa.

REFERENCES

Chancel, L., 2022: Global carbon inequality over 1990-2019. *Nature Sustainability* volume 5 (2022).

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41893-022-00955-z>



FABIO ANDRÉS DÍAZ PABÓN is a researcher at the African Centre of Excellence for Inequality Research of the University of Cape Town and

a research associate at Rhodes University in South Africa.

fabioandres.diazpabon@uct.ac.za

WORLD BANK

Biden's promising candidate

US President Joe Biden has nominated Ajay Banga to lead the World Bank. This is a smart choice with interesting global implications – and a bearing on Indian identity politics.

By Hans Dembowski

Banga is the former chief executive of Mastercard. He grew up, went to university and started his career in India before moving to the USA. His South Asian background is undeniable in spite of his US passport.

Most likely, the World Bank's member countries will appoint him. Critics have long bemoaned the conventional practice of World Bank presidents being US citizens and nominated by the White House.

Biden is reaching out to non-western cultures with the proposal of a manager who proudly displays his Sikh identity by wearing a turban and having a beard. In particular, Biden is reaching out to those emerging markets that have a long track record of keeping a distance from the west. People in Brazil, China and South Africa will certainly consider Banga to be Indian as well as American.

Banga's CV does not include long stints in multilateral institutions or development agencies, but he has shown a strong interest in developmental issues, including the devastating impacts of global heating in particular. On the other hand, he has thrived as a financial-sector manager on Wall Street. He knows how to mobilise private capital and invest it competently. Biden obviously wants to shore up the World Bank as a financial institution.

Some observers are disappointed that the White House did not pick a climate expert or a development professional, but financial-sector competence may actually be more important. In-depth knowledge of ecological matters or development economics are not needed to define the right goals, but banking know-how is indispensable for achieving them. In terms of competence, Banga will thus be hard to reject. Some criticise Biden for not nominating a woman. I agree that it would be great to get a female

World Bank president. I also think that Banga's nomination makes sense in terms of fighting destructive identity politics.

Narendra Modi, India's prime minister, must support the first World Bank president from his country, but is probably unhappy about Biden's proposal. After all, Banga does not confirm Modi's Hindu-supremacist ideology. Sikhism is a different faith, and proud Sikhs resent the attempts that Modi and his camp make to subordinate their religion to Hinduism. Banga is the son of a high ranking military officer. In his generation, that meant being raised in the Nehruvian spirit of secular nationhood which rejects sectarian divisiveness. Some Indian immigrants in the USA support Modi, but many do not. Banga is certainly in the latter camp. He is an ally of Vice President Kamala Harris, who opposes discrimination of all kinds. He has a history of supporting inclusiveness.

The Indian public celebrates compatriots who rise to positions of global leadership. Such persons represent the nation at the international level and serve as role models at the domestic one.

Biden's subtle message to India is thus: we appreciate your great and diverse culture, but we don't fall for your govern-

ment's ideology of an exclusively Hindu nation. By endorsing a liberal Sikh, Biden has thus weakened Modi's claim to define Indian nationhood.

At the global level, Biden's message is different. He wants the World Bank to become more forceful and to use its clout in response to the climate crisis. Global heating is indeed an urgent problem and all available resources must be used to get a grip on it. If the World Bank is becoming a climate bank, however, an unresolved question becomes even more urgent. It is to what extent climate finance is being conflated with official development assistance (ODA). The big promise was always that climate finance would be provided on top of ODA.

ODA is well defined and the flows are transparent. On average, high-income nations are paying about half of what they promised. Climate finance promises have perhaps been kept by 80 % or so, but definitions are more vague and there is obviously quite a bit of double counting with ODA. While the World Bank has not caused this bewildering state of affairs, it certainly is an agency that can contribute quite a lot to providing more transparency. International observers should therefore pay close attention to what its top leader does in this respect.



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

eu.editor@dandc.eu



Ajay Banga
self-confidently
displays his Sikh
identity.

WEST AFRICA

Inconclusive results

The results of Nigeria's presidential elections will be challenged in court. That related disputes are being dealt with peacefully, is good news for the entire ECOWAS region.

By Prince Thompson

Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has declared Bola Ahmed Tinubu the winner of the presidential elections three days after the voting took place. Tinubu was the candidate of the ruling party All Progressives Congress (APC), and his two most important opponents have declared they will go to court to challenge his victory. The developments in Nigeria have strong implications for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), of which it is the most populous country and largest economy.

According to INEC, Tinubu got 37% of the vote, while Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) came in second with 29% and Peter Obi of the Labour Party third with 25%. Turnout was surprisingly low at 29% of some 90 million eligible voters.

Nigeria's elections always matter to the rest of West Africa. Its huge population,

large economy and abundant oil reserves make it the "giant of Africa". Whatever happens here has an impact on the neighbours.

It is a good sign that the conduct of the election was largely successful compared with previous ones. Nonetheless, there were irregularities, violence and avoidable technical glitches. For these reasons, the results are in dispute. The resolve of the losing candidates to seek redress at the court is good for entrenching democratic progress more deeply in the region.

Moreover, judicial review of the election results should strengthen Nigeria's democracy and stability. Both are crucial for the entire region. ECOWAS has a history of governments insisting on democracy in partner countries, but has recently seen a series of military coups in Mali, Guinea-Bissau and Burkina Faso. Indeed, Nigeria is a significant contributor to peacekeeping operations in West Africa. Its troops are currently present in Mali, Guinea-Bissau and Sierra Leone.

Like several other West African countries, Nigeria has been struggling with political unrest and Islamist insurgents for many years. If things deteriorate in Nigeria, that would have repercussions throughout the

region. Neighbouring countries might see more refugees, while militant outfits benefit from support from Nigerian allies. A serious stability crisis in Nigeria would destabilise the entire region. Ghana has played an active role in supporting Nigeria's fight against Boko Haram and other insurgent groups in the region. Any disruption in Nigeria's security situation could potentially affect Ghana's efforts to maintain regional stability and security.

Nigeria has long been a significant trading partner for other ECOWAS members, including Ghana for example. Any changes in Nigeria's economic policies could have far-reaching effects on Ghana. If Nigeria's economy grows stronger and becomes more stable, that would boost investment and trade opportunities for Ghana. Conversely, if Nigeria experiences political instability or economic difficulties, that would have negative impacts on Ghana's economy.

The same can be said for other West African countries. However, comparatively strong and diversified economies like Ghana's or Côte d'Ivoire's benefit more from international relations than those of low-income countries like Sierra Leone or Niger. Moreover, linguistic barriers mean that francophone countries generally tend to be somewhat less exposed to Nigerian influence, though that is not the case for Benin and Niger, which both share borders with Nigeria.

Nigeria's next government will certainly have an impact on regional integration. Nigeria has long been a key player in the ECOWAS, and the block's future will depend on it in the future too. The good news is that regional integration was not controversial in the election, with all three major candidates supporting it in principle. Establishing a single currency for the ECOWAS will not be possible without Nigerian leadership. Nor will the Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), which the African Union plans to create, become a reality.



PRINCE THOMPSON

is from Ghana and studying development management at Ruhr Universität Bochum. He is currently an intern at D+C/

E+Z. His masters programme is affiliated to AGEP, the German Association of Postgraduate Programmes pertaining to international development.

prince.thompson94@yahoo.com



Peaceful protests show that many Nigerians find official election results unconvincing.

MIDDLE EAST

Jewish voices assess Israel's current crisis

Prime Minister Benjamin (“Bibi”) Netanyahu is leading a right-wing government in Israel. It wants to radically reduce the power of the Supreme Court and supports Jewish settlers in the West Bank territory. Mass protests have arisen against the government in Israel. At the same time, violence haunts the West Bank, which has been under Israeli occupation since the Six Days War in 1967. Here are the headlines of – and excerpts from – opinion pieces by Jewish contributors in international papers. We are quoting the websites.

By D+C/E+Z

MY MESSAGE TO BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: STOP YOUR COUP OR WE'LL STOP THE COUNTRY

History is full of dictatorships established by people who first came to power through legal means. It's the oldest trick in the book: first you use the law to gain power, then you use your power to distort the law. When examined together, the laws this government is currently legislating have one simple meaning (and you don't need a PhD in law to get it): if these laws are passed, the government will have the power to completely destroy our freedom.

Sixty-one members of Knesset (Israel's parliament with 120 members, D+C/E+Z) could pass any racist, oppressive and anti-democratic law they think of; 61 members of Knesset could also change the electoral system, to stop us from replacing the regime. When we ask the leaders of this coup what will keep the power of the government in check under the new regime, and what will protect basic human rights, they only have one answer: “trust us”.

Prime Minister Netanyahu, Justice Minister Levin, MK (member of the Knesset, D+C/E+Z) Rothman, chair of the constitution committee, we do not trust you! You're tearing to shreds the contract that has some-



Yuval Noah Harari addressing a protest in March – The Guardian published his speech in its opinion section.

how held our society together for 75 years, and then you expect us to trust you?

We don't trust you, because we know very well what you want. You want unlimited power. You want to shut us up and to tell us how to live, what to eat, what to wear, what to think and even who to love.

Yuval Noah Harari, *The Guardian*

BE PREPARED FOR THE END OF ISRAEL AS WE KNOW IT

Remember, Israel has no second chamber and no written constitution. As things stand, if an Israeli government, which by definition dominates the Knesset, wants to do something, the only body that can stand in its way is the Supreme Court. And now Bibi wants to gut it.

In practice, it means that Netanyahu or any future PM would rule Israel with unrestrained power. It would be the tyranny of the majority, as expressed by 61 seats in a 120-member Knesset (...). Sometimes the minority will be the obvious one, Israel's Arab citizens, but sometimes it will mean those on the losing side of a contested question. In a democracy, everybody is in the minority sometime. (...)

For decades, those who opposed the post-1967 occupation warned that it would

inevitably corrode the occupier, that Israel could not disregard democracy on one side of the Green Line and expect to maintain it indefinitely on the other. Eventually, the malignancy would spread across that ever-fading boundary. That moment has now come.

Jonathan Freedland, *The JC (Jewish Chronicle)*, based in London

ISRAEL HAS ANGERED ITS CLOSEST SUPPORTERS

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's assault on the independence of Israel's judiciary has provoked mass demonstrations, dire warnings from the business community and words of caution from the Biden administration and pro-Israel members of Congress. This level of opposition is unusual. But it is mild compared with the angry response to mob violence in the West Bank.

“A rampage by Israeli settlers after a Palestinian gunman killed two Israelis in the occupied West Bank has exacerbated fears that violence in the territory might spiral out of control,” the Financial Times reported.

Netanyahu sounded weirdly sympathetic toward the rioters, much as President Donald Trump sounded when talking to the American insurgents on Jan. 6, 2021. “I ask – even when the blood is boiling – not to take the law into one's hands,” Netanyahu tweeted. As of this writing, no one has been detained for prosecution.

(...)

The message from the executive vice president of the Orthodox Union, among Israel's most loyal defenders, was bracing: “How can such a thing happen?” Rabbi Moshe Hauer wrote. “How could it come to this, that Jewish young men should ransack and burn homes and cars?” While empathizing with the “anguish” over the killings of two Israelis, the statement reiterated that “we cannot understand or accept this.” And in an extraordinary rebuke of Netanyahu, Hauer continued: “Attacking a village does not deserve to be called ‘taking the law into your own hands.’ This is not the law; this is undisciplined and random fury.”

How could it come to this? These things happen when a right-wing government sends a consistent message of sympathy for the country's most radical elements.

Jennifer Rubin, *The Washington Post*



Rally in support of independent judiciary in Tel Aviv in early March.

YOU CAN'T SAVE DEMOCRACY IN A JEWISH STATE

For most of the Palestinians under Israeli control – those in the West Bank and Gaza Strip – Israel is not a democracy. It's not a democracy because Palestinians in the Occupied Territories can't vote for the government that dominates their lives. (...) They can complain to the Palestinian Authority. But the PA is a subcontractor, not a state. Like other Palestinians, its officials need Israeli permission even to leave the West Bank. In Gaza, too, Israel determines, with help from Egypt, which people and products enter and exit. And Gaza's residents, who live in what Human Rights Watch calls "an open-air prison," can't vote out the Israeli officials who hold the key. (...)

In 2009 the Palestinian Knesset member Ahmad Tibi quipped that Israel was indeed "Jewish and democratic: Democratic toward Jews and Jewish toward Arabs." To many liberal Zionists, that might sound churlish. After all, Mr. Tibi has now served in Israel's Parliament for almost 25 years. But he understands that the Jewish state contains a deep structure that systematically denies Palestinians legal equality, whether they are citizens or not. (...)

This helps explain why Palestinians comprise more than 20 percent of Israel's citizens but Palestinian municipalities, according to a 2017 report by a variety of Palestinian and Israeli human rights groups, encompass less than three percent of Israel's land. In

2003, an Israeli government commission found that "many Arab towns and villages were surrounded by land designated for purposes such as security zones, Jewish regional councils, national parks and nature reserves or highways, which prevent or impede the possibility of their expansion." Unable to gain permission, many Palestinian citizens build homes illegally – which are therefore subject to government demolition. (...)

Some Jews may worry that by advocating genuine liberal democracy – and thus exposing themselves to accusations of anti-Zionism – Mr. Netanyahu's critics will marginalize themselves. But if they widen their vision they'll see that the opposite is true. By including Palestinians as full partners, Israel's democracy movement will discover a vast reservoir of new allies and develop a far clearer moral voice. Ultimately, a movement premised on ethnocracy cannot successfully defend the rule of law. Only a movement for equality can.

Peter Beinart, The New York Times

AMERICAN JEWS, YOU HAVE TO CHOOSE SIDES ON ISRAEL

The interests of American Jews and Israel have been diverging for many years, but it's been papered over. Up until the early 2000s – as Israel was focused on absorbing Jews from Russia and Ethiopia with the help of American Jewry, pursuing the Oslo peace process with the help of American presidents and launching start-ups with the

help of American investors – the interests between the two communities seemed to be generally aligned. (...)

Under Netanyahu, Israel's governments sought every way possible to avoid the peace process with the Palestinians and used every opportunity possible to demonize Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas, even though Netanyahu knew that for years Abbas's Palestinian Authority was providing essential security cooperation with Israel in the West Bank.

Netanyahu and his team also dismissed liberal American Jews, viewing them as a dying breed, intermarrying their way to irrelevance. Netanyahu and his allies have instead focused their energies on building support for Israel with Republicans and their evangelical base.

Still, the leaders of the major American Jewish institutions worked hard to deny the implicit contempt that Netanyahu manifested toward them, putting out pabulum statements about the need to respect Israel's democratic process and judge Israel's government "on actions" – as if Netanyahu's appointment of two ex-convicts and nationalist, messianic zealots to key cabinet posts was not worthy of condemnation.

But as Netanyahu's latest government has pressed ahead with its attempt to crush the independence of the Israeli judiciary, splitting Israeli society, American Jewish leaders now have no choice but to choose sides.

Thomas Friedman, The New York Times

FOCUS

Digital change

“Pakistan has been slow to adopt technological progress in the education system.” **MARVA KHAN, P. 19**

“The number of online shoppers in Africa is set to surpass half a billion by 2025.” **JAYLAN ELSHAZLY, P. 21**

“The use of smart climate technologies is another factor for green growth.”
TIAN XIA AND NATHALIE SPATH, P. 23

“Nigerians now have even less confidence in the election commission.” **ADAZE OKEAYA-INNEH, P. 25**

“Done well, e-government can improve services for citizens.” **CHARLES MARTIN-SHIELDS, P. 27**

“World Vision and other agencies are boosting training in digital literacy.” **MELANIE ASSAUER ET AL., P. 29**

“More than two-thirds of internet users now live in places where free expression is restricted online.”
ROLI MAHAJAN, P. 31

“AI programmes are not designed to think; they merely process data.” **HANS DEMBOWSKI, P. 32**

Nigerian
election official
with digital
equipment.



PAKISTAN

Invest in digital learning

Pakistan's struggle with underinvestment in education and digitisation has resulted in high illiteracy rates and systemic discrimination against girls and less privileged students. While some positive examples can be found in institutions catering for persons with disabilities, the overall picture remains bleak.

By Marva Khan

Education is Pakistan's Achilles heel. More than 230 million people live in Pakistan, making it the fifth most populous country in the world. About one third of them is aged below 15, according to the UN Population Fund (UNFPA). It is imperative to ensure that this young and dynamic population has access to quality education if Pakistan wants to achieve its economic and socio-political potential.

However, the country's public investment in education is dismal, with Pakistan spending only 2.4% of its total GDP on education in 2021. This figure has remained between 1.8 and 3% in recent decades, paling in comparison to EU member states that al-

locate between 4.5 and 5.5% of their GDP to education.

Thus Pakistan's poor literacy rates should come as no surprise. They differ significantly between the country's provinces, between 66.3% in Punjab and 54.5% in Baluchistan. Since the 18th Constitutional Amendment in 2010, education has become a provincial matter. Each region is responsible for its own policies.

Within the provinces, literacy rates can be expected to be significantly higher in urban centres than in rural areas. Additionally, men enjoy notably higher rates than women. This holds true for all ages across the country.

DIGITISATION IS KEY

To improve education for all, access to technology and digitisation are essential. The Covid-19 pandemic brought this need into sharp focus, as lockdowns and job losses disrupted digital connectivity. Online teaching underscored the importance of internet access as an integral component of education (see box).

However, Pakistan has been slow to adopt technological progress, particularly in the education system, largely due to high costs. The country ranks in the bottom quarter of the Inclusive Internet Index, which evaluates nations' availability, affordability, relevance and readiness of internet services. The gender gap is also a significant challenge, with just 19% of Pakistani women accessing mobile internet compared to 37% of men in 2020.

The country's government has taken measures to address these issues. In 2017, Pakistan's Ministry of Information launched the Digital Pakistan Policy 2017, which aimed to promote IT usage across all sectors, including education. Its objectives included:

- enhancing public-private partnerships,
- developing accessible software,
- incorporating IT accessibility in all competitive exams and
- subsidising assistive technologies' costs.

The policy also aimed at providing pupils with better digital learning opportunities, including access to better tools. It could have proven effective for students, especially those enrolled in public schools during Covid-19 lockdowns. However, it was abandoned after a new government took over following the 2018 general elections.

In Punjab, the provincial government had set up the Punjab Information Technology Board (PITB) to provide IT services and infrastructure, with a plan to implement a massive internet connectivity spread. A 2017 education policy aimed to capitalise on this initiative. However, political interference in the PITB's structure and work following the regime change in 2018 led to earlier formulated policies and actions being set aside.

Additionally, Pakistan's digital infrastructure has been subject to government restrictions, including the banning of websites like Youtube and Wikipedia on the grounds of "offensive" or "blasphemous" content.

PRIVATE SECTOR STEPS IN

As the Pakistani government continued to neglect the education sector, private educational institutes have stepped up to the plate, investing in quality education and



Blind students at a government school in the city of Peshawar, Pakistan.

leveraging technological advancements and digitisation. These institutes are primarily concentrated in three major urban centres – Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad. They predominantly offer secondary education based on British and American systems. However, their high fee structures make them a rather exclusive option.

The private sector has assumed a critical role in Pakistan's education system. In 2017/2018, privately owned institutes accounted for 38% of all educational institutes and 44% of total enrolments. While some of these "elite" institutions provide access to modern technology, disparities persist across the board.

Among the first institutions and organisations in Pakistan to use digital technology for education purposes have been some that provide education and training to persons with disabilities, including the Ida Rieu Welfare Association, the Pakistan Association of the Deaf, the Aziz Jehan Begum Trust & Institute and the Special Talent Exchange Program. Additionally, some higher educational institutes increasingly leverage assistive technologies and digitisation to make education more accessible to persons with disabilities. For example, Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) has established its Assistive Technology Lab, a facility designed to assist impaired students and staff.

For Pakistan to prosper as a country, better education for all is paramount. Investing in digitisation and education should be the main tool to achieve this goal, both in the private and public sectors. Notably, closing the gender gap in education and access to technology should be a top priority.



MARVA KHAN
is an assistant professor of law at LUMS (Lahore University of Management Sciences) and co-founder of the Pakistani Feminist Judgments Project.
marva.khan@lums.edu.pk

Digital learning during the pandemic

The arrival of Covid-19 in Pakistan in 2020 forced the closure of all educational institutes and triggered strict lockdowns in March. With no end in sight, both public and private sector educational institutes across the country were compelled to invest in digitisation in order to keep teaching. Some well-funded private institutions adapted more easily than publicly funded ones. However, infrastructure deficiencies prevented students from all kinds of backgrounds from accessing digital learning.

As an assistant professor of law at Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), I witnessed first-hand how my institution tackled this challenge. Our university moved swiftly to purchase Zoom accounts for faculty and administration, allowing us to transition to online learning within a mere two to three weeks of the initial lockdown. Having already established the practice of offering digital access

to reading materials and other learning resources, the switch was not too arduous for us.

However, there were still holdups. Not all faculty members were comfortable with the new technology. What proved even more problematic was the alienation of students who come from less affluent families or reside in areas with inadequate internet access. In Pakistan, internet quality can be patchy across the country (see main text).

These students had relied on campus computer labs and

other resources to complete assignments and conduct research. Now they were forced to purchase expensive laptops. However, they were still often unable to establish a reliable internet connection due to poor service in their areas.

Another concern were the cramped and sometimes unsafe learning environments. Some students found themselves sharing small spaces with family members during class time, while others, especially girls, were expected to contribute to household chores. Reports suggest that domestic violence increased.

Before the pandemic, being on campus may have been an equalizer for students from different backgrounds. The

lockdowns, however, forced many of them back into those shells. Their socio-economic disparities had a direct impact on their learning progress.

LUMS made an effort to provide internet connection to students who could not afford it. However, the lack of tangible infrastructure in certain parts of the country meant that some students still had to choose between taking time off or returning to campus and living in almost complete isolation to continue their education.

Elite schools like Lahore Grammar School used technologies like Zoom or Google Classrooms for teaching. Their students are predominantly from a few selected localities within the same city, so they often had access to better internet service. They also could afford to purchase packages from multiple internet providers simultaneously, so they had backups. Moreover, they possess better phones and laptops than average pupils. All of these privileges made the transition easier for them. Given that students from poorer households fared much worse, Covid-19 compounded social disparities in Pakistan.

MK



Exam at a university in Peshawar, 2020.



Many African women use e-commerce to sell goods.

GENDER JUSTICE

Encouraging women to profit from e-commerce

The African e-commerce market is growing fast, offering many opportunities for women. While female entrepreneurs play an important role in the sector, they keep encountering obstacles. These need to be removed so women can use digital platforms to their full advantage.

By Jaylan ElShazly

Meet Adejumoke Olutayo, the founder of Deeski.com, an online grocery outlet in Nigeria. A mother to eight-year-old twins, she has built a thriving business through online sales on one of Africa's largest e-commerce platforms. Launched in 2016, Deeski.com now serves all areas in Nigeria's bustling commercial capital Lagos and employs 14 full-time staff members.

Stories like Adejumoke Olutayo's are not unique. Africa's e-commerce market is witnessing exponential growth and is allowing women entrepreneurs, who outnumber their male counterparts on the continent, new income-generating avenues.

In 2020, e-commerce in Africa was valued at \$20 billion. It is the fastest-growing e-commerce market in the world, expected to reach \$84 billion by 2030. The number of online shoppers in Africa is set to surpass half a billion by 2025, growing annually at a rate of 18% since 2014 and exceeding the global average of 12%. The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated an already strong trend and brought new customers to the e-commerce space.

E-commerce represents a unique opportunity for women entrepreneurs to lev-

erage this booming sector to increase their revenues and strengthen their business performance. First, e-commerce allows women to operate in the retail sector without needing physical stores that require capital. Second, e-commerce provides instant access to a wide variety of buyers as well as a reliable ecosystem of services, such as marketing, payment and logistics services. With that, women entrepreneurs get much-needed support that could help them scale quicker.

MORE FLEXIBILITY

Lastly, e-commerce allows women the flexibility to work at the time and location that suits them. This flexibility is important given the disproportionate level of care responsibilities women carry. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), African women spend more than three times as much time on unpaid care work as men.

In 2021, the International Finance Corporation (IFC), in partnership with Jumia Group and the European Commission (EC), conducted a study that leverages data and insights from sellers on Jumia, one of Africa's largest e-commerce platforms, in Ken-

ya, Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria. IFC is a member of the World Bank Group focused on the private sector in developing countries. The study's aim was to understand how to boost opportunities for women entrepreneurs in e-commerce. It found that the value of the African e-commerce market could increase by nearly \$15 billion between 2025 and 2030 if women's sales reach parity with men's (IFC 2021).

Women are well-represented in e-commerce in Africa. On the Jumia platform, they own 35% of businesses in Côte d'Ivoire and 51% in Kenya and Nigeria. When comparing the presence of formal business ownership between the Jumia platform and national statistics, women-owned businesses were better represented on the Jumia platform in both Kenya and Nigeria. This means that women are active participants in e-commerce.

BEING SUCCESSFUL IN MALE-DOMINATED SECTORS

E-commerce could enable women to move into male-dominated sectors which are characterised by high earning potential. This is good news as gender-based segregation in sectors is a key challenge standing in the way of greater profitability for women entrepreneurs. According to a World Bank report, female entrepreneurs who cross over to male-dominated sectors on average make higher profits than female entrepreneurs in female-concentrated sectors (World Bank 2022).

Findings from the study in Africa corroborate this. For example, women held more than half of the market share in the clothes and accessories segment yet generated only one third of the gross merchandise value (GMV) of the segment. Conversely, they held about one third of the market share in the male-dominated electronics sector yet generated two thirds of its GMV. E-commerce can, therefore, open opportunities for women in male-dominated, high-value spaces and support women entrepreneurs' growth and profitability.

REMOVING ROADBLOCKS

The road toward equal participation is, however, not well paved. Connectivity challenges and low digital literacy are among the main barriers for women in Africa which

need to be addressed to ensure women can profit from e-commerce. Only 24% of girls and women in Africa are estimated to use the internet compared to 35% of the male population. Furthermore, the continent faces digital skill shortages at all levels, but especially at the intermediate and advanced levels which are critical for women to use digital tools and technologies (World Bank 2021).

These gaps are evident in the way women use e-commerce platforms. For instance, the study conducted by IFC, Jumia and EC showed that women are more likely than men to value training and business support provided by the platforms. One woman entrepreneur in Nigeria shared that she used the training offered to learn how to upload product pictures. Additionally, women are less likely than men to invest in paid promotions for their products and do not take full advantage of system features such as advertising and marketing services.

E-commerce platforms therefore need to support women entrepreneurs in gaining the necessary skills to operate the system and all the features it offers. Not only will this help to boost women's businesses, but it will also provide additional revenue streams to the platforms through the increased usage of its paid promotional services.

ADDRESSING FINANCING

Financing is another barrier for African women entrepreneurs in e-commerce. The challenges for women-owned micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are well documented. IFC estimates that the financing gap for women entrepreneurs in developing economies is valued at \$1.7 trillion.

Research findings on e-commerce show that over 80% of the women-owned businesses on the Jumia platform in Kenya, Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria were microenterprises and the majority rely on personal savings to start their businesses. Women typically join the platform to expand an existing business. They rely mostly on family and friends as a source of finance after start-up.

Fintech offerings, such as lending services administered through e-commerce platforms, can give sellers access to short-term working capital. On Jumia's platform, only seven percent of women use this option compared to 11% of men, yet women were more likely to be approved for these loans.

Evidence suggests that, in addition to technology and skills barriers, women tend to self-select out of such loans due to a perception that their businesses have lower creditworthiness (African Development Bank Group 2019). Platforms and financial institutions can leverage the fact that women are already active on these platforms. They can encourage those that operate growth-stage businesses to apply for loans and train them on how to use these fintech offerings on the e-commerce platform. This would help women expand their businesses and boost their sales. It may also encourage them to pursue additional funding sources outside of the platform.

Women have more to gain from greater participation in e-commerce and more to lose if they are excluded from this new form of business. Addressing connectivity, digital skills and access to finance barriers will help African women entrepreneurs profit from e-commerce as well as support the growth of the African e-commerce market. A win-win for all.

FURTHER READING

IFC, 2021: Women and e-commerce in Africa.
https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/topics_ext_content/ifc_external_corporate_site/gender+at+ifc/resources/women-and-ecommerce-africa

World Bank, 2022: Breaking barriers: Female entrepreneurs who cross over to male-dominated sectors.
<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/36940>

World Bank, 2021: Digital skills: The why, the what and the how.
<https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/0a4174d70030f27cc66099e862b3ba79-0200022021/original/DSCAP-MethodGuidebook-Part1.pdf>
African Development Bank Group, 2019: Women self-selection out of the credit market in Africa.
https://www.afdb.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/wps_no_317_women-self-selection_out_of_the_credit_market_in_africa.pdf



jelshazly@ifc.org

JAYLAN ELSHAZLY
is Disruptive Technology
acting Lead at IFC's Gender
and Economic Inclusion
Group.



View inside a breeding box of young crickets that are being raised in France exclusively for human consumption.

CLIMATE CRISIS

New economy, smart technologies

Stopping climate change and mitigating its impacts is the greatest challenge of our time. Yet at the same time, many people lack the opportunities to do so because they live below the poverty line. Economic innovations and new technologies are part of the solution.

By Tian Xia and Nathalie Spath

For low-income countries, the climate crisis poses a particular challenge. On the one hand, they are already being severely impacted; on the other, they have few technological or financial resources to carry out mitigation or adaptation measures. However, there are also many opportunities in sustainable economic growth with fewer emissions.

In its 2020 report, the World Economic Forum coined the term “New Nature Economy”. The idea is to reduce the resources a society needs to achieve prosperity, thereby protecting ecosystems.

New Nature Economy offers a broad spectrum of new business models that use innovative technology and attract private capital. Some are already successful. Ecotourism, a responsible and sustainable way to travel, is one well-known example. Various market research studies estimated the market size of ecotourism at around \$180 billion in 2019, with an annual growth rate of approximately 10 to 15%.

Another example is breeding insects as an alternative protein source for humans and animals. Edible insects have a similarly high protein content as meat, but rearing

them uses significantly less space and energy compared to other livestock. At the moment they remain a niche product, but in the past two years, three insect species were approved for human consumption in the EU.

“Zero waste” has become a slogan on social media. This is how bakeries are springing up that bake fresh bread from old – and textile factories that recycle cotton and turn it into new clothes. Apps that broker leftover food from restaurants help to reduce food waste and thus protect the environment. Nature-based solutions like purifying water through plant-based purification systems are attracting the interest of investors. According to estimates by the World Economic Forum, the business potential of New Nature Economy is \$10.1 trillion annually by 2030. It could also create 395 million jobs.

THE ADVANTAGE OF DIGITALISATION AND TECHNOLOGY

Based on these examples, it’s clear that technologies will play a leading role in the

transformation to New Nature Economy. Technological advances present a major opportunity for low-income countries. They can base their growth on significantly improved technologies, whereas industrialised countries often underwent the Industrial Revolution at the expense of the environment.

According to the German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS), the swift increase in emissions in low-income countries can primarily be attributed to their rising energy needs, which at the moment are still largely being covered by fossil fuels.

For a long time, high transition costs were a serious impediment to the development of renewable energies in these countries. However, the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) reports that these costs have dropped significantly over the last decade, partly due to improved technologies and competitive supply chains. For example, the IRENA database shows that the cost of electricity from photovoltaic plants dropped by 85% between 2010 and 2020, while the cost of concentrated solar power fell by 68% and wind power by 56% (onshore) and 48% (offshore).

This trend is expected to continue for the foreseeable future. Clean energy is now not only affordable, but often even more competitive than fossil fuels. The transition to renewable energy sources offers enormous potential for economically weak countries – both in terms of saving costs and emissions.

However, there are some points to consider so that renewable energies can really make the greatest possible contribution to sustainable business. For example, the production of building components for renewable energy infrastructure itself requires a great deal of energy and materials. It is important to ensure that this process leaves as small a carbon footprint as possible.

The performance of power plants based on renewable energies is strongly dependent on weather conditions. For that reason, technological innovations are essential in this area to further boost storage capacity and diversify the energy mix. They are the only way to mitigate fluctuations in electricity production due to unfavourable weather conditions.

Furthermore, social and ecological aspects must be taken into account in the

planning and realisation of such power plants in order to reconcile the interests of all those involved and affected. For example, people who are to be resettled because of the construction of a hydropower plant must be fairly compensated. In the case of projects like offshore wind parks or tidal power plants, the protection of marine life must be ensured.

SMART FARMS AND DRIVERLESS TRUCKS

In addition to the transition of energy sources, digitalisation and the use of smart climate technologies is another factor for green growth, emission reduction and the mitigation of climate risks. A 2020 study by the German digital association Bitkom shows that digital technologies could save up to 20% of global greenhouse gas emissions. The greatest potential can be found in the energy, building, mobility and transportation sectors, as well as in agriculture and industry.

Innumerable innovations are already on the way. In the logistics sector, driverless electric trucks can increase the efficiency of goods transport and reduce emissions at the same time. Thanks to the quick growth of network capacity and available data, driverless trucks can find the best route, analyse traffic situations and communicate with other vehicles. Thus they can avoid traffic jams and accidents and deliver their goods more efficiently. The use of electric vehicles lowers fossil fuel consumption, and an improved traffic flow raises the quality of life, increases traffic safety and reduces emissions.

Smart farming has become a reality as well. Digital devices can analyse weather conditions, monitor plant growth, improve irrigation efficiency and reduce groundwater consumption. Drones that spray fertiliser, for example, raise dosing accuracy, lower fertiliser consumption and therefore also emissions from fertiliser production.

Intelligent building technologies have been monitoring energy consumption in homes for some time and network technical devices there. For example, they control shading, heating and cooling systems as well as lighting and can thus optimise energy consumption.

GreenTechs like Husk Power Systems are playing an increasing role in the energy sector as well. With financial support from the German development financier DEG,

Husk develops and operates low-cost hybrid power plants based on renewable energies in Nigeria and India. These so-called mini-grids make it possible to use appliances such as refrigerators, fans or water treatment plants. They are a series of electricity generators and, possibly, energy storage systems that are operated as a single system and connected to a distribution grid that provides localised electricity.

However, according to the Bitkom study mentioned above, 1.8 to 3.2% of global greenhouse gas emissions are caused by the production of digital devices and the operation of digital infrastructure. Therefore, it is also important for digital solutions to find a healthy balance through climate-friendly hardware production and an optimised energy mix for the high energy demand of data centres and networks.

LINKS

World Economic Forum, 2020: New Nature Economy Report II: The Future Of Nature And Business.

https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_The_Future_Of_Nature_And_Business_2020.pdf

Bauer, S. et al., 2021: Working together to achieve the Paris climate goals and sustainable development: International climate cooperation and the role of developing countries and emerging economies.

https://www.idos-research.de/uploads/media/Report_DIE_NewClimate_ENGLISH_FullReport.pdf

Bieser, J. et al., 2020: Klimaschutz durch digitale Technologien – Chancen und Risiken. Kurzstudie.

https://www.bitkom.org/sites/main/files/2020-05/2020-05_bitkom_klimastudie_digitalisierung.pdf



TIAN XIA
is an economist at the
Deutsche Investitions- und
Entwicklungsgesellschaft
mbH (DEG).

tian.xia@deginvest.de

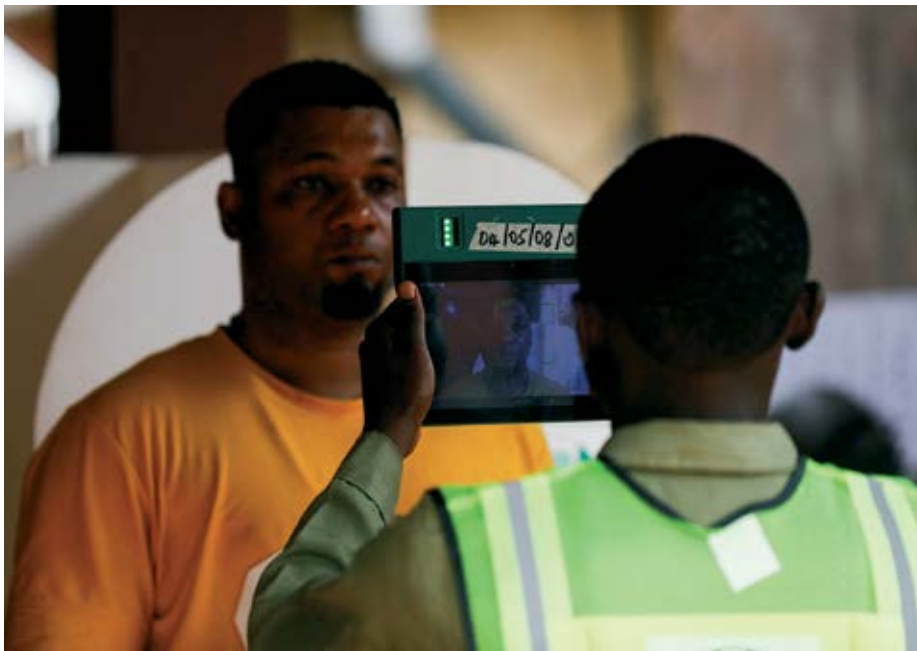
presse@deginvest.de



NATHALIE SPATH
is a policy advisor at the
Deutsche Investitions- und
Entwicklungsgesellschaft
mbH (DEG).

nathalie.spath@deginvest.de

presse@deginvest.de



Digitised voter accreditation in Anambra State on 25 February.

DEMOCRACY

Unfulfilled promise

High-tech approaches were supposed to make Nigeria's presidential elections in February transparent and safe. They did not do so.

By Adaze Okeaya-inneh

Electoral fraud and election violence have been haunting many African countries for a long time. Some countries, including Ghana, Rwanda and Kenya, have adopted modern technology to strengthen the electoral process and promote transparency. Nigeria did so too – but it did not work out well in the recent presidential elections. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is thus facing serious criticism.

Nigeria is the most populous nation in Africa with more than 210 million people. Past elections were often tainted by violence, malpractice and irregularities. The election cycle of 2023 was supposed to be different. Voters were expected to choose their next president and the members of the National Assembly in the first round of voting on 25 February and several state governors two weeks later.

It did not go as planned. While the National Assembly results were rather satisfying, the presidential election was a mess. Three days after the voting, INEC declared Bola Ahmed Tinubu to have won. That result remains controversial. Opposition leaders have declared they will challenge it in court (see Prince Thompson on page 15 of this Digital Monthly). Suspicions of manipulation and fraud abound – not least because the National Assembly results were not plagued by problems to the same extent.

The good news is that the opposition leaders have opted for an orderly process. The country's institutional order thus does not look threatened in spite of people's deep sense of frustration. In view of the procedural difficulties, the state elections were postponed to late March and were largely okay in technical terms.

Two high-tech approaches were expected to improve electoral transparency. The first is the BVAS, which stands for Bi-modal Voter Accreditation System. The second is the IREV, the abbreviation for INEC

Result Viewing portal. This year's elections were their first nationwide application.

The BVAS serves three functions:

- registering voters before elections,
- accrediting them before voting and
- uploading results on the IREV on election day.

The system relies on electronic devices that read voter cards and then confirm that the person concerned is eligible. The system uses face and fingerprint recognition. It requires 4G network coverage for regular software updates as well as for convenient downloads and uploads.

The BVAS was first tested in regional elections in Delta and Anambra States in 2021 and the Federal Capital Territory in 2022. There were complaints that the machines sometimes failed to recognise voters' faces and thumbs. The INEC, however, claimed that the hitches had been resolved and dismissed fears before the presidential elections. Nonetheless, the same kind of failure kept recurring.

IREV is the storage site where results are supposed to be uploaded on election day. It was first deployed for a by-election in Nasarawa State in 2020.

THEORY VERSUS PRACTICE

In theory, things are supposed to go like this at polling units: After voting ends, an INEC officer counts the ballot sheets. In the presence of representatives of the competing political parties, he or she then signs the result sheet. The officers use the BVAS to take a picture of the result sheet and upload it on the IREV.

This way, national results can be compiled fast and transparently. Of course, the election results are documented offline as well, so scrutiny of the results is always feasible at a later point.

What sounds good in theory, did not work out in practice, however. The presidential election was haunted by many problems:

- At many polling stations, INEC officials arrived late and so did sensitive voting materials. In some places, where insurgent militias are strong, INEC officials actually did not show up at all.
- The training some INEC officers and ad-hoc staff got was apparently inadequate. During the election, some officials claimed they could not remember the password to

the IREV portal. Perhaps well-trained persons were sabotaging the elections this way.

- Voters reported that the BVAS devices failed in some polling units, resulting in people being disenfranchised. In Rivers State, the BVAS initially failed to capture the Governor, Nyesom Wike. Identical twins in particular were often not validated as voters.
- Internet connectivity was not good enough. In particular remote locations do not have the needed 4G network.
- In spite of the high-tech tools, the national results of the presidential elections could only be compiled slowly and were only made public three days after the event.

The full truth is that Nigeria once again saw election violence and large-scale electoral fraud. A public outcry followed INEC's collation of results. Actual results and what had been uploaded to the IREV were too often inconsistent. Two opposition parties fast accused the INEC of complicity in rigging the election.

That the same problems did not mar the National Assembly elections to the same extent needs some explanation. One reason

may have been that the data from individual constituencies was uncontroversial, so the big picture that emerged from those local results was more convincing. It seems more likely, however, that the presidential elections were intentionally sabotaged. That is the most convincing way to explain why there were problems with compiling the presidential election at the national level, but not the legislative election.

It is obvious that BVAS and IREV were ineffective. The reason was either manipulation or, less likely, failure of INEC to test



their application adequately before deployment. Nigerians now have even less confidence in the election commission than they did before. Low voter trust results in low voter turn-out, which further dropped from 35% in the presidential elections of 2019 to about 29% this time.

The election commission had four years and ample funding to prepare for the election. Not many are comforted by Festus Okoye, the INEC commissioner, who says that the technical challenges have been rectified for future elections.

By all indications, technology will play a more critical role in politics and future elections in Africa. Even the best tech approaches, however, cannot make a difference if they are used incompetently or in intentionally obstructive ways. Nigerians deserve better.



ADAZE OKEAYA-INNEH
is a broadcast journalist and
screenwriter.

adazeirefunmi@gmail.com

SHARE YOUR VIEWS ON OUR PLATFORM!

If you have a thought you would like to share on our platform, please get in touch with the editorial office and send us a short proposal of 10 sentences or so in which you outline your main thesis and supporting arguments.

We believe that voices from **Africa, Asia and Latin America** must be heard in global debate. We would like to increase the number of contributions from **Africa and the Arab region**. Therefore, we encourage journalists, civil-society experts and academics in countries concerned to write for us. We are especially interested in **women's point of view**.

Nonetheless, this invitation applies to everyone, regardless of gender or nationality. We need correspondents everywhere, and are keen on closing some evident gaps. We pay a modest financial compensation for articles. If you would like to contribute, please send an e-mail to: euz.editor@dandc.eu.

Focus on people's needs

Done well, e-government can improve services for citizens while also making the jobs of public officials easier. Two countries that have set up useful web portals for dealing with government agencies are Kenya and Malaysia.

By Charles Martin-Shields

E-government, the shifting of government services previously done face-to-face onto internet platforms, has the potential to improve citizens' experience when interacting with government agencies. Making certain aspects of public administration possible

tion of time, which citizens spend less of when they deal with government agencies remotely? Or is it about cost savings in public administration? In a democracy, citizens' experience should obviously matter most.

Done well, e-government can improve services for citizens while also making the jobs of civil servants easier. The efficiencies are felt when citizens file taxes, apply for a driver's license or register children for school without having to go to office. For civil servants, the time freed up from doing routine tasks face-to-face can be invested in engaging with more complex requests that require a human touch.

sions. An e-government portal would be useful for managing comparatively simple tasks like visa extensions for foreign residents. Caseworkers would then have more time to focus on complex cases like asylum requests.

It is important to notice what is not happening in the example above. For two reasons, there is no mention of saving money:

- First, high-quality e-government platforms are not cheap to build and maintain. The complexity of public administration does not go away when it is digitised, and badly designed e-government platforms just create new layers of frustration. In countries with great resource constraints, malfunctioning e-government approaches may even increase stress among staff and distract from delivering citizen-facing services. That is especially likely at the municipal level.
- Second, e-government should not replace human workers, but supplement civil servants in ways that reduce their routine work and allow them to focus on more challenging tasks.

E-GOVERNMENT IN PRACTICE

To understand e-government better, it should be seen in practice. Here are some examples from Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Fairly straightforward national e-government portal systems are increasingly common in middle-income countries. Kenya's "eCitizen" portal includes standard services like requesting an ID card, marriage registration, land registration and tax issues, and drivers' license applications. Malaysia's "MyGOV" portal functions similarly, allowing citizens to register for school, marriage, file taxes and access health-care systems among other things. These are examples where standard citizen-government activities like individual citizen services and tools for businesses are centralised through a single web portal.

Togo, a least-developed country, introduced a basic minimum income during the Covid-19 pandemic. Applications and disbursements were made by mobile phone.

The Colombian project Kioscos Vive Digital is being implemented by the Ministry of Information and Communication Technologies and supported by UNESCO (UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organi-



As Russian attacks hit large-scale infrastructure in Ukraine, accessing government agencies via mobile phone serves practical needs.

via an app on a smartphone or through a web browser on a laptop also comes with gains in efficiency.

However, one needs to clarify what is meant by "efficiency" and who exactly is supposed to benefit. Is efficiency a func-

In Germany, for example, e-government could add value in the administration of the immigration services. In many localities, all services require an in-person appointment, including new residence permits, asylum applications and visa exten-

zation). It is a creative bottom-up approach of digital citizen engagement. It allowed people from many different communities to share online how they use the internet in general and in exchange with government agencies in particular. The idea was to understand different internet cultures across Colombia and to generate locally-specific insights regarding how to improve things.

E-government systems are also being implemented in extreme political circumstances. Ukraine's Diia is a mobile phone-based portal that citizens can use to access government ministry services. This is taking place in the backdrop of a war of aggression, with large-scale infrastructure being targeted by Russia. In this setting, a decentralised system based on mobile phones serves practical needs.

There are political implications too. Western governments are supporting Ukraine with funding and military equipment, and they insist on transparency and anti-corruption measures. E-government systems can address such concerns, if designed and implemented well.

This is one reason why bilateral and multilateral development agencies are interested in e-government. Indeed, USAID, the US administration's bilateral agency, is supporting Diia in Ukraine. Germany's GIZ is currently supporting a programme in Egypt to create comprehensive e-government with funding from Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Development and Cooperation (BMZ).

Both USAID and GIZ tend to focus on tools that meet citizens' needs, so programmes and systems are designed accordingly. The idea is to improve government capacities on that basis. There is a need to balance in-house capacities within public institutions and assigning software companies to adapt programmes or develop new ones.

An important component is the role of continuously evaluating political context that an e-government system will be deployed into. A government's respect for human rights, privacy and transparency all have a significant effect on whether e-government improves or impinges on citizens' quality of life. Where democratic rule is not in place or looks shaky, it may be difficult to determine what kind of e-government project to support. More generally speaking, e-government approaches will deliver

the best results where people trust government institutions. Where they fear repression, they will reduce contact to the bare minimum and be tempted to enter wrong information.

Multilateral agencies also play a supporting role in creating and deploying e-

centric. It is necessary to build fully inclusive systems. E-government investments must not come at the cost of maintaining in-person services for those who need a new paper document or who do not have internet access. On the other hand, e-government solutions look particularly promising



E-government makes life easier for rural Kenyans.

government strategies. The World Bank's Information Solutions Group oversees the e-government advisory practice and provides advice on integrating digitised solutions into government procedures and management of the economy. The model is built around consulting and knowledge sharing, helping partner countries to identify needs, organise financing and integrate new technologies into government procedures.

Along with advice, the UN provides a global monitoring service that tracks the state of e-government in member nations. The UN E-Government Development Index (EGDI) provides cross-national comparative data.

E-government can significantly improve the relationship between people and government agencies. What matters most is to make sure that the services are citizen-

in developing countries which do not have the legacy systems of public administration that mark countries in the global north. Where public services are poor, digital technology can improve matters fast.

In Kenya, for example, marriage registration is one of the top-line services one sees when opening the eCitizen website. Marriage may not be high on donor governments' agenda. It matters very much for a Kenyan couple in a rural area, since a viable e-government solution means it must not make an inconvenient trip to the nearest town.



CHARLES MARTIN-SHIELDS is a senior researcher at the German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS) in Bonn.

charles.martin-shields@idos-research.de



Cash distribution via LMMS during a drought in Ethiopia.

HUMANITARIAN AID

Digital platform makes emergency assistance easier

In disasters, World Vision, the international non-governmental organisation, uses the “Last Mile Mobile Solutions” system to register people in need and assist them. The approach leads to new challenges, for instance regarding data privacy.

By Melanie Assauer, Eric Kiruhura and Chris Jansen

In order to provide assistance quickly and efficiently during disasters, humanitarian actors need reliable information. We work for the Christian aid organisation World Vision, which has numerous offices in countries around the globe, including in Germany. In emergencies, we have to know: Who is affected, and how? Who can be helped, and how? What is most urgently needed?

In case of a flood disaster, for example, we send a team to the affected area within 72 hours. Its job is to provide emergency

relief and to conduct what we call “rapid needs assessment”. Next, we do our best to find out what help is most urgently needed. For instance, water lines are often damaged and markets may no longer work because of disrupted supply chains. Such information helps to determine to what extent we need to organise water trucks or distribute food.

If markets are still functioning, we often give out cash or vouchers. The people affected will then decide for themselves what they need most. This approach is more dignified and, moreover, often more effective.

In cooperation with local authorities, we determine who needs attention most and find the people most affected. It could be single parents, households with more than three children, people with disabilities or the aged. World Vision registers them as beneficiaries based on pertinent criteria. Thus we ensure that the support reaches the target groups precisely.

They countersign once they have received assistance. Their confirmation is important in terms of guaranteeing the scope and quality of our measures. It also facilitates proper oversight of how we use private donations and government funds. We must give account to those who support us financially and ensure that their money serves the intended beneficiaries. Under the direction of governments and UN organisations, we also work to avoid duplications in the distribution of goods, cash or vouchers.

A DIGITAL SOLUTION

In the past, we carried out most of these tasks with paper and pen, consolidating all information manually. Transcribing the information took time, however, and was error-prone. We accumulated masses of paper folders, which were then tediously scanned. Storing all documents safely was a serious challenge.

World Vision was one of the first humanitarian organisations that developed digital tools for registration, distribution and reporting. We use it for humanitarian aid in general and in disasters in particular. Our platform, “Last Mile Mobile Solutions” (LMMS), facilitates digital and non-physical registration offline. The system is fast and precise. Since 2008, LMMS has registered

over 10 million beneficiaries and managed over \$100 million of cash distributions. It is used by 20 different organisations in over 30 countries around the world (see Box).

We only collect the most essential data and only pass them on if necessary to identify beneficiaries in distribution efforts and to verify that measures reach them as planned. These data include a photo, their name, the number of family members or, if available, an identification number.

After being registered on the LMMS platform, beneficiaries receive an ID card. They can use it to collect the aid they are entitled to (both goods or cash) at World Vision's distribution sites. Where the situation permits, the ID card can also be used to open a bank account, allowing people to decide on their own how much cash to withdraw and when. Digital money transfers are particularly helpful when a disaster forces people to flee and they are on the move. In cooperation with state institutions, we sometimes contribute money to existing pension systems so beneficiaries will receive assistance that way. These approaches obviously depend on fully operational financial service providers and social security systems.

LMMS is very helpful when it comes to supporting people in areas that are difficult to access. Thanks to its offline capabilities and low connectivity requirements, we do not depend on broadband or Wi-Fi coverage. We can manage transactions where the people are, covering the "last mile". In remote areas, we often use a hotspot to save data sets on a data storage device. Once we have

internet access again, the data is automatically uploaded to our central system.

DATA SOVEREIGNTY IS IMPORTANT

As important as technological advances are for our work, it is equally important that people are neither reduced to data nor rendered "transparent", which would make them even more vulnerable than they already are. Their dignity must be respected, and their individual needs should be considered. They should share their data voluntarily, so disclosure must not be a precondition for receiving desperately needed support. Beneficiaries must be protected from data abuse, particularly in places where marginalised and needy people are discriminated against or even persecuted by their own government.

World Vision and other agencies are therefore boosting training in digital literacy. We teach our teams as well as beneficiaries. Topics include

- why we collect data,
- what we will do with the information,
- when it will be deleted and
- what rights people have in regard to their own data.

We explain UN rules on human rights as well as national laws.

Moreover, beneficiaries should be able to decide what personal information is shared with whom and when. For that purpose, we use an app which can be installed on smartphones and, like LMMS, can be used in many languages.

Currently, World Vision is launching a project to promote decentralised data use between international organisations. It aims at developing international standards for the ethical, efficient and systematic exchange of data in the distribution of cash or vouchers. We are doing this as part of the Collaborative Cash Delivery Network, a platform of 14 civil society organisations seeking to improve their cash programmes. The project gets funding from the European Commission. A test run is planned in South Sudan this year as a component of an emergency aid project.

LINK

<https://www.collaborativecash.org/>



MELANIE ASSAUER
is Senior Coordinator for Disaster Management at the German section of World Vision.

melanie.assauer@wveu.org



ERIC KIRUHURA
is Digital Humanitarian Systems Advisor at World Vision International.

eric_kiruhura@wvi.org



CHRIS JANSEN
is Senior Director of Disaster Management, Advocacy and Grants at World Vision International.

chris_jansen@wvi.org

Digital support for Ukraine

Since the beginning of the Ukraine war in February 2022, World Vision has been using its digital platform "Last Mile Mobile Solutions" (LMMS) in the country (see main text). LMMS has helped this international non-governmental organisation to provide urgently needed money to more than 20,000 internally displaced persons and refugees in Ukraine and

Romania as well as members of host communities. In cooperation with local and faith based charity organisations, World Vision is supporting internally displaced people and hosts in western Ukraine and in the capital Kyiv, as well as refugees along the borders and in the Romanian capital Bucharest. A special focus is on eastern Ukraine where the war has

made some areas completely inaccessible.

LMMS makes it possible to deliver humanitarian aid faster. Moreover, it helps World Vision to be accountable for the



funds that have been entrusted to it. At the same time, the personal data of beneficiaries is secure and protected.

At this point, LMMS is being used in several World Vision projects in Ukraine, Romania, Moldova and Georgia. Apart from disbursing cash, the projects focus on distributing food, supplying refugee shelters or providing immediate funding for special needs such as transporting children to therapists in order to process war traumas. MA, EK, CJ

WORLD WIDE WEB

How to counter potential authoritarian overhaul

Internet freedom has declined for the 12th year in a row according to Freedom House, the Washington-based human-rights organisation. It documented the sharpest downgrade in Russia.

By Roli Mahajan

The agency's Freedom on the Net 2022 report reveals that more governments than ever before are restricting liberties online. Their actions include shutting down the internet, censoring online content, harassing citizens for expressing themselves and surveilling them online. Freedom House beams the trend of governments hoarding data and centralising infrastructure. The report also notes that private-sector companies have amassed substantial power online and calls for more transparency accordingly.

The report is part of an annual series. The current issue was released in the last quarter of 2022 and surveys 70 countries which account for 89% of the world's internet users. In 28 countries, things deteriorated in last year's research period. According to the data, more than two-thirds of internet users now live in places where free expression is restricted online. In at least 53 countries, "users faced legal repercussions for expressing themselves".

Some governments are trying to fracture the global internet along national borders. The authorities of 47 countries cut residents off from foreign-source content. Indeed, access to international information was limited in two thirds of the surveyed countries.

More than 20 governments have recently proposed or passed laws that make state surveillance more likely. Rwanda's 2021 Data Protection Law, for example, forces companies to store user data locally rather than abroad, while India has pushed VPN providers out. VPN systems allow persons to use the world wide web without revealing their identity.

Freedom House states that worsening digital restraints often mirror broader crackdowns on human rights. They coincide with the repression of domestic independent media and the restriction of civil-society space, with state-endorsed narratives crowding out dissent.

Internet freedom in Russia is said to have fallen to an all-time low after the in-



The report's assessments result from a survey of 70 countries with 89 % of internet users.

vasion of Ukraine. China, however, had the world's most repressive online environment for the eighth consecutive year. According to Freedom House, censorship intensified during the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics. Moreover, new rules requiring platforms to use their algorithms in support of the regime's ideology keep the country's booming technology sector in check.

Freedom House points out that Chinese and Russian diplomats want to transform international institutions like the International Telecommunication Union

(ITU) into a global internet regulator in ways that would advance authoritarian interests. They are said to have made some inroads in UN contexts.

On the other hand, a cohort of democracies are pushing back. The USA, according to Freedom House, has recently shown promising signs of reengaging in cyber democracy. The EU has made progress regarding regulations to protect internet users' privacy and reduce potential harm linked to online activities.

While internet freedom has been declining overall, a record 26 countries have seen improvements. Two noteworthy examples were Gambia and Zimbabwe. While the USA improved its ranking for the first time in six years due to the Biden administration's pro-active international stance, Freedom House sees shortcomings at the domestic level. In particular, the USA lacks a comprehensive legislation on online human rights.

According to Freedom House, civil society, the courts and democratic-minded policymakers would do well to join forces in regard to protecting internet freedom. The authors also state that the private sector has a role to play. For example, content moderation on social-media platforms is said to be very important as the freedom of speech can become destructive if and when public discourse loses credibility. Democracy and human rights are at risk when disinformation abounds – and it is abounding on the internet.

Freedom House insists that democracies must not only promote internet freedom in multilateral contexts, but also significantly improve respect for online rights at home. Flawed domestic policies, including insufficient regulation of corporations, after all, undermine the values they seek to defend internationally.

LINK

Freedom House: Freedom on the Net 2022 – Countering an authoritarian overhaul of the internet.

<https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/FOTN2022Digital.pdf>



ROLI MAHAJAN

is a freelance journalist based in Lucknow, India.

roli.mahajan@gmail.com



Human drivers process complex information: downtown traffic in Berlin.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Chatbots cannot “think outside the box”

Innovative AI systems are able to write astonishingly good manuscripts. Some chatbots are accessible online. This technology will have far-reaching impacts – and they will make formal education more, not less important. Chatbots, moreover, will probably reinforce conventional narratives.

By Hans Dembowski

Artificial intelligence (AI) has been a hot topic for quite some time. So far, I have nonetheless found it unimpressive. AI programmes are generally based on huge datasets and use algorithms that detect how most human users respond to specific signals in specific situations. They mimic the human mind by replicating the average results humans deliver in those settings.

For many purposes, this is perfectly fine. We actually want a self-driving car to perform like the average driver because the average driver normally does not cause accidents. Drunk and sleepy drivers do, and

reckless speeders who disregard traffic rules are dangerous too.

The big challenge of making self-driving cars is to collect and process all the information a human driver’s senses provide. Humans depend on eyesight, hearing and other senses (including smelling, to detect a gas leak, for example). They must monitor various tools and survey a complex road environment. Installing enough cameras and sensors to collect all information is difficult. On that basis, however, it makes sense to use average human behaviour as the guideline.

CHATBOTS

In the past four months, a new kind of AI programme has been making headlines around the world. Chatbots are AI systems that generate language. It is possible to correspond with them and ask them to perform some tasks. The most prominent one is probably ChatGPT. It was created by Open AI, a not-for-profit company with a for-prof-

it subsidiary based in the USA. The most prominent investor is Microsoft.

ChatGPT was launched late last year. Its user numbers soon exceeded 100 million and are still growing fast online. Anyone who registers on the website can ask the chatbot questions and will get answers. You can tell the programme to write a letter, an essay or even a poem. The results are surprisingly good. People who want to register may have to wait before they get access because of huge and fast growing demand.

However, ChatGPT is still stuck in the conventional AI mould. The programme does not do any kind of creative thinking. It basically rows word behind word according to a statistical evaluation of its huge database. If you don’t trust me, check out what the prominent linguist Noam Chomsky wrote with two co-authors in the New York Times. The headline was: “The false promise of ChatGPT”.

At this stage, it is reasonable to say that chatbots write the kind of manuscript an informed average internet user would write when weighing in on a given subject. ChatGPT has passed some high school exams in Germany, but the results were mediocre, not excellent. That should not come as a surprise. After all, the programme is designed to opt for the most typical solution human beings would come up with. It is neither designed to deliver the most relevant nor the most intelligent solution.

For most practical purposes, average results are probably good enough. Quite likely, many internet users will stop using search engines like Google, because it is more comfortable to interact with a chatbot. You ask for information, and you get answers without having to choose from a long list of potentially interesting websites.

Microsoft has integrated a chatbot into Bing, its search engine. The combination results in an interesting tool, not least because the answers include the sources they were derived from. Moreover, you can ask Bing to stray beyond conventional thinking by requiring “unusual” or “non-conformist” results. Making sense of the results, however, is obviously more challenging than simply accepting average ones. We should thus expect chatbot researches to largely confirm mainstream thinking – most likely with a Californian bias.

On the other hand, fact checking will become even more important. Chatbots do

not have an understanding of truth or reality. They are driven by probability garnered from existing databases. If there is a lot of false information and fake news out there (and there is), that will leave a mark on chatbot responses.

The impacts will be huge. In secondary and tertiary education, students will use chatbots, and their supervisors will have to figure out whether they fulfilled the task they were given or whether an AI programme did all the work. Moreover, sensible curricula will have to include how to use AI.

In journalism, we will face challenges too. Some smart contributors will use AI to get their work done faster, letting the chatbot provide the first draft and then editing it. Less competent persons, however, will let a chatbot do the entire job, and it will be the editorial team's job to detect what factual errors may have crept in.

STAYING STUCK IN OUR SILOS

What worries me most, however, is that journalism generally reproduces conventional narratives. I suspect AI generated journalism will further compound this problem. After all, AI programmes are not designed to "think outside the box". They are actually not designed to think at all. They merely process data.

In recent years, however, the demands to think outside the box have been increasing. The reason is that our species is facing huge and interrelated challenges, so we need innovative approaches. The sad truth, of course, is that human thinking tends to

be stuck in silos no matter how often we say that we want to transcend them. We long for cross-cutting solutions, but tend to stick to the patterns of thought that we are used to. Common narratives reinforce those patterns.

They often are not helpful. Consider the standard explanation for why right-wing populism has been gaining strength around the world. It is that left-behind working class people are rebelling against global elites. Why then is Fox News – based in New York and owned by a multinational corporation dominated by Rupert Murdoch, an Australian-born billionaire – the main proponent of right-wing populism in the USA? His News Corporation also runs British media outlets that supported Brexit. Moreover, other newspapers that supported Brexit similarly belong to plutocrats, some of whom, like Murdoch, do not live in Britain.

The common narratives regarding right-wing populism do not tell us why oligarchs with international lifestyles promote narrow-minded nationalism.

Super-rich persons do so because they see that global cooperation leads to international regulation that can put a check on their power. Examples include environmental protection and the enforcement of tax laws. Accordingly, they support nationalism and attack "globalists". I think the term "plutocrat populism" fits their attitude, but it has not gained much traction.

The more AI programmes figure in public life, the more discerning we will have to become. Knowledge-related work will increasingly be about asking interest-

ing questions. It takes a good education to do that. Specialist knowledge will often matter too.

AI will certainly have far-reaching impacts. Sooner or later, bureaucracies will use it to handle standard processes. Most of the time, the AI system will take the proper decision, though there will be snags too. We know, for example, that face-recognition systems, whether produced in California or China, tend to do a poor job of telling black people from one another. The main reason is that there are too few black faces in the datasets the programmes are based on. That may change over time, but some mistakes are baked into the technology. Average decision-making is, by definition, mediocre, and sometimes wrong.

We can expect chatbots to become better fast as the databases they rely on are growing. They will soon include information gathered in interaction with masses of internet users. To some extent, that will make chatbots look more like experts. After all, experts are the people who generate most content related to the areas they specialise in, so deriving answers from those entries should more or less result in average expert opinions, excluding lay persons' views. That may explain why the latest ChatGPT version seems to pass exams with better results than previous ones.

At the same time, chatbots can make it easier to produce fake news, building on disinformation and propaganda. I fear that many people will not notice that they are being misled while others happily use AI to mislead them.

Only when used by well-informed people, AI will deliver above-average. In general, it will reinforce long-established patterns of thought and prejudices. To rise to the sustainability challenge, humankind must use the new technology wisely. Simply trusting it is the wrong approach.

LINK

Chomsky, N., Roberts, I. and Watumull, J., 2023: The false promise of ChatGPT.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/08/opinion/noam-chomsky-chatgpt-ai.html>



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

euz.editor@dandc.eu



Protesting against plutocratic populism in New York: chatbots make it easier to produce manuscripts, including those with misleading propaganda.

We have redesigned our website
and optimised it for mobile use.
www.dandc.eu

