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ELECTION I
What challenges the new Congolese president faces

ELECTION II
Upcoming elections in Malawi will hardly strengthen democracy

ANTIBIOTICS
Dangerous resistances world-wide on the rise

The refugee challenge

In German in E+Z
Entwicklung und Zusammenarbeit.
Both language versions
at www.DandC.eu

Monitor

Debate

Tribune

Focus: The refugee challenge

Title: More than one million Sudanese refugees live in Lira in Uganda.
Photo: Ton Koene/Lineair

FOCUS

The refugee challenge

Asian discomfort

Refugees do not get appropriate support in many Asian countries. Host societies tend to be overburdened. Sussi Prapakranant of the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network assessed matters in an interview, elaborating what needs to happen. Ridwanul Hoque and Ashraful Azad, two legal scholars, describe how Bangladesh is coping with the mass influx of Rohingya from Myanmar. PAGES 19, 21

Focus on Afghanistan

For four decades, violence and political crises have rocked Afghanistan. The US administration is now negotiating with the Islamist Taliban. Nawid Paigham considers its approach dangerous. Bernd Leidner of the Afghan Credit Guarantee Foundation is in favour of promoting small and mid-sized enterprises in order to foster economic development. Mahwish Gul, a student of Ruhr University Bochum, gives an overview of how Afghan refugees fare in Pakistan. PAGES 23–25

Regional challenges

More than 1 million Syrians and Palestinians live in Lebanon. The country with 6.2 million citizens is therefore facing huge challenges, reports journalist Mona Naggar from Beirut. Uganda is another country that has taken in more than 1 million refugees, most of whom are from South Sudan. Most of them feel well accepted, says Ochan Hannington, a South Sudanese journalist who lives in Uganda. Agadez in Niger has become an important transit city in Africa. Ibrahim Manzo Diallo, a journalist, elaborated in an interview what impact EU policies have on the city. PAGES 26–30

Why people leave

There is a wide range of reasons that drive people to move to distant places. Walter Kälin of the intergovernmental Platform on Disaster Displacement discussed in an interview how climate change and migration are linked. As human-rights defender Dennis Muñoz and social anthropologist Rita Trautmann write, people leave Honduras to escape poverty, crime and dysfunctional governance. PAGES 31, 33

Setting the wrong example

We are witnessing a global drama of forced migration. Millions of people have left their homes because armed gangs and natural disasters forced them to do so. Last summer, 68.8 million people around the world were refugees, internally displaced persons or seeking asylum, according to the UN refugee agency UNHCR. One of 110 persons worldwide was affected. Almost 60 % of them did not cross the border but stayed in the country they are from. Filippo Grandi, the UN high commissioner for refugees, considers it unacceptable that 50 % of the refugees worldwide are not even 18 years old.

On the run, most people lose everything. They may have been prosperous and well-respected at home, but now they are paupers who depend on charity and are considered burdens.

The EU and the USA are building virtual and real walls to keep away people who are seeking protection. Australia even detains asylum-seekers on remote islands indefinitely. It is a scandal that high-income nations are disregarding Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Its first sentence states: "Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution."

Governments have closed borders in response to xenophobic sentiments among citizens who do not make a distinction between refugees and migrants in search of better paying work. The deep irony is that high-income countries actually need immigrants in view of their demographic trends. Their policies tend to be incoherent.

The human right to asylum is neglected in other places as well. Many Asian countries do not have specific laws on how to deal with refugees. Therefore, refugees' legal situation is often precarious. Nine of 10 people who flee violence or disaster end up in developing countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan and Lebanon. Uganda is a major host country too: 1.4 million people have fled there, mostly from South Sudan, a state that has collapsed into civil war.

All too often, the reasons of flight are not considered. It is essential, however, to understand who bears what responsibility. Political violence and natural disasters are the main reasons that drive people from their homes, and these phenomena do not tend to respect national borders, because relevant issues interact in complex ways. It is often neglected, for example, that environmental problems exacerbate violent strife. At the same time, natural disasters are particularly devastating in crisis regions.

We are dealing with global problems. They require collective action by the international community. On this agenda, taking care of refugees is an important item.

For several reasons, high-income countries must rise to their responsibility in particular. They have the most money, the best infrastructure and the strongest capacities. They have made the greatest contributions to causing climate change. That so many countries lack truly democratic governance is linked to the established powers' geostrategic considerations, their resource needs and weapons exports. The long-term impacts of colonial rule matter as well. The governments of rich nations tend to lecture others on what needs to happen. But they are not leading by example.

You'll find all contributions of our focus section plus related ones on our website – they'll be compiled in next month's briefing section.

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Photos: Sengupta/Lineair, picture alliance/Xinhua

Debate

Get a grip on superbugs

According to the World Health Organization, antibiotic-resistant disease strains are among the 10 greatest health risks. Treating patients is becoming ever more difficult. Developing countries are hit hardest, writes Mirza Alas who specialises in related issues at the South Centre, the Geneva-based think tank that belongs to developing countries. **PAGE 10**

Tribune

Malawi votes

On 21 May, Malawi will hold elections. What looks like a healthy democratic exercise at first glance, turns out to be less convincing at closer inspection, warns Rolf Drescher who works in Malawi for an aid agency. **PAGE 13**

Historic, but not perfect

At the end of 2018, the Democratic Republic of the Congo finally held the presidential elections that had been postponed several times. For the first time ever, the country saw a peaceful transition of power. Now the new president, Félix Tshisekedi, must rise to huge challenges, states Jonathan Bashi, a law professor and development consultant based in Kinshasa. **PAGE 16**

ORGANIC FARMING

Feeding 10 billion people

Experts disagree on whether organic farming can ensure food security for the world population or whether high-input agriculture is needed. The proponents of environment-friendly approaches raise important points that the advocates of conventional farming cannot entirely escape.

By Sabine Balk

Important reasons for promoting organic farming include the damage done to climate, soil and water resources. Conventional agriculture is a huge part of the problem, according to data published recently by the UN International Resource Panel. The statistics show that agriculture accounts for about 60 % of biodiversity loss and 24 % greenhouse gas emissions internationally. In Germany, conventional farming has caused about 75 % of the dwindling of insect populations in the past 30 years, according to NABU, an environmentalist lobby group.

At the III. World Organic Forum, which was held in Kirchberg an der Jagst in March, Hartwig de Haen, emeritus professor of agricultural economics at the university of Göttingen and former officer of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), pointed out these trends. He added that about one third of the world's farmland is degraded, and almost two thirds of fish stocks have been exhausted.

The proponents of organic farming are convinced that their approach is the only response to these depressing trends, but de Haen is not convinced. In his eyes, organic farming is a niche business. Its advocates, he says, have yet to prove that organic farmers can indeed produce the food amounts humanity needs. Given that there still is a huge and untapped potential in developing countries, he does not consider it completely impossible. After all, many smallholder farmers cannot afford chemical inputs and machinery, so they are actually running organic operations, which are not certified as such and therefore do not show up in addition statistics.

On the other hand, de Haen warns that organic farming requires more land to grow the same amount of food as conventional farming does. Today, certified organic farms only account for about one percent of the world's fields. According to de Haen, it should be possible to increase this share to 20 % without needing more land.

He considers two things indispensable in this context:

- Food waste and harvest losses should be reduced by 25 %.
- The space used for producing animal feed should be reduced. Currently about one third of the world's fields serve that purpose. One implication would be that western lifestyles with meat-intensive diets would have to give way to more vegetarian food.

Experts expect the world population to grow to 10 billion people by 2050. De Haen doubts that organic farming will expand in a way to feed all of them, though he does not say it is impossible. He thinks humanity needs "an intelligent mix of improved conventional and organic approaches".

Hartmut Vogtmann disagrees. He is a full professor of ecological farming at Kassel University. An academic pioneer in this field, he says that such a compromise cannot work. He speaks of "system failure" and insists that economic growth cannot and does not follow a linear path. The current agricultural paradigm puts farmers evermore at disadvantage, making them depend increasingly on the fertilisers and pesticides the chemical industry produces,

Photo: sb

Rakash Chinappa (in front) is one of several 100,000 organic farmers in the Indian state of Karnataka.

the scholar argues. Given that research is mostly funded by multinational corporations like Bayer, which recently bought its US-based competitor Monsanto, alternative approaches are largely neglected.

In view of corporate managers' focus on chemical inputs and hybrid seeds, Vogtmann calls for a U-turn. The focus should be on health, not profits. He considers conventional food to be too cheap because the costs of the production-related environmental damages are not included in retail prices. The damages do not only include environmental degradation like the loss of biodiversity, but also low farm revenues. In Vogtmann's eyes, policymakers and business leaders must rise to their responsibilities – and so must consumers. He says that everyone has a role to play in ensuring the transition to sustainable lifestyles around the world.

Eco-friendly products are being hyped in Western countries, but their share in supermarket sales is still quite small. In developing countries, there generally is no market for such products, though there are some exceptions (see box below).

Swiss researchers have compiled statistics on the matter. They work for the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL), an independent, international, nonprofit institute that advances cutting-edge science in the field of organic agriculture. In cooperation with the International Federation of Organic Argriculture Movements (IFOAM), the FiBL publishes the annual Report on the State of Organic Agriculture. According to its data, Australia is the world leader with 58.8 million hectares used for organic farming. Argentina (3 million ha) and China (2.3 million) are in the 2nd and 3rd place respectively. While the share of organic farming is very small the USA, this country has the biggest retail market for organic products. In 2016, people there spent the equivalent of about €40 billion on such goods. That was about half of the global expenditure. Germany (€9.5 billion) and France (€6,7 billion) followed suit. In terms of per-head spending, Swiss consumers are the most committed to organic food. According to FiBL scholar Helga Willer, they buy organic food worth an annual average of €274. The next in line are the Danes (€227) and the Swedes (€197).

Willer says that 30% of the eggs sold in Denmark are organic, so "you cannot call this a niche anymore". In absolute numbers, however, she still considers organic farming a niche industry. In Europe, organic food only accounts for 7.7% of sales. Internationally, the figure is a mere 1.5%, and it drops to only 0.5% in developing countries. Among developing countries, Argentina has the most advanced market for organic goods, followed by China, Uruguay and India. As Willer emphasises, organic farming "has been expanding fast in recent years – and it keeps expanding further".

LINK

FiBL and IFOAM, 2018: State of Organic Agriculture in the world.
https://shop.fibl.org/CHde/mwdownloads/download/link/id/1093/?ref=1

Cheap, modern and eco-friendly

So far, there is not much organic farming in developing countries and emerging markets (see main story). Many smallholder farmers cannot afford high-tech inputs, but they are not systematically applying the methods of organic farming either. Only very few run certified operations. Typically, smallholders lack up-to-date information on crop rotation, multi-cropping and soil conservation. Such knowledge would boost harvests, reduce losses and protect soils. It is therefore important to adopt the evidence-based methods of organic farming.

In the developing world, India is a pioneer. There are many organic-farm initiatives in the country's different regions (see interview with Anitha Reddy in focus section of D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2019/02). Helga Willer of FiBL, an international research institute, reckons there are more than 1 million organic farmers in India, more than in any other country. Most of them, however, are subsistence farmers who do not have access to commercial marketing systems, she says.

According to T. Vijay Kumar of the non-profit organisation Rythu Sadhikara Samstha (RySS), this is a huge obstacle. RySS is based in Andhra Pradesh, one of India's southern states, and Kumar gives advice to its government, which aspires to making the state's agriculture organic by 2026. The method RySS has developed is called "zero-budget natural farming" (ZBNF). It is based on cutting-edge research, Kumar says, but also takes into account regional traditions. ZBNF is an affordable and holistic alternative to conventional farming, which relies on expensive chemical inputs. By contrast, ZBNF uses cattle urin for the microbiological treatment of seeds and cow dung for fertilising field. Moreover, farm land is mulched with crops and crop waste.

According to Kumar, the empowerment of village women is an important dimension of ZBNF. Women's knowledge matters.

Kumar says that some 750,000 farmers are taking part in the RySS programme so far, and the number is set to rise. The state government of Andhra Pradesh wants to involve 6 million farmers by 2026 and hopes that all fields in the state will be used according to organic methods two years later.

African policymakers so far do not spell out such ambitions. However, a small organic movement has emerged on Zanzibar, where German farmers asked local colleagues to start the organic cultivation of spices. Other local farmers find their example inspiring, says Juma Ali Juma, who serves as minister of agriculture in the island's sub-national government. In March, he told the III. World Organic Forum in Kirchberg that he considers organic farming most promising not only for Tanzania, the nation Zanzibar belongs to, but for Africa in general. (sb)

BIODIVERSITY

Agriculture at risk

Food security is at risk because humans are reducing biodiversity, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization. It calls for coordinated international action in a recently published report.

By Cema Tork

The FAO's first report on the State of the World's Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture explains why biodiversity is essential to food and agriculture. It also spells out what needs to be done to protect it.

Wildlife plays a part in food production, the FAO points out. That is the case, for example, when birds feed on pests. Moreover, three-quarters of crops depend on pollinators. The FAO warns that bees are becoming rare and that other insect populations are dwindling too. Moreover, some species of bats and birds also serve as pollinators, but are at risk of extinction.

Scientists know that, as a general principle, biodiversity makes food systems resilient to shocks. Biodiversity is not only threatened by climate change. Invasive species, urbanisation, pollution, resource depletion, destructive consumption habits and unsustainable agriculture practices matter too. These include overharvesting, soil degradation and intensive farming in general. Farms rely on ever fewer species of plants and animals. Industrial scale breeding, moreover, means that the genetic base of varieties concerned is small and keeps shrinking.

Government policies often either harm or ignore biodiversity. For instance, infrastructure development may be destructive – such as, when new roads, dams or mines destroy wildlife habitats. Such projects have "caused the degradation and fragmentation of ecosystems, destroying habitats and creating barriers to species' migrations". According to the authors, even development considered "low impact" and "environmentally friendly" often threatens ecosystems with high levels of biodiversity.

Scientists still do not fully understand many important issues. More research is needed, for instance concerning pollinators, wild foods and invertebrates. The FAO warns that it is difficult to tell exactly what an ecosystem is worth. The value should be considered, but is mostly not taken into account. The authors suggest that a standard method for measuring what an ecosystem contributes to the economy – for instance in terms of productivity – would be useful. Such a method would help to convince policymakers, for example, and educate the public. The FAO calls for more research on the matter.

In political debate, agriculture and nature conservation are often considered to be opposites. The FAO warns that this assumption is wrong. It calls for more and closer collaboration amongst producers, consumers, marketers, policymakers, state agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Such cooperation, moreover, is needed internationally. The authors call for effective policies and stringent implementation, which depends on financial, technical and human resources. In their view, policies and implementation so far have proved too weak.

The report praises the Mexican approach to international and interdisciplinary cooperation. The Mexican biodiversity commission CONABIO (Comisión Nacional para el Conocimiento y Uso de la Biodiversidad) coordinates action to preserve traditional farming methods in cooperation with partners in other Central American countries. CONABIO organises funding from the public and private sector and provides money and seedlings to farmers, encouraging them to rehabilitate their land, prevent harmful slash-and-burn practice and comply with sustainable practices.

Mexicans can access CONABIO information on food security, conservation and soil and water use. Additionally, CONABIO promotes certification for sustainable coffee production which increases incentives for farmers as market value increases. This could be a model for other countries in regard to other products, the FAO report suggests.

Ninety-one countries submitted country reports to the FAO for the biodiversity study. The bad news is that biodiversity is in decline and the levels of protection are not yet sufficient. The good news is that biodiversity-friendly efforts are increasing. Ever more actors are realising that biodiversity really does matter.

Pollinators can no longer be taken for granted: bee in an apple blossom.

Photo: Eric Tourneret/Biosphoto/Lineair

LINK

FAO 2019: The State of the World's Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture.
http://www.fao.org/3/CA3129EN/CA3129EN.pdf

HUMANITARIAN CRISES

What the global public is missing

In a recently published report, Care International outlines ten humanitarian crises missed by the international media in 2018. While the world focused on Venezuela, North Korea and the Middle East, nine other countries went unnoticed. Journalists ignored ongoing troubles in Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Sudan, for example. The report confirms trends reported by Germanwatch in the Global Climate Risk Index.

By Cema Tork

All but two of the crises listed by Care, the international humanitarian agency, are African. The report is based on an evaluation of 1.1 million online articles. The list includes the DRC, the Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Sudan, Philippines, Haiti, Chad, Niger, Madagascar. The crises do not necessarily affect the entire country. Ethiopia is listed twice, for displacement and hunger. Common themes in every country named are poverty, starvation and displacement. These hardships are often intertwined. Nearly every country listed has experienced natural disasters, drought and a decline in agricultural output.

In Haiti, the situation is worst. Ranked number one, Haiti is said to be "on the edge of survival". Its food crisis, however, has received little international coverage. Half of the people live on less than the purchasing of one dollar per day, and 22% of children in Haiti are chronically malnourished. Core challenges are extreme poverty and a lack of basic infrastructure, with frequent natural disasters threatening any progress made.

In many cases, climate change is part of the problem. Indeed, three of the nine countries have been named in the top ten of the Global Climate Risk Index (GCRI) between 1998 and 2017. It is compiled by Germanwatch, a Bonn-based civil-society organisation. Haiti is number four in the 2019 GCRI.

In the case of Madagascar in 2018, climate change contributed to severe crop damages. According to Care, it caused tensions within families and compounded problems like child marriage and domestic violence. Fewer children attend schools, moreover, as Madagascans struggle to feed them.

This is happening in other crisis countries too. They are suffering the impacts of climate change, which they, unlike prosperous nations, have done little to cause. Apart from supplying aid, Care considers it essential to raise awareness for these issues. The report lays out sensible steps for policymakers, aid agencies, journalists and consumers.

LINKS

Suffering in Silence: The 10 most under-reported humanitarian crises of 2018.
https://www.care-international.org/files/files/Report_Suffering_In_Silence_2018.pdf
Global Climate Risk Index 2019:
https://germanwatch.org/sites/germanwatch.org/files/Global%20Climate%20Risk%20Index%202019_2.pdf

Women and children wait for water in Ethiopia during drought.

Photo: Mulugeta Ayene/picture-alliance/AP Photo

Contraceptives for minors

Zambians debate whether or not contraceptives should be handed out to young girls – including minors – as a way of preventing unplanned pregnancies. Some civil-society groups are in favour of this approach. They point out that it could contribute to reducing the prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases too.

Zambia registers about 16,000 cases of unplanned pregnancies per year among schoolgirls. The number is even higher if teenagers who do not go to school are counted as well. Pregnant schoolgirls usually stop going to school, and many do not return to complete their education after giving birth. The intellectual potential of these girls goes to waste.

Marie Stopes Zambia is the national branch of the international non-governmental organisation that promotes the distribution of contraceptives to teenage girls. Marie Stopes International provides personalised contraception to women and girls in 37 countries. Where abortion is legal, moreover, it offers such medical services.

Marie Stopes Zambia insists that blocking teenagers' access to contraceptives and denying them comprehensive sex education "does not prevent them from having sex". The consequences are unwanted pregnancies. Childbirth complications occur frequently in this age group moreover.

According to Kwesi Formson, the director of Marie Stopes Zambia, complications from pregnancy are "the leading cause of death among young women aged 15 to 19".

When women and girls have access to contraception, their future becomes brighter, he argues: "Fewer girls drop out of school, fewer young women die giving birth, and more young women enter the workforce." Ultimately, the entire country benefits, Formson says.

Nonetheless, many Zambians are uncomfortable with NGOs giving teenagers access to contraceptives. The debate was stirred up by some local politicians. They claimed that organisations propped up by western countries were distributing condoms to school kids. The Centre for Reproductive Health, a local organisation, says this is not the case.

The Basic Education Teachers' Union of Zambia (BETUZ), a trade union, similarly opposes the distribution of condoms in schools. BETUZ officials say that "distributing condoms in schools will encourage sex at a tender age, which may distract pupils from their studies".

Edwin Mbale, a father of girls and resident of Ndola, says that international organisations must know that African culture does not encourage sex before marriage in any form. "As Zambians, we must teach our children to abstain from sex," Mbale says. "This is not just for preventing unplanned pregnancies, but also the spread of HIV/AIDS or any other sexually transmitted diseases." The irony of the matter is that condoms do not only prevent pregnancies, they also prevent HIV infections.

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HEALTH

How to contain superbugs

Ever more disease strains are becoming resistant to antibiotics. This global crisis requires a global response.

By Mirza Alas

The World Health Organization (WHO) has recently classified antimicrobial resistance as one of the 10 greatest threats to global health in 2019. There are indeed ever more reports of how antimicrobial resistance is making some infections almost impossible to treat. Developing countries are hit hardest.

Antimicrobial resistance is not restricted to one particular pathogen or disease. This fact makes it harder for policymakers and the general public to understand the urgency of the issue and act accordingly. Drug-resistant "superbugs" are therefore not high on the international agenda. Unfortunately, momentum was neither sustained in 2016, after the UN General Assembly passed a declaration on the matter, nor in 2015, after the World Health Assembly adopted a global action plan.

Antimicrobial resistance is a natural evolutionary process which makes a commonly used antibiotic ineffective. Bacteria mutate and become immune to agents that previously killed them. The overuse and misuse of antimicrobial substances in health care, animal husbandry and agriculture accelerates this natural trend.

Inadequate use of antibiotics is driven by many things, including over-aggressive marketing by pharma corporations and inappropriate prescription guidelines. In developing countries, antibiotics are all too often applied to handle the consequences of insufficient water and sanitation infrastructure. Heavy reliance on antimicrobial agents in agriculture compounds the problems. Even antibiotics that are important for human health or even last-resource medication are used on farms.

The international community needs joint action to stop such malpractice in health care and in agriculture. Special interests will try to defend their profits, but the top priority must certainly be the sustainability of health care. It is a global public good.

The depressing truth is that we are running out of treatment options for ever more strains of illnesses such as gonorrhea, malaria and tuberculosis. Measures to tackle the superbugs are complex and require multi-sectoral action. Developing countries cannot rise to the challenges on their own.

No doubt, developing countries must strengthen their health systems, ensure access to clean water and improve infrastructure as well as public services in general. These are development challenges they must rise to. More is needed, however, and essential pharmaceutical research and development (R&D) is extremely expensive. It is needed to:

- make new treatment options available,
- improve diagnostic and laboratory infrastructure and
- monitor the spread of superbugs.

R&D exceeds the funding capacities of developing countries. This is evident in the plain fact that superbug infections kill fewer patients in developing countries than the unavailability and unaffordability of standard antibiotics. Poverty actually is one of the factors that accelerate the spread of antimicrobial resistance. The reason is that cash-strapped patients often stop using antibiotics too early. Satisfied that the symptoms are gone, they stop spending money on the drug and visiting the doctor. What they do not know is that their infection has not yet been cured and the surviving bacteria are more likely to mutate into drug-resistant strains.

Tuberculosis is a case in point. It remains the number-one killer infection. Multidrug-resistant strains make it ever harder to treat. New treatments (bedaquiline and delmanid) have come to the market, but they are out of reach for patients – and governments – in countries with high disease burdens.

TB patient in Kolkata in 2009.

Photo: Sengupta/Lineair

Action at the global level needs to be geared to mobilising resources, tools and finance. Developing countries must be enabled to respond to the health challenges they face. Since deadly diseases do not respect national borders, antimicrobial resistance is a global problem. Solving it will require international cooperation. Unless we consider underlying structural causes and implement changes internationally, medical progress will be jeopardised – not only in developing countries.

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ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Investor calculations are changing

Some development scholars argue that humanity must overcome capitalism before we can hope to make economies sustainable and eliminate poverty. For several reasons, they are wrong.

By Hans Dembowski

The most important one is that science tells us we must decarbonise the world economy fast if we don't want climate change to spin out of control, but we have not seen convincing progress towards overcoming capitalism since Karl Marx wrote The Capital. On the other hand, prudently regulated capitalism has facilitated meaningful welfare policies in rich nations, and even the rough variety has reduced poverty in huge emerging markets. Communist-run China is the leading example.

The big challenge is thus to organise markets in a way that leads to sustainability and prosperity. So far, we are not even close. Climate change is accelerating dangerously, and so are carbon emissions. At the same time, experts reckon that the global community needs to mobilise an astounding $2.6 trillion annually to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Policymakers point out that state institutions cannot plug that gap, so private-sector funding is needed.

Some sceptics find that bewildering. They doubt that market forces, which caused the environmental crisis, are its solution. They have a point. Environmental progress has been excruciatingly slow so far, which shows that market forces have been irrational for decades. They should have headed Munich Re's warnings long ago. The reinsurance giant has been pointing out climate risks for decades, but financial markets are only beginning to pay attention now. The obvious difference now is that the damages have increased dramatically. Hardly a month goes by without news of extreme weather. Hurricanes in USA, heat waves in Australia, typhoons in Southeast Asia, flooding in India and draughts in Africa keep causing massive harm. Investors are increasingly wary of fossil-fuel risks.

Pacific Gas and Electric, California's big utility company, recently collapsed under the weight of huge financial liabilities after devastating wildfires that spread after extended draught. Its bankruptcy sent shock waves through the investor community. Pressed by activist shareholders, BP, the oil giant, has promised to begin regular reports on sustainability. Buying shares of fossil-based corporations like RWE, a German utility, is no longer the safe bet it used to be. Indeed, the RWE share price has become quite volatile, mostly because of environmental concerns. According to Jochen Wermuth of Wermuth Asset Management, the general mood among financial investors may change fast and, within five years, energy investments could be 100 % geared to renewables.

At the same time, there is currently a lack of convincing conventional investment ideas, whether in the real economy or the financial sector. Gillian Tett, the FT columnist, recently pointed out that investors' interest in SDG-related projects is growing accordingly.

It would be wrong to expect market forces to do the job by themselves. Markets need political guidance. It is good that Democrats in the US Congress are now discussing a Green New Deal. They want the US government to spend massively on making the economy environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive. As long as climate-change denying Donald Trump is in the White House, that will not happen. But his re-election looks unlikely at the moment, and after him change could happen fast and have considerable international repercussions.

Californian wildfire in 2017.

More generally, decisive state action anywhere will contribute to boost private-sector confidence in eco-friendly approaches. There is no guarantee humanity will reduce carbon emissions fast enough. Passing and enforcing prudent regulation may prove to difficult, but the chances of success are still infinitely better than overcoming capitalism first.

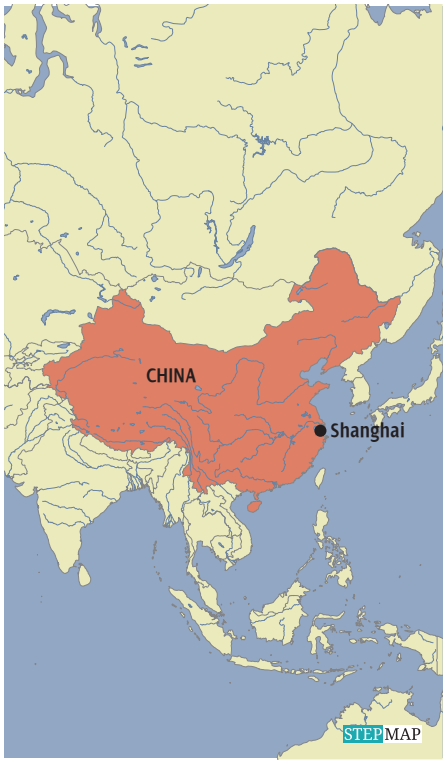
Photo: Santa Barbara Fire Department/picture-alliance/AP Photo

LETTER

Feelings of humiliation

D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2018/12, p. 38, Hans Dembowski: "Free trade" in the 19th century.

Congratulations on the article on the opium trade: a quite accurate and concise assessment of history. I have been working in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore for 32 years. What you write reflects long-lasting feelings for injustice and humiliation. My wife has a Taiwanese-Chinese background, I have heard a lot about these things. A short anecdote: there is a park in Shanghai's English quarter; it was set up for British expats. The Chinese did not take down the sign at the gate in order to keep memories alive. It says: "No dogs, no Chinese allowed." **Prof. Dr. Raymond Saner, Geneva**



CORRECTION

Bound by ODA rules

"We don't take orders from the government", D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2019/03 p.5.

Our short item on how church and state cooperate in international development affairs in Germany was misleading. It should have included the following two sentences: "Church charities cannot, of course, use public funding for missionary purposes, must fully account for spending and are bound by the BMZ's general rules on official development assistance. Within those parameters, church-based agencies have considerable leeway." We only figured out too late that, without that information, the entire story might be misunderstood in the sense of the government sponsoring religious engagement.

DEVELOPMENT OF DEMOCRACY

Malawi heads for elections

Malawi is set to hold national elections on 21 May 2019 – for the sixth time since the multi-party system was introduced in 1994. Presidential, parliamentary and local government elections will be held at the same time. What looks like a shining example of democracy at work in one of the world's poorest countries at first glance turns out to be far less rosy on closer examination. Malawi is facing serious political, social and economic problems.

By Rolf Drescher

After independence from Britain in 1964, Kamuzu Banda became president of the new Malawi. For the next 30 years, he ruled a one-party state with dictatorial powers. With a lack of civil rights and liberties, Malawi was described as a country "where silence rules". In June 1993, a referendum was held, and the nation voted in favour of a multi-party democracy. In the ensuing parliamentary and presidential elections in May 1994, Banda was voted out of office. Bakili Muluzi was elected president.

Ever since, elections have by and large been conducted in a peaceful and lawful manner, with an orderly transfer of power on a president's departure from office. The peaceful transition from Banda's dictatorial regime to a democratic constitution was a historic achievement. However, more recently, in the run-up to the elections, there has been evidence of authoritarian tendencies, for example in legislation regulating non-governmental organisations, and politically motivated violence has been increasing.

The president and vice-president are elected directly on the same ticket. They are elected for a five-year term and may stand for reelection once. A simple majority suffices, there is no second ballot. The National Assembly has 193 seats, occupied by members directly elected by constituencies (see box next page).

The deadline for nominations for the upcoming presidential elections expired in mid-February 2019. Nine candidates are now running for the presidency. But only three are considered serious contenders:

- current President Arthur Peter Mutharika (DPP), who is standing for re-election,
- current Vice-President Saulos Chilima, who quit the ruling party in mid-2018 to launch his own party (UTM), and
- the leader of the biggest opposition party (MCP) Lazarus Chakwera.

The other candidates do not seem to stand a chance of winning the elections.

Photo: picture-alliance/Xinhua

Malawi after storm Idai: Due to flooding, schools in the south of the country were converted into shelters for storm victims. It is unclear whether the election will be affected.

After electoral defeat in 2014 and a period of self-imposed exile, former President Joyce Banda had initially announced to make a renewed bid for the highest office but, without any real prospects of winning, withdrew her application later.

The electoral system seems to be appropriate, but that impression does not withstand closer scrutiny. The president is elected by a simple majority. In the 2014 elections, President Mutharika won 36.4 % of the votes cast. With an estimated voter turnout of just over 60 %, that means that he won with the support from little more than 20 % of the electorate (citizens of at least 18 years of age). That is a weak basis for legitimising a presidency. Mutharika had promised a new 50 %+1 electoral in his manifesto, with a run-off between the two candidates with the most votes, but that reform was dropped and not put to a vote in parliament.

In April last year, representatives of civil society raised a 10-point ultimatum. A fundamental electoral reform with the introduction of a 50 %+1 electoral system was a core demand. They did not succeed. Because the government prioritised the retention of power, the same rules will apply this year as in the past. Judging by the sharp drop in voter registration and verification, turnout in 2019 will likely be even lower than five years ago.

WIDESPREAD DISSATISFACTION

There is no single reason for the fall in electoral participation. The main factor is probably widespread dissatisfaction with the political, economic and social situation. People's expectations have been dashed. "50 years of standing still", was the headline the magazine African Business used for its report on the 2014 independence celebrations. Even President Mutharika admitted in his address

Political and economic profile of Malawi

Malawi's parliament, the National Assembly, has 193 seats. The members are directly elected in local constituencies. The DPP, President Arthur Peter Mutharika's party, won 51 seats in the last elections. The largest opposition party, the MCP, won 48. However, the largest group in the Assembly, with 52 seats, is made up of independent parliamentarians with no party affiliation. The president's party thus has no parliamentary majority. There is no majority coalition supporting the government.

None of the parties have a clear political profile. Chameleon politics – switching parties for career advancement – is common practice at all levels. There are no ideological barriers between parties. Parliament's control function is limited by the constitution and capacity. The prevailing political and organisational conditions significantly reduce the efficiency and effectiveness of the work of both government and parliament.

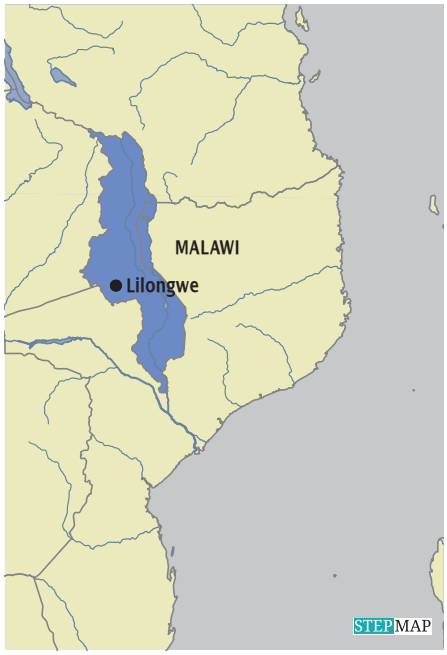
With a per capita gross national income (GNI) of $ 320, Malawi is one of the world's poorest countries. Seventy percent of the people live below the poverty line on a purchasing power of less than $ 1.90 a day. Hunger and dependence on food aid are widespread. In 2015/16, 6.5 million people relied on food aid. That was nearly 40 % of the population. In 2018/19 the figure is forecast to be at least 3.3 million.

The UN Development Programme (UNDP) ranks Malawi among the lowest of the "low human development countries". According to its Human Development Index (HDI), the country is the 171st of 189. Despite a moderate downturn in the fertility rate to 4.4, population growth is still at 2.9 %. According to recently published census results, Malawi currently has a population of just under 18 million. By 2050, that figure will more than double to 43 million, with serious unpredictable implications for the economy and environment.

65 % of the population work in agriculture: a farmer in rural Malawi in her maize field.

Photo: Mike Kollöffel/Linear

Malawi's economy is extremely susceptible to exogenous shocks. Sixty-five percent of the people work in agriculture, predominantly engaging in rain-dependent subsistence farming with very low productivity on shrinking areas of farmland. Malawi's economy (measured in GDP per capita) grew by just 1.5 % per year between 1995 and 2015, compared with an average of 2.7 % for other resource-poor countries in sub-Saharan Africa. In 2017, the figure stood at four percent. The forecast for 2018 is 3.3 % (IMF). That is well below the economic growth of at least six percent needed to reduce poverty significantly. However, the structural requirements are not in place for a sustained long-term economic upswing of that order. (rd)



on the 50th anniversary of independence in 2014 that "on average Malawians are poorer than they were under colonial rule".

This message was emphatically confirmed in a pastoral letter published by the Catholic bishops in 2018. It called for fundamental policy change. Two months later, one of the country's two major newspapers published poll results showing that 81 % of Malawians were unhappy with democracy. Twenty-five years after the referendum introducing the multi-party system, they believed it had contributed nothing to the country's social and economic development.

According to an Afrobarometer survey, 40 % of the people now support the idea of choosing political leaders by methods other than elections. This tallies with the fact that 14 June, the anniversary of the referendum, is no longer a national holiday ("Freedom Day"). Instead, Kamuzu Banda's birthday on 14 May was revived as a holiday ("Kamuzu Day").

Observers have accurately assessed the Banda dictatorship's transition to a multi-party democracy as a "transition without structural transformation". Oxfam (2018) and the World Bank (2018) both conclude that the country's small political and economic elite dominate the political processes, including government and other public institutions, and exploit their position of power in a form of "competitive clientelism" (World Bank, 2018). They have transformed the country's economy into a rent economy solely aimed at maximising short-term profits. No structural transformation focused on long-term development goals has taken place, and there is no sign of it happening.

Weak governance and weak institutions are one – if not the – major cause of Malawi's low level of development. Improving governance is thus a crucial requirement for a transformative development strategy to achieve sustainable long-term growth. Misappropriation of public funds and systemic corruption related to the rent economy are the most pressing public administration problems (World Bank, 2018). Therefore, it is of particular importance to:

- strengthen public finance management and
- develop efficient checks and balances in order to foster a culture of public accountability.

In 2013, the so-called "Cashgate" scandal made headlines. Between April and September 2013, the equivalent of $ 32 million was misappropriated in various ministries. An investigation was launched by then President Joyce Banda. Auditors scrutinised the accounts for 2009 to 2014 and identified unaccounted-for expenditures totalling $ 1.25 billion. That figure was later reduced to $ 507 million.

Five years on, the political and legal proceedings triggered by the Cashgate scandal have still not been concluded. In September 2018, Reyneck Matemba, the director of the Anti-Corruption Bureau, publicly insisted that the problem of corruption must not be dismissed: "All government ministries, departments and agencies are rotten. There is no single one which we are not having problems with on issues of corruption."

Malawi gets nuanced marks in the Ibrahim Index of African Governance 2018 (IIAG 2018), which is published by the Mo Ibrahim Foundation. Overall, the country ranks 19th among 54. Its rank is buoyed by good scores for its judicial system and other indicators. However, a sharply deteriorating trend was noted for corruption in the public sector in comparison with the period 2008 to 2017 (with the score sliding to a mere 22 points out of 100).

This assessment is consistent with the Afrobarometer surveys, which show that a majority of the people see a sharp rise in corruption and give the government poor marks for fighting it. In the latest Transparency International Corruption Perception Index, Malawi ranks 120th in the world, scoring just 32 points of a possible 100.

Nonetheless, Malawi is changing, albeit slowly. According to Asbjorn Eidhammer (2017), a former ambassador of Norway, "the most important change is that there is a young generation who wants change." The young voters have the power for change in their hands, they are in the majority. Under 35s account for 55 % of Malawians registered on the electoral roll. Hopefully they will exercise their right to vote at all levels – in the presidential, parliamentary and local government elections – and will continue to be politically active thereafter.

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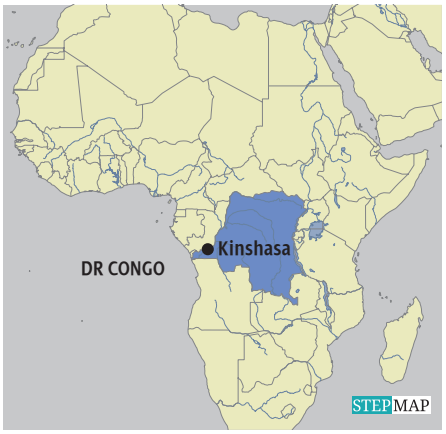
DR CONGO

Imperfect but historical elections



After several postponements, presidential elections finally took place in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) on 30 December 2018. Afterwards, there was the first ever peaceful transfer of power in the country. However, various observers noted a number of irregularities in the electoral process, and big challenges lie ahead.

By Jonathan Bashi

The shift of power from Joseph Kabila, who had run the country for 18 years, to Félix Tshisekedi was historical for the country and the region. The elections were relatively calm, and there was no major post-election unrest. It seems that the international community has opted to accept these imperfect but peaceful elections: regional powers such as South Africa and Kenya swiftly recognised Tshisekedi as the winner, and countries such as France, Belgium and the United States at least "took note" of his election.

Twenty-one candidates had been running for president (see my comment in D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2018/11, Debate section). However, three candidates took centre stage: Emmanuel Ramazani Shadary, handpicked by Kabila to represent the ruling party, and two opposition leaders. Tshisekedi represented the "Union pour la Démocratie et le Progès Social" (UDPS), a major opposition party led for more than three decades by his late father Etienne Tshisekedi, and Martin Fayulu, an influential businessman known for his integrity and consistency and founder of the political party "Engagement pour la Citoyenneté et la Démocratie" (ECiDé). It has been notable for its very strong political activism over the past decade.

The elections brought about large electoral coalitions of several political parties: on one side there was the "Front Commun pour le Congo" (FCC), the coalition of Kabila's ruling majority in power, which supported Shadary. On the opposing side there was LAMUKA, an alliance created by the main opposition leaders at a meeting in Geneva, Switzerland in November. This coalition appointed Fayulu as the opposition's common candidate. However, less than 24 hours after this appointment, Tshisekedi of UDPS and Vital Kamerhe of "Union pour la Nation Congolaise" (UNC) – a defector of Kabila's party and former candidate for the 2011 presidential elections – broke the agreement and created a brand-new coalition, the "Camp pour le Changement" (CACH), which supported Tshisekedi's candidacy.

The election campaign was relatively calm. A very committed population, however, acted increasingly demanding towards the candidates. While some candidates were able to gather huge crowds of supporters, others were prevented by the local people from holding meetings in certain parts of the country. One of them was Shadary. The former Minister of the Interior is hit by EU sanctions for human-rights violations because of his role in suppressing protests. The general feeling was that of a people fed up with 18 years of Kabila's regime and with a strong desire for a radical change in Congolese politics.

Tshisekedi was declared winner by the electoral commission on 10 January with 38,6 % of the vote, ahead of Fayulu (34,8 %) and Shadary (23,8 %). These results came to everyone's surprise: several observers, including the Catholic Church, which had deployed about 40,000 observers, and a couple of foreign diplomats had announced Fayulu as the apparent winner. He immediately challenged the results and filed a complaint with the Constitutional Court, demanding a recount of the votes. According to his own count and that of the Catholic Church, Fayulu had won the presidential election with more than 61 % of the votes. However, the Constitutional

The new president Félix Tshisekedi, left, and outgoing president Joseph Kabila during the inauguration ceremony in Kinshasa on 24 January.

Photo: Jerome Delay/picture-alliance/AP Photo

Court confirmed Tshisekedi's victory on 19 January. The inauguration ceremony took place on 24 January.

Beyond the general feeling of hope inspired by this first peaceful transfer of power, many people question the legitimacy of the new leaders, given the imperfections that have marked the electoral process. On 26 December, four days before the vote, the electoral commission announced a postponement of the vote in the regions of Yumbi in the West and Beni and Butembo in the East, which include 1,256,177 voters or three percent of those registered. Yumbi has been the scene of community violence that left hundreds dead in December, while Beni and Butembo are affected by an Ebola epidemic as well as recurrent killings of civilians by local militias. In these regions, the vote was planned to take place on 31 March (after this e-Paper was finalised) and to be limited to legislative and local elections, thus depriving the people of their right to vote for the president.

There are also rumours of a secret agreement between Tshisekedi's CACH and Kabila's FCC to preserve Kabila's safety and political future against Fayulu, who is supported by two of Kabila's main opponents: Jean-Pierre Bemba and Moïse Katumbi, who were both banned from running for president. These rumours are fueled by the fact that Tshisekedi must negotiate with the FCC, which won the majority of seats in parliament and is therefore supposed to form the future government. Overall, the new president has a huge task ahead of him. He must deal with enormous challenges such as the fight against corruption, unemployment and high expectations of its people for change.

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Safeguarding a peaceful transformation

After the change of power in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the UN wants to reduce its resources for peacekeeping in the country. Leila Zerrougui, who heads the UN Stabilisation Mission (MONUSCO) there, warns against premature decisions.

Despite the controversial election results (see main article), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) called upon the international community to respect the sovereignty of the country and its political processes. Zerrougui accepts their approach. According to her, the election was part of a long-term transformation: "I see democracy as a process and not something that can happen in just one election," she said in Berlin in February. She has held talks with the new government, civil society and the opposition in the DR Congo, trying to defuse tensions.

MONUSCO has been supporting the DRC government in stabilisation and peace operations for almost 20 years. Every year, the UN spends more than $ 1 billion dollars on MONUSCO, making it one of its most expensive missions in the world. It relies on a staff of 20,500 persons, 3,000 of whom are civilian. The mandate is robust: peacekeepers are allowed to use force not just in self-defence but also in defence of civilians and the MONUSCO mandate.

From July onwards, the head of mission expects drastic budget cuts after a new UN resolution. However, MONUSCO needs to be able to adequately respond to unforeseen events, says Zerrougui. Even though the recent change of power was relatively peaceful, the situation remains volatile, and the balance of power remains unclear.

According to Zerrougui, the fight against armed groups will continue to be MONUSCO's first priority. Rebels should get the chance to lay down their weapons, and reintegration programmes could help them return to mainstream society. "In some regions, this is not hard to do, but it's costly," Zerrougui says.

The situation is more difficult in the eastern provinces of North and South Kivu. This region is rich in fiercely-contested resources. It is estimated that around 80 % of the world's coltan deposits are there. Coltan is an important mineral used in electronic devices such as mobile phones and computers. Moreover, ethnic conflicts haunt the region, and an Ebola epidemic has killed more than 500 people since July 2018. According to Zerrougui, the new government has requested further UN support for the region.

The peace mission's second priority is to support the political transformation. MONUSCO is meant to cooperate equally with the government and the opposition. Despite allegations of electoral fraud, Zerrougui points out achievements. Former president Joseph Kabila has stepped down, and the population is largely satisfied with the outcome. "People had to wait four years for the elections. In light of that, the result is a sign of hope," says Zerrougui.

She argues that it is more important to demobilise the various rebel groups rather than to challenge the legitimacy of the new government. "It would be a huge success, if we managed to do that in the eastern provinces of Tanganjika, Ituri, North and South Kivu," she says. She wants to persuade the UN Security Council to carefully ponder budget cuts. The decision on the new MONUSCO mandate and budget from July 2019 was scheduled for March, but had not been made when this manuscript was finalised.

Theresa Krinninger

The refugee challenge

Millions of people are forced to leave their homes every year because of armed conflicts or natural disasters. Poverty, hardship and a lack of prospects for the future also drive hundreds of thousands of people to leave their homes. The majority of displaced people remain within the borders of their home countries, but many also cross national borders. Therefore, flight is a global problem and cannot be solved at the national level alone. It is the duty of rich countries to take responsibility. They have the means to provide protection, address the causes of flight and find political solutions.

This focus section directly relates to the UN's 16th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG): Peace, justice and strong institutions.

Relief distributions to the 3,000 Rohingya refugees at Balukhali relief camp, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

Photo: picture-alliance/Pacific Press Agency

"Refugees can make contributions to host communities"

The Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN) is a network consisting of more than 350 civil-society organisations from 28 countries committed to advancing the rights of refugees in the Asia Pacific region. Sussi Prapakranant, programme officer of the APRRN, shows how the network strengthens refugee organisations through information sharing, capacity building and joint advocacy.

Sussi Prapakranant interviewed by Sheila Mysorekar

Shan refugee from Myanmar living in Koung Jor Refugee Camp, Thailand.

Photo: my

What is the situation for refugees or displaced persons in the Asia-Pacific region?
Overall there is a lack of protection for refugees across the region: only 20 out of 45 countries have signed on to the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. Among the ten member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), only two, the Philippines and Cambodia, are signatories. Even countries that are signatories often do not adhere to the principles enshrined in the Convention. For example, Cambodia has a track record of returning refugees to countries from which they have fled. Australia continues to violate its international obligations by practicing offshore processing, indefinite detention and intercepting boats at sea. Compounding this issue, many countries do not have national laws or frameworks in place to protect refugees. Some have reservations to other international human-rights laws, treaties and conventions. The overall lack of legal status in the region leads to refugees and stateless persons being managed under immigration laws and treated as "illegal immigrants". This causes a situation where particularly urban refugees are in constant fear of and subject to arbitrary and indefinite immigration detention, harassment and deportation. They also lack legal work rights.

There seems to be increasing use of detention of immigrants and refugees in the Asia-Pacific region. Why?
Globally we are seeing a narrative where refugees, asylum seekers and displaced persons are criminalised and discussed in the context of national security, rather than one of human rights and protection. Some governments – like Australia – employ detention as a means of deterrence. However, all studies and data show that this practice does not work. Furthermore, it fails entirely in addressing the root causes of displacement, such as conflict, persecution and discrimination. An example of this is Myanmar where denial of citizenship as well as racial and religious discrimination have led to the displacement of large numbers of Rohingya (see Ridwanul Hoque and Ashraful Azad in this e-Paper, p. 21) and ethnic minority groups such as the Karen, Karenni, Shan and others.

What are the effects of immigrant detention?
It has severe impacts on the physical and mental wellbeing of people. The impacts are well documented: mental illness, increase in suicide attempts and poor physical health and deaths in detention. A report details how the conditions and cuts in health-care provision in Australia's offshore immigration-detention system led to suicide, suicide attempts and self-harm among the refugees. In the case of children, detention and separation of families often

lead to developmental impairment, self-harm, suicidal thoughts and suicide. Children are at risk of violence, suffering sexual and physical abuse and trauma. Immigration detention violates human rights, but it does not deter any refugees from leaving their countries.

What can the APRRN do about this?

We try to make governments understand that refugees are not burdens, but through for instance local integration and legal work rights they can make contributions to host communities. For example in Thailand, APRRN together with a coalition of Thai human-rights and child-rights NGOs has engaged in advocacy efforts towards government stakeholders and decision-makers. The collaborative efforts have led to the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on ending child detention. Furthermore, APRRN and its partners are working with the government on developing and implementing an "Alternatives to Detention" (ATD) pilot project.

What are Alternatives to Detention (ATD)?

ATDs for children and their parents or caregivers can take many different forms including community housing (underpinned by the development of a robust case management system), foster-care of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASCs), provision of temporary or permanent residence visas, and legal status which affords refugees with protection or immunity from arrest and detention. It is a cheaper, more effective and more humane way to manage migration. ATDs are up to 80 % cheaper than detention. They also provide added benefits like supporting the health and wellbeing of migrants, reducing overcrowding in detention centres and helping governments to fulfil their human-rights obligations.

Does the legal framework of the ASEAN states offer enough protection for refugees?

ASEAN does not have a legal framework for the protection or promotion of refugee rights. Several individual states within ASEAN furthermore hold reservations to other international human-rights laws and standards. Whilst there is an ASEAN Declaration on Human Rights (ADHR), it does not specifically cover refugee protection. Other factors that influence the scope for engagement include a lack of funding and resources for refugee protection.

What could ASEAN as an intergovernmental organisation do in order to improve the situation for refugees within its states?

ASEAN needs to move beyond its principles of non-interference and national sovereignty and acknowledge that displacement and forced migration are regional issues with potentially destabilising effects, which require regional cooperation. The 2007 ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers focuses solely on migrant workers and does not mention refugees or asylum seekers. ASEAN should develop a regional framework and a common set of refugee and asylum policies, which includes guidance for action to be taken when a member state's internal issues causes people to flee to neighbouring states. Such an instrument could help to ease both the escalation of conflicts and any future ethnic or religious tensions between states.

What do you regard as the most urgent challenges across the Asia-Pacific region regarding migration?

In addition to immigration detention, I would highlight three refugee populations, which all underscore the urgency for addressing the lack of durable solutions for refugees:

- The first is found in Thailand along the border with Myanmar, where 100,000 Karen, Karenni and smaller numbers of other Myanmar ethnic minority groups have resided in nine Temporary Shelters for Displaced Persons for 30 years.
- Yet another ethnic minority group, the Chin, fled Myanmar to India and Malaysia. The Chin are facing an uncertain future as the UNHCR has started the process of cessation of their refugee status, having deemed that they are no longer in need of international protection.
- Finally, in August 2017 the world witnessed the mass exodus of more than 700,000 Rohingya from Myanmar to Bangladesh. This was propelled by outbreaks of violence in Myanmar's Rakhine State. The Rohingya are a population group who the Myanmar government does not recognise as citizens, effectively making them stateless. They now reside in a staggering number of more than 900,000 in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, making it one of the most densely populated and now largest refugee camps in the world.

These refugee populations have one condition in common: the underlying causes of their displacement have yet to be addressed in a comprehensive manner.

How can APRRN influence the general trend?

Through joint advocacy and lobbying, APRRN aims to advance refugee rights at national, regional and international levels. At the national level we seek to strengthen local civil-society actors and national networks, with the goal of increasing and creating space for advocacy with regional bodies and mechanisms such as ASEAN.

Do you see any positive developments?

In Thailand APRRN and its partners are working with the government on developing and implementing an Alternative to Detention pilot project, and the government has publicly committed to developing a National Screening Mechanism, a national framework for managing refugees and asylum-seekers. In Malaysia, APRRN member SUKA Society take part in a working group which includes government stakeholders on finding alternatives, such as community placement for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASCs). In South Korea, a comprehensive refugee bill was adopted in 2013, and in Taiwan APRRN's work with legislators, judges and the National Immigration Agency has led to a draft refugee bill that largely mirrors the refugee convention, and if adopted, it would legally recognise refugees.

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LINK

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Photo of author: Jerzy Michał Dziekan

Lives saved temporarily

Masses of Rohingya have fled to Bangladesh from Myanmar. The most they can hope for is humanitarian aid in dismal refugee camps. The international community is not paying adequate attention.

Ridwanul Hoque and Ashraful Azad

In terms of the number of refugees, Bangladesh is one of the world's top ten host countries. Since August 2017, arrivals of Rohingya refugees has dramatically escalated. Those who make it across the border escape persecution with genocidal dimensions (see box, p. 22). When the refugees arrived en masse – hungry, exhausted, traumatised and even wounded – thousands of local volunteers flocked to the border with food, medicines, clothes and other life-saving materials. They saved human lives even before international aid arrived. Unfortunately, resentment has since increased.

Refugee camps have grown huge in the country's south-eastern districts, causing immediate damage to the local environment. Lush-green hills have turned barren. They were cleared, first for shelter and then for fire wood. Supplying drinking water for masses of people is also taking a toll on the environment, and proper sanitation remains a challenge.

Host communities initially welcomed the refugees, but later frustration took hold and socio-economic tensions keep growing. In some places, the refugees outnumber local people by a 2:1 ratio. To some extent, international aid efforts are addressing some of the relevant issues. Local youngsters have found jobs working for non-governmental agencies in the camps. Nonetheless, the majority of the local people suffer serious hardships. The prices of food, other commodities and housing have skyrocketed, forcing many locals to move away. Those who remain worry about their livelihoods, property and environment. They increasingly blame the refugees for their plight.

The government is playing the key role in administering the camps and providing assistance to refugees, though its preferred term is "forcefully displaced Myanmar nationals" (FDMN). Bangladesh is not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. Nor does it have a domestic law specific to refugees and asylum seekers. Therefore, administrative bodies are largely free to decide as they please.

Balukhali Refugee Camp in south-eastern Bangladesh in February 2019.

Civil-service officers and the security forces are implementing government policy. The lead agency is the RRRC (Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner). It is cooperating closely with UN agencies as well as with hundreds of international and Bangladeshi non-governmental organisations.

REPATRIATION POLICY

The government insists that the refugees must return to Myanmar. Its diplomats are told to convince the international community of Myanmar's duty to take them back. In November 2017, Bangladesh signed a bilateral agreement with Myanmar for voluntary repatriation of the Rohingya. The repatriation was due to start in January 2018, but was delayed. In November 2018, the attempt to begin repatriation failed as well. In Bangladesh, refugees protested, whereas Buddhist monks rallied against repatriation in Myanmar.

The refugees demand that Myanmar must grant them "full citizenship" and recognise the Rohingya ethnic identity. Otherwise, they refuse to return. The Myanmar government, however, denies that the Rohingya are its citizens. It wants to settle them in so-called transit camps and reception centres. Facilities for internally displaced Rohingyas were established in 2012. Some 120,000 Rohingya live there – in a situation of marginalisation, exploitation and lack of opportunities. They are denied equal rights. For good reason, refugees in Bangladesh fear they would share that fate after returning to Myanmar.

In the meantime, the Bangladesh government has begun to look for alternative strategies to house the refugees. In a particularly ambitious plan, it has built camps

Photo: Mamunur Rashid/picture-alliance/Nur Photo

on Bhasan Char, a previously uninhabited delta island. It has only recently emerged from the sea and is vulnerable to cyclones. Though the government has made significant investments in embankments, refugee leaders and human-rights group warn that the relocation will lead to disaster. What they find most worrisome is that the island could serve as a prison-like settlement. They fear that refugees will be interned there.

The pressure on Bangladesh is further exacerbated by the forced deportation of Rohingya from India and Saudi Arabia. Currently, about 40,000 Rohingya refugees are living in improvised camps and urban slums in various parts of India. Increasing harassment by police and Hindu nationalist groups forced about 1300 of them to cross the border into Bangladesh in January this year.

Saudi Arabia was long considered a safe-haven, hosting an estimated 200,000 Rohingya. Many of them have fake Bangladeshi passports. Saudi Arabia has begun to sort them out and deport them. Several dozen arrived this way in Bangladesh in recent weeks. Bangladesh's government had not objected by mid-March, when the manuscript was finalised. In its eyes, Saudi Arabia is an important ally.

GLOBAL POLITICS

It is unfortunate that the international community has largely failed to ensure justice for the victims of atrocities committed by Myanmar. Nor has it done anything serious to create a safe environment in Myanmar so refugees could return to the country. The problem is that major world powers are playing politics in pursuit of a narrowly perceived national interests.

China, Russia and India are basically siding with Myanmar. China and Russia have vetoed measures several times at meetings of the UN Security Council. Bangladesh's government is interested in good relations with these countries.

In an unprecedented move, the International Criminal Court (ICC) ruled that it has jurisdiction to investigate the crime of deportation of Rohingya people from Myanmar (a non-member state) to Bangladesh (a member state). For the first time, the ICC is considering a case against a non-member state without referral from the Security Council. However, it is not clear that it will do much. Big global players – including the USA, Russia, China and India – are likely to do their best to stop the case. They do not want an international norm to take hold according to which they themselves might one day be held accountable for similar acts.

While the ICC considerations are at least putting some international pressure on Myanmar, that country's government remains defiant. Not only is it still carrying out atrocities against Rohingya Muslims, it has also started to target some ethnic minorities who are predominantly Buddhist. Some of them have reportedly fled to Bangladesh.

On the positive side, Bangladesh deserves praise for not having so far forcibly returned any Rohingya to Myanmar, where their lives would be in danger. However, it is increasingly obvious that mass repatriation will not happen soon. Accordingly, a sense of frustration is not only growing in the government sector but also – most alarmingly – among local communities.

Problems are compounded by the government's recently launched "war on drugs" (see Hoque and Shamin in focus section of D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2018/12) Bangladesh's south-eastern districts are notorious entry points for illicit narcotics. Along with locals, desperate refugees are being used as drug-mules. Nearly a dozen Rohingya people have already been killed by security forces. Another big problem is human trafficking. Refugee teenagers and children are targeted in particular.

The Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh are largely left to their fate. The most they can hope for is camp-based humanitarian assistance. At least temporarily, their lives are saved. What is being neglected, however, is education, housing, human rights and socio-economic development for the Rohingya community.

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A history of persecution

The Rohingya are a religious and ethnic minority. They are mostly Muslim and traditionally live in Myanmar's northern state of Rakhine (previously Arakan). Their presence there has been documented over centuries. Nonetheless, the government of Myanmar generally denies that they are citizens and calls them "Bengalis". The Rohingya language is related to, but different from Bengali.

Anti-Rohingya pogroms have made people flee in the past – for instance in 1978 and 1991/92. The current influx of refugees is unprecedented nonetheless. International agencies, including a UN fact-finding mission, speak of genocidal violence raging in Myanmar in view of killings, torture, rape and forced labour. At least 720,000 Rohingya sought asylum in the country within few months. Currently, Bangladesh is housing about a million Rohingya refugees in camps near the south-eastern border (see main story).

In Myanmar, Rohingya are also subjected to discrimination in education, employment, health care and religious practices. The Myanmar government denies all accusations, rejecting them as biased and politically motivated.

With 1200 people per square kilometre, Bangladesh is one of the world's most densely populated countries. The average annual income is currently the equivalent of $1751, according to the government. Despite big problems of its own, the country showed a rare example of humanitarianism by hosting a million refugees. (rh/aa)

Hotspot Afghanistan

Afghanistan has been shaken by violence and political crises for four decades. Millions of people were displaced, hundreds of thousands of them found refuge in Pakistan. The international community is deeply involved in Afghanistan's conflicts. For instance, the US administration now negotiates with the militant Islamist Taliban. Economic development largely depends on small and mid-sized enterprises.

The debate that never was

By Mahwish Gul

About 1.5 million Afghan refugees could have benefited from a new policy Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan announced after taking office. Unfortunately, his promise of citizenship was watered down fast.

On 16 September 2018, Khan told a rally in Karachi: "Afghans, whose children have been raised and born in Pakistan, will be granted citizenship." He made a passionate plea, arguing that so far the people concerned have been prevented from getting formal-sector jobs and accessing basic services. Khan's statement made sense, but it was devoid of history, political intricacies and ethnic divisions. He backtracked soon.

Khan's new policy would have applied to up to 1.5 million persons, reversing decades-old practice. Afghan refugees were always only given a temporary status, and Pakistan made efforts to repatriate them. The powerful military endorsed this approach.

The reactions to Khan's speech were mixed. The international community, including the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and Afghan refugees, appreciated the announcement. Sceptics, however, questioned his motive. Some say that it was a mere ploy to strengthen Khan's party, the Pakistan Justice Movement. It has traditionally attracted Pashtuns. This ethnic group lives on both sides of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, and many Afghan refugees belong to it.

In public discourse, however, the refugees are often linked to narcotics, crime, smuggling and counterfeiting. To some extent, they are also blamed for Islamist extremism.

For four decades, Afghanistan has been a country torn by crisis and political violence. Refugees started leaving the country in masses after the Soviet invasion in late 1979. Some 3 million people fled across Pakistan's border during the ensuing civil war.

Afghan refugees celebrating Prime Minister Imran Khan in late September 2018 in Karachi.

Photo: picture-alliance/ZUMA Press

In those years, western powers supported anti-Soviet Mujahedeen, and the militant Islamist Taliban took root in refugee camps. The withdrawal of the Red Army, however, did not lead to peace. Eventually, the Taliban gained control of Afghanistan, but their government was toppled by the invasion of US troops after the 9/11 terror attacks on New York and Washington in 2001.

In the aftermath of 9/11, Afghan refugees were considered a security risk in Pakistan. In the context of UNHCR supported repatriation efforts, people were intimidated into returning home. In 2002, the international non-governmental organisation Human Rights Watch (HRW) urged "the government of Pakistan to cease harassment, extortion, imprisonment and forced returns of Afghan refugees because of their undocumented status".

According to the UNHCR, Pakistan is currently housing 1.4 million registered Afghan refugees. Another 800,000 Afghans are in the country legally without claiming refugee status. Up to 1 million Afghans are reckoned to be in the country illegally. All in all, there are at least 2.6 million Afghans in Pakistan. In 2017, HRW reported about the "mass forced returns of Afghan refugees", adding the qualifier "so called" to what officially is called "voluntary repatriation".

The situation of the refugees is bad. They include the poorest and the most vulnerable of refugees who have nothing to return to and cannot meet the repatriation costs even with token UNHCR assistance. There is also a vast number who were born and raised in Pakistan. They do low-paying informal work. According to the law, they cannot register businesses or pay taxes.

Most Pakistanis consider them a burden and do not acknowledge their perseverance or contributions to the local economy.

They associate refugees not only with crime, but also with over-use of natural resources and over-burdened infrastructure. Only a few human-rights organisations appreciate that the refugees are a marginalised community that deserves better opportunities.

Imran Khan's policy reversal could have benefited up to 1.5 million persons, but under intense criticism, he fast softened his stance. A political commentator pointed out: "Raising an issue and bringing it into the limelight is one thing and getting it resolved is another." The prime minister tried to start a debate that Pakistan needs to have, but six months later, it has not moved forward.

That was then: US and Afghan Presidents Donald Trump (r.) and Ashraf Ghani in New York in 2017.

Marginalised government

By Nawid Paigham

For a long time, Afghanistan's government pressed Washington to engage in peace talks with the Taliban. Now the Trump administration is negotiating with Islamist militants, but not involving the Afghan government.

In late 2001, a bit more than 17 years ago, a remote and war-torn country became the focus of global attention. The September 11 attacks on New York and Washington had been planned by Al Qaida, a terrorist organisation, which was largely based in Afghanistan. In cooperation with opposition militias, US troops toppled the Islamist Taliban regime. They were soon supported by an international coalition with a mandate from the UN Security Council. An immense amount of financial, military and humanitarian aid poured into the country. The international alliance pursued a double goal: the eradication of terrorism and the democratisation of Afghanistan.

Despite all the generous help, one third of the country's people still live below the poverty line. Humanitarian assistance is still needed. Compounding the problems, statehood remains fragile because of resurgent extremist militants. The elected government needs military support.

For one and a half decades, Afghanistan was a top concern of US policymakers. For obvious reasons, President Donald Trump now seems eager to withdraw. The war has proven long and expensive. In fact, it is now the longest war in US history. It is also increasingly unpopular, not least, because the Taliban have been gaining ground in recent years. His administration has started peace talks – without involving the government of President Ashraf Ghani.

The great irony is that the Afghan government has for years wanted to bring the Taliban to the negotiation table. It even offered them positions in the government. The Taliban turned down the offer and refused to talk to those they called "American puppets". Washington, by contrast, always considered the Taliban terrorists, unworthy of diplomatic acknowledgment. Trump has turned everything up-side-down and is keen on a timeline for troops withdrawal. By marginalising the elected government, he is basically abandoning the democratisation policy.

The US-Taliban talks have gained considerable momentum. Both sides want to reach an agreement. The Taliban sense an opportunity, not least in view of the absence of the Afghan government.

Trump's approach to foreign affairs does not look coherent however. On the one hand, he says the USA should not play the role of world police and avoid paying for the defence of others. On the other hand, he wants the USA to remain an unrivalled superpower that can wield overwhelming force if required. Withdrawing from crisis regions obviously serves the first goal, but it weakens the USA's geostrategic reach. Accordingly, Trump's plans are not only opposed by Ashraf Ghani, Afghanistan's president, but also by many legislators, including from his party, the Republicans, in Washington.

In Afghanistan, people worry about what the growing clout of the Taliban may mean. Especially in urban areas, there has been considerable progress since the Taliban regime fell in 2001 in regard to human rights, freedom of speech and women's rights, for example. Economic and political institutions have become stronger, though not strong enough. Democratic ideas have taken root. It would make sense to foster them. Some refugees have opted to return from abroad, while others still think doing so would be too dangerous.

The current course of the US administration is adding to the worries. Unmeasured and hasty decisions could have devastating consequences. By side-lining Ghani and his government, moreover, the US is set to gamble away everything it and its allies achieved in almost two decades of sacrifice and expenditure.

In 2001, Afghanistan was the country where western powers decided to prove their development model to work. They did not live up to that ambition, but their involvement kept hope alive in Afghanistan. If the USA now abandons Afghanistan's people and leaves them at the mercy of Islamist extremists, that will not be forgotten – neither in the country concerned, nor elsewhere in predominantly Muslim countries.

Photo: Shealah Craighead/picture-alliance/ZUMA Press

Private sector needs suitable financing

By Bernd Leidner

Despite the ongoing crisis in Afghanistan, the private sector is holding its own. Small and mid-sized enterprises, in particular, have the potential to boost economic development and contribute to rebuilding the country. To do so, these enterprises need targeted support and access to finance.

Afghanistan is located on the old Silk Road and has a long tradition of entrepreneurship and trade. Small- and mid-sized enterprises (SMEs) are today the engine of the private sector: according to a 2014 study by the thinktank Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 85% of all enterprises are SMEs, they generate half of the economic output and provide 35% of jobs. The financial sector has an essential role to play in supporting these engines of growth.

Many initiatives aim to improve SMEs' access to finance. What is needed above all is formalisation of the economy. Banks and officially registered microfinance institutions (MFIs) have been newly established since 2004, but so far they cover only a small share of company financing. Private loans and informal finance account for the largest share: only two percent of all companies use bank loans to finance their investments. Bank loans to private enterprises account for only 3.5% of national economic output. According to a recent OECD publication, this is the lowest percentage worldwide.

An estimated 80% of real estate in Afghanistan is not officially recorded in the land register and therefore cannot be used as collateral for loans. As a result, even wealthy business owners with large real estate holdings do not meet banks' requirements. Most businesses do not use proper financial accounting and business plans are extremely rare. As a result, lending decisions in Afghanistan are marked by a very high degree of uncertainty.

To mitigate the risks of lending and the lack of collateral that banks can accept, loan guarantees are crucial. The ACGF – Afghan Credit Guarantee Foundation guarantees about half of the loans to SMEs, totalling around $ 50 million (as of the end of 2017). An external evaluation recently showed that without the loan guarantees most of the ACGF's lending partners would not be able to serve this target group, or would do so only to a much more limited extent.

In addition to the actual risks, the high perceived risks are also relevant. These stem from the fact that the finance sector has little experience with SMEs. Basic training, the development of innovative products – for instance in renewable energy, Islamic loans or Fintech instruments – and support in reaching out to new customers such as start-ups or women-led businesses, could improve SME financing.

Millions of Afghans had to leave their country during the civil war. Most of them went to Pakistan and Iran. Many of them are now being forced to leave their host countries, and some are doing so voluntarily. Although the large number of returnees places a burden on Afghanistan in many respects, they also present opportunities for the SME sector. In most cases returnees initially establish micro-enterprises, but many have professional qualifications and experience that enable them to manage larger enterprises and thus create jobs.

The financial sector is one of the most important drivers of further development of SMEs. The Afghan central bank has also recognised this. It recently approved the use of loan guarantees as a fully-fledged substitute for real collateral, and generally loosened the rules for securing loans. This makes lending much easier for banks and MFIs. With the support of the World Bank, the OECD and the EU, the Afghan government has also formulated a strategy to promote the private sector. Access to finance and formalisation of the economy are key components, but are still in their infancy. With loan guarantees for risk-sharing, advice and training for the financial sector and regulatory support from the central bank and government, the private sector will be able to continue its positive development.

If you want to start a business, you need money. In Afghanistan, the funds usually come from private loans and the informal sector.

Photo: Sanaullah Seiam/picture-alliance/Photoshot

LINK

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Poverty and a lack of rights

Lebanon is one of the countries in the world that has taken in the most refugees. Over a million Syrians and Palestinians have fled to this country of just 6.2 million people. The situation is difficult and the problems are manifold.

By Mona Naggar

The Lebanese greeted the formation of their new government at the end of January with fireworks and celebratory gunfire. Over eight months of political crises had finally been overcome. The people hoped that this step would have a positive effect on the economy. However, Syrians in Lebanon had less reason to celebrate. The new Minister for Refugee Affairs, Saleh Gharib, belongs to the faction in the Lebanese government that is loyal to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Correspondingly, Gharib's first official act was not, for example, a visit to one of the many informal camps for Syrian refugees, but rather a whirlwind trip to Damascus. While there, he went along with the Syrian government's official pronouncements that Syria was now safe and that everyone could return. This visit caused concern among refugees. They are very worried that they could be forced to repatriate.

Since the beginning of the conflict between the Syrian regime and armed opposition groups in 2011, millions of people have had to flee their homeland. Over 5 million Syrians crossed the border into neighbouring countries, primarily Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. Roughly 1 million Syrian refugees have registered with the UN Refugee Agency in Lebanon (947,000 as of January 2019). There is also an unknown number of unregistered Syrians. Therefore approximately 20% of Lebanon's population is Syrian. Most of the people who fled the war settled in the border regions in the north and east of the country. These areas are among the poorest regions in Lebanon.

According to Nasser Yassin of the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut (AUB), both the Lebanese host society and the Syrian refugees in Lebanon have reached a "state of exhaustion". Approximately 70% of Syrians live below the poverty line in deplorable conditions. Over half of the Syrian children between the ages of three and 18 do not attend school. The majority of Lebanese who live in areas where Syrians have settled hold the refugees responsible for power and water shortages. It is not rare for Lebanese to protest against Syrian businesses for luring away customers with low prices.

Many factors are responsible for this situation, Yassin explains. According to him, the number of immigrants is simply too high for Lebanon. The Cedar State is a politically fragile country that has not yet come to terms with its armed conflicts of past decades – not to mention its internal political tensions. Then there is the dilapidated state of its infrastructure. Furthermore, the researcher explains that the relationship between the Lebanese and the Syrian refugees is being strongly influenced by Lebanon's prior experiences with Palestinian refugees. "A negative attitude towards refugees has become embedded in the collective memory of many Lebanese," Yassin says. He believes that the withdrawal of international solidarity is also playing a role. In his opinion, the rise of populist, right-wing movements in the countries of the global North have changed these countries' attitudes towards refugees. There is less willingness now to take in people who are fleeing their homelands.

A LACK OF POLITICAL STRATEGY

These issues are being exacerbated by the lack of a clear, well-thought-out strategy on the part of the Lebanese state: "Every group or local power in the country is whittling away on their own policy towards the Syrian refugees according to their own political and populist interests," the researcher says.

A look back at the treatment of Syrian refugees by Lebanese authorities in past years supports the analysis of Nasser Yassin. Prior to 2015, Syrians could enter Lebanon without a visa. That was part of the close, though not unproblematic relationship between the two countries since each gained independence. The refugees crossed the border legally and were able to freely disperse over the entire country and register with the UN Refugee Agency. There were repeated discussions about and plans to build camps. The idea was to process and care for people at a central location. But these plans were never put into action. In fact, they were unpopular, given Lebanon's experiences with the camps of the Palestinians, which had turned into permanent establishments. Instead, as a kind of regulation, the Interior Ministry introduced entry restrictions, high fees for extensions of stay and the kafala (in-country sponsor) system for Syrians.

Refugees came nevertheless, but from that point on they crossed illegally over the green border. Most Syrians did not have the financial means to extend their stay. The consequences have been catastrophic: over 70% of Syrians in the Cedar State do not have a valid residence status. They have to work illegally. Hundreds of thousands of people are the victims of exploitation by domestic employers and of harassment by security agencies.

Khalil Jebara, a former advisor to the Interior Ministry, admits that the illegal status of hundreds of thousands of Syrians is not in Lebanon's best interest, since the country has lost sight of and control over the people who are residing in its territory. But according to him, the state is incapable of devising a sensible refugee policy because each of the different Lebanese political forces that is also represented in the government has its own reading of the crisis in Syria and, correspondingly, its own approach to dealing with the refugees. The only consensus of all the different factions

Conditions are miserable for Syrians in this refugee camp in the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon.

is "no" to "tawtin", the permanent settlement of refugees, and "no" to easier access to work.

NON-SYRIAN REFUGEES

However, if one compares the way the Lebanese state treats Syrian refugees with its policies towards other refugee groups, such as Palestinians, Iraqis or foreign workers from Asian and African countries, then it is possible to detect a pattern. People are forced to the margins of society and stripped of their rights. The result is disenfranchisement and poverty, says Nizar Shaghiyeh, an attorney and editor-in-chief of The Legal Agenda, a publication by an organisation of the same name that examines legal developments in Lebanon. Part of this pattern is also a strong focus on security. All refugees are categorised as potential security threats.

According to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), 422,000 Palestinian refugees are registered in Lebanon. However, the actual number of Palestinians is much lower: a 2017 census revealed that there are only about 170,000. They are descendants of the people who were forced to leave their country and seek refuge in neighbouring countries during the foundation of the State of Israel and the wars of 1948 and 1967. Many Palestinians live in camps dating from that time, which, over the decades, have developed into city districts and also often into slums.

Even though these Palestinians have lived in Lebanon for generations, the state denies them many rights. There are many jobs that they are not allowed to perform, particularly those that require higher qualifications. They are barred from acquiring property outside the camps. They are largely excluded from the state's social and health insurance scheme. Palestinian children are not allowed to attend Lebanese state schools (see my contribution in the focus section of D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2017/01). They are treated like foreigners at the state university and are subject to a quota. For decades, the Lebanese government has used these policies to block the permanent settlement of Palestinians in Lebanon ("tawtin").

The results of this discrimination are social decline and poverty. A 2012 study by the International Labour Organization (ILO) showed that half of Palestinians in Lebanon do not earn more than $333 a month. According to UNICEF, 96% of six- to eleven-year-old Palestinian girls and boys go to school. Between the ages of 12 and 14, that number drops to 63% and then to 40% for 15- to 17-year-olds. Many young people work. The only opportunity Palestinians have to live a better life is to emigrate to other countries. Therefore it is no wonder that their numbers in Lebanon continue to decline. Returning to Palestine is nothing but a dream.

The situation is different for Syrians. Their homeland is accessible, but the conditions for a voluntary, safe and dignified return are lacking, even though war is no longer raging in many parts of the country. Whether and when these conditions will be fulfilled depends on the political process in Syria. Meanwhile, the next generation of young Syrians is growing up in Lebanon.

Nasser Yassin from the AUB is reminding rich countries of the global North of their duty. He is calling on them to take in more refugees in order to make Lebanon's burden lighter and to give people hope for a better future.

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Photo: picture-alliance/ZUMA Press

"The flow has not stopped"

Agadez in central Niger is a major transit hub for refugees from West and East Africa heading for Algeria and Libya. For many, the ultimate destination is Europe. Ibrahim Manzo Diallo, a journalist and policy consultant, assesses how the local situation has changed since the EU started becoming involved in refugee issues in Niger.

Ibrahim Manzo Diallo interviewed by Katja Dombrowski

You were born in Agadez and have been observing the situation there for many years. The city has become known internationally as a transit hub for refugees heading for North Africa and Europe. How many refugees are in the city, and where do they come from?
It is impossible to put a precise number on the size of the refugee and migrant population in Agadez. More than 2,500 from Sudan alone are estimated to be waiting for recognition as refugees. They have a tough time here because they are accused of being former rebels, either from Darfur or the war in Libya. In either case, they are stigmatised. The Sudanese are housed at 15 kilometres outside the city. They do not get the health care or psychosocial care that they desperately need. There have even been suicide attempts. Elsewhere in Agadez, hundreds of migrants are stuck in ghettos. The migrants come from West Africa, the majority of refugees from East Africa.

You make a conscious distinction between refugees and migrants. What is the difference?
The migrants here in Agadez are on the move because they are searching for a better place to live. The refugees – many of whom come from Sudan, Eritrea and Somalia – are returnees from Libya and waiting for a residence permit or recognition as refugees.

How come the migrants are stuck in ghettos, as you said?
They have not been able to move on for nearly two years. They have been stuck here since Law 036/2015 came into force. Since then, it has been illegal to transport migrants or give them shelter. Accommodations have been closed and vehicles confiscated. Nigerian security forces are now controlling known routes, borders and even cities like Agadez. Anyone found trafficking is jailed, and the migrants are handed over to the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

What part does EU policy play in all this?
The EU is behind all of the mechanisms introduced to curb migration and restrict freedom of movement. Europe is moving its external border to Agadez and using its Trust Fund for Africa as an economic tool for something that resembles extortion, seriously undermining the development efforts of countries like Niger. In our country, 11 projects are currently ongoing, with a total value of € 229 million. Nearly all of them relate to migration and some, like the establishment of a "joint investigative team" and a "rapid reaction force", are directly aimed at preventing the movement of potential

Returnees from Algeria in Agadez, Niger, wait to be repatriated to Sierra Leone by the International Organization for Migration.

Photo: Jerome Delay/picture-alliance/AP Photo

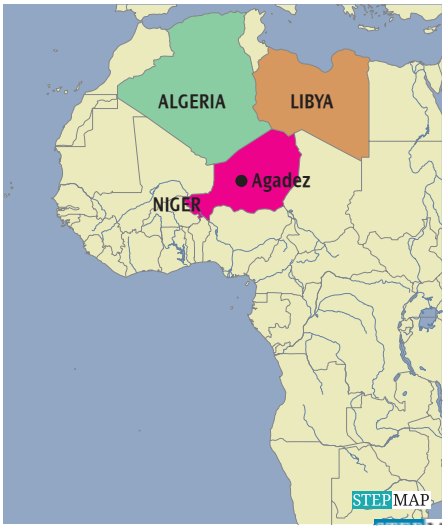
migrants. These measures cause massive harm to the local population.

Does that mean no one now gets any farther north?
No, it does not. Despite the risk, some traffickers will always transport refugees. Sometimes, migrants gather dozens of kilometres south of Agadez and use trails through the desert. At the border, accomplices of the traffickers pick them up and take them to Sabha in Libya.

Crossing the Sahara was always dangerous. Has it now become even more dangerous?
Yes, the risks have increased considerably. The known routes are now policed, so the traffickers use trails that are not marked on any maps – and those trails are longer and more dangerous. Migrants and traffickers die if they lose their way or their vehicles break down. They die of thirst. Some migrants have also been abandoned in the desert. In the past two years, there have been at least 60 fatalities in the Nigerian and Libyan desert.

How many migrants do you think reach their destination?
That is very hard to say because they take so many different routes. The number of refugees heading for Libya and Europe has certainly declined in recent years. But the flow has not stopped.

Do many people return to Agadez after trying to get away from your city?
Yes, indeed. Last year alone, about 28,000 came back from Algeria. Many also return from Libya. They are brought here by the UN refugee agency UNHCR or the IOM. If they report to the authorities voluntarily, they are given a returnee package and even get access to education or training. But I do not believe that will solve the problem. Many of those who return to their homeland will come back to Agadez – not to travel on to Libya but to get a second aid package under a new name. The EU and African states cannot build relationships of trust and mutual respect as long as the right of people in the south to freedom of movement is not respected.



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Uganda's open doors

South Sudanese boy in Palorinya refugee settlement, Uganda.

Photo: shmy

Even though Uganda is a poor country, its doors remain open for refugees. Most of them come from neighbouring South Sudan, where violence continues to displace people, and livelihoods are destroyed.

By Ochan Hannington

Out of 68.5 million people forcibly displaced from their homes worldwide, over 1 million sought shelter in Uganda. Around 800,000 of them are South Sudanese, according to UN figures. Their number has been drastically increasing since the current crisis in South Sudan began in 2013. Some small villages in northern Uganda like Bidibidi and Palorinya grew within a few months into some of the biggest refugee camps in the world, jointly hosting around half a million people.

Geriga Charles is one of the South Sudanese refugees. The 44-year-old and his 15-member-family live in the Suwinga-Bidibidi refugee settlement. They survive

mostly on meagre refugees' food rations and sleep in huts made of sticks, mud and grass – a common sight across refugee settlements in Uganda. They came in the second half of 2016, at the height of South Sudan's recent violent conflict that affected almost the entire Equatoria region in the south of the country. Charles could have chosen to flee to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which is closer to his home, but he led his family to Uganda instead. "Uganda is friendly to refugees. There is peace; there is freedom of movement for all refugees. There is good education for our children too," he explains.

Charles thinks of Uganda as his second home. He first sought protection there in 1993, during the civil war in Sudan, when South Sudan was not yet independent. At that time, he fled with his father and carried nothing with him except the clothes on his back. When the conflict in his home country flared up in 2016, Charles and his family were forced to move from one village to another, as they tried to keep away from various armed groups. But hiding in the bush could hardly provide enough safety, Charles says – and continuing with his work as a farmer was impossible. "When the conflict grows intense resulting in lack of food, no access to our farms and no medical services, all we can do is flee," he explains.

Getting out of the embattled country was difficult. Charles can only walk with the aid of crutches because of a polio infection as a boy. This impairment makes him easy prey for marauding militia that assault civilians. But the family managed to cross the border to Uganda. Charles is thankful that they are now safe and plans to stay as long as South Sudan's security situation remains shaky.

FEW CHOICES

Maliko Hellen of the International Rescue Committee in Northern Uganda helps refugees like Charles to survive and recover from the shock. She is glad that many of her clients did not stay too long in South Sudan's bushes, playing a hide-and-seek game with the armed groups. "Many refugees tell me that they actually fled before the war reached their villages. Knowing the volatile security situation, they anticipated the worst-case scenario and left before it came to this." Hellen adds that those who stayed behind did not have many choices to make – either join the forces that overran their villages or be attacked and even risk being killed.

According to the findings of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, nearly 400,000 deaths in South Sudan between December 2013 and September 2018 were related to the crisis. Therefore, fleeing the country is a logical choice.

It was the choice of 56-year-old Vicky Nyoka too: she had survived crossfire between government and opposition forces and did "not want to take chances anymore". Nyoka, a widow, fled South Sudan on foot in December 2016, taking along six of her own children plus three others whom she picked up along the way. They had been separated from their parents while fleeing and had lost hope of seeing their relatives again. In 2017, one of the three committed suicide.

Nyoka remembers that once she saw the blue and white UNHCR (UN Refugee Agency) tents across the border in Uganda, she knew her horrendous journey was over and a better life was on the horizon. "There is freedom in Uganda. Other countries keep refugees in enclosures like animals," she says.

Thijs Van Laer of the International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI) says it makes "a lot of sense" for people like Charles and Nyoka to choose Uganda over the other neighbouring countries. "Number one is the proximity. But the fact that refugees here in Uganda have relative freedoms and receive support from the UNHCR and NGOs is of course another reason."

The 2006 Refugee Act and the 2010 Refugee Regulations of Uganda grant protection and freedom to refugees as well as property rights, freedom of movement, the right to work and the provision of services. According to the World Bank and UNHCR, these provisions offer the opportunity to refugees to establish their own livelihoods and some level of self-reliance.

MISSING SAFETY

Eujin Byun, who works at the Juba Office of the UNHCR, claims that the conflict in South Sudan has generally subsided. However, the "spontaneous conflicts" in some parts of the country "are concerning", she adds, and deter refugees from returning home. "One important reason why they fled is insecurity. South Sudanese refugees in various countries want assurance as far as security is concerned, otherwise they don't feel safe enough to return." Therefore, it might take them long to "come to terms with the narrative of repatriation," Byun maintains.

She fears that even more South Sudanese could flee to Uganda if normalcy does not return soon. "The problem of food security is getting more and more serious. If farmers cannot cultivate on time because they have to hide in the bush, they cannot harvest. Therefore, they will have no choice but to find food in the neighbouring countries." About 80 % of South Sudan's population lives in rural areas in the south of the country, in the Equatorias. Most households depend entirely on low-input, low-output subsistence agriculture.

Even though major parties to the conflict signed a peace deal in 2018, there are still some conflicting armed groups in South Sudan. The violence still poses danger to civilians. Until this calms down, refugees are afraid to return, and more will probably come.

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Deciding whether to migrate and where to go

Climate-induced migration has been a focus of political and public discussion for quite some time. Law professor Walter Kälin has campaigned for years to get it onto the international agenda – first through the Nansen Initiative and now through the Platform on Disaster Displacement. In an interview he explains what challenges exist and what needs to be done.

Walter Kälin interviewed by Sabine Balk

Are climate refugees recognised as such?
No, they are not. Changes in climate are not acknowledged as reasons to flee and seek refuge, at least not in international law. But the issue figures prominently in the new UN Global Compact for Migration because climate change and natural disasters are recognised as a cause of migration. References are found, for example, in objectives 2 and 5. However, the term climate refugee is heard less and less in the international political and legal discourse. The term used now is disaster displacement.

Why is that so?
There is a growing awareness that climate change is generally not the sole cause of migration, and that refugee movements are always multi-causal. In many cases, it is also very difficult to show the link between a particular weather event and global warming. There are occasional instances where scientists can establish a clear connection but that is the exception, not the rule. Migration can also be triggered by geophysical events, such as the earthquakes that hit Haiti in 2010 and Nepal in 2015. In both cases, large numbers of affected people fled across borders, but such incidents cannot be captured by the notion of climate refugees.

What about people who abandon their homes because of gradual environmental changes such as droughts or rising soil salinity?
Sudden events and gradual changes are generally interconnected. Take Somalia, for instance. After several years of recurrent drought, the situation changed within a few months and, in combination with difficult economic conditions as well as the continuing military violence in parts of the country, food insecurity turned into famine and thus a disaster that triggered massive internal and cross-border displacement. Interactions between sudden and gradual natural events can also be seen in the low-lying island states at risk in the South Pacific and elsewhere. While coastlines are slowly eroded by rising sea levels, soil and groundwater salinity is increased by storm surges. Many islands today experience extreme weather events that are more powerful and more frequent than in the past. All of which can make islands uninhabitable and force their populations to seek refuge elsewhere.

How does the Platform on Disaster Displacement (see Platform article in D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2017/04, focus section) aim to resolve these problems?
We advocate three forms of intervention:

- Helping people stay where they are by improving climate-change adaptation and disaster-risk reduction, especially in areas or communities at increased risk of displacement.
- Facilitating regular migration or planned relocation, which means helping people move out of harm's way before a disaster strikes.
- Where these measures fail or are insufficient, action needs to be taken to protect people who have been displaced. This applies equally to people who are internally displaced and people who seek refuge across borders.

This three-pronged concept has been recognised and enshrined in the 2018 Global

Protecting people displaced by disasters

The Platform on Disaster Displacement is a state-led initiative that works to protect people displaced by the impacts of climate change and natural disasters. Its mission is to carry forward the work of the Nansen Initiative established in 2011/12, which developed a Protection Agenda for Disaster-Induced Cross-Border Displacement on the basis of regional consultations. That agenda was endorsed in 2015 by 109 states. The Platform on Disaster Displacement was launched at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit by Germany's then Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (see article by Sabine Balk in D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2017/4, Focus section). The chairmanship went first to Germany, then passed to Bangladesh. The next chair will be France. The Platform's objective is to integrate the Protection Agenda in international processes. It has significantly helped to get the issue of climate change and disaster-induced displacement recognised in the UN Global Compact on Migration, the Sendai Action Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Paris climate-change talks. A resolution was passed in Paris to create a Task Force on Climate Change and Displacement, in which the Platform is involved. At a regional level, the Platform is mainly active in Latin America, East Africa and the South Pacific. It is largely supported by Germany. (wk)

LINK
Platform on Disaster Displacement:
https://disasterdisplacement.org/

Fijians do not want to become refugees due to climate change. The government already has plans to relocate people from areas at risk.

Compact on Migration – a sign of important progress made on this issue over the past two years. We now have the right texts.

What plans are in place for relocation?

Fiji has its own internal relocation plans. International relocation is being considered in very few cases. Kiribati has purchased an area of higher ground on Fiji. This is a precedent in the context of climate change. The land could be used for resettlement purposes or it could be farmed to secure food supply – an increasingly difficult challenge as soil salinity rises. The discussion in the South Pacific focuses on creating migration opportunities enabling people to decide for themselves when and where they go before they are forced to move. Temporary migration opportunities as a way of strengthening resilience and thus helping people stay longer are also considered.

Can you give any concrete examples?

Yes, Australia and New Zealand have programmes specifically designed for Pacific Island states, allowing people to obtain a work visa for a number of months. The programmes also offer access to skill development programmes and support services to help people invest the money they earn back home so that their families and communities can cope better and stay where they are, at least for some more years or decades. I recently learnt about a village in Samoa where 20 to 25 young men per year leave to work in Australia. In the space of six months, they can earn seven times more there than they would earn at home in a year. That is a boon for the community. The money that comes back is invested, for example, in making homes storm-proof and establishing businesses.

Over the next three years, the Platform itself will be supported by the European Commission to engage in a project strengthening such programmes in conjunction with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and other partners in the Pacific. We need to think now of how temporary – and later also permanent – migration can be managed. We must not wait until people become refugees and a humanitarian problem. That message rings out loud and clear across the Pacific: people do not want to become refugees. They want to be able to leave in a controlled manner and not end up in a refugee camp.

What about Africa and the prospects of controlled migration there?

The situation is different in Africa. I mentioned Somalia a moment ago. East Africa suffers from regular droughts and flooding, and displacement is a regular occurrence. The causalities are complex because climate change and other environmental factors are often compounded by conflicts. The biggest challenge in East Africa is protecting internally displaced people. In 2017, for example, drought forced more than a million people in Somalia to abandon their villages or pastoralist way of life to avoid starvation. Most have been unable to return and still live in camps or irregular settlements on the outskirts of Somali cities. Considerable investment is needed to find long-term solutions for those people.

They were at least able to find refuge in their own country. Which was not the case in 2011/12 when Kenya, Ethiopia and other East African countries took in around 300,000 Somali refugees. They did so under the 1969 Refugee Convention of the Organisation of African Unity, which covers people who seek refuge beyond their country's borders. The Convention confers refugee status not only on those fleeing persecution and civil war, but can also be applied to victims of disasters, provided natural hazards cause a severe disruption to public order.

In West Africa there is a protocol on the free movement of people in the region of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Experience shows that it also benefits people who are deprived of a livelihood by drought or floods and find temporary work in a neighbouring country. There is even a kind of travel document for livestock. Many people can thus help themselves by migrating – which is why we hear much less about flight and long-term humanitarian problems in the region despite the fact that environmental migration certainly occurs there.

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LINK

UN, 2018: Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.
http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/73/195

Photo: Sean Sprague/Lineair

Hoping for a better future

Honduras has rarely received as much press attention as it has in recent months. The reason is not the large public protests against government corruption or the murders of human-rights activists. The media are covering the spectacle of caravans consisting of thousands of men, women and children heading out of Honduras. People band together to leave their country and head for the USA.

By Rita Trautmann and Dennis Muñoz

Migrant caravan from Honduras on a highway in El Salvador in January 2019. People try to get to the USA on foot.

The journey is long, and it follows one of the world's most dangerous migration routes. The hazards include assault, abduction, extortion and sudden disappearance. Drug cartels and youth gangs prey on the migrants. And the journey has an uncertain outcome. Shortly before their destination, the migrants face a very well-guarded border.

All this is well known in Honduras, but people set off anyway. "We are fleeing from poverty and because of the government," says a 35-year-old, "and we are also fleeing because of crime."

What is driving these people out of their country is mainly hopelessness. Honduras is one of the poorest countries in Latin America. In the past four years, the poverty rate has soared to almost 66 %. But that is only one of the many causes of this exodus. Others include a corrupt political system that serves the elites rather than the people, a failed security policy, a shortage of jobs and an economic policy focused on exploiting natural resources instead of on land reform.

Corruption spans all parties and extends to all sectors. In 2015, one of the biggest scandals was exposed: millions of lempira were diverted from the social-security system for use in election campaigns of the ruling political party. A wave of public protests followed after that became known.

UNCONVINCING MEASURES AGAINST CORRUPTION

Demands were made to create an anti-corruption commission similar to Guatemala's CICIG (Commissión Internacional contra la Impunidad en Guatemala – International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala). The government responded by establishing a "Mission to Support the Fight against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras" (MACCIH – Misión de Apoyo contra la Corrupción y la Impunidad en Honduras). Unlike the commission in Guatemala, which operates under the auspices of the UN, the MACCIH operates under the aegis of the Organization of American States (OAS).

The MACCIH is not allowed to conduct its own investigations, merely supporting the efforts of the Public Prosecutor's Office. Nonetheless, it has set some wheels in motion. The impact of its work can be gauged by the extent to which the MACCIH is obstructed and attacked by the government and the elites that back the government. Currently, the MACCIH's existence is at greater risk than ever before. The agreement between the government of Honduras and the OAS is due for renewal in autumn 2019. It obviously does not offer any comfort to Hondurans that the Guatemalan government has discontinued its cooperation with CICIG, forcing that commission to move abroad.

Officially, the government of Honduras takes no position on the work of the MACCIH. But state officials and deputies of the governing National Party (Partido Nacional de Honduras) have repeatedly issued statements suggesting that the end of the MACCIH is near. For example, the president of the Supreme Court recently said that he considers the mission's task to have been completed.

In fact, many of the cases raised last year will not be fully resolved by the end of 2019. This time span is too short to investigate the vast networks of sham companies, bogus organisations and parliamentarians who systematically fleece the state. Such networks are active in the health sector and in the Ministry of Agriculture and many other contexts.

In recent years, the government of President Juan Orlando Hernández has brought all state institutions under the control of the ruling party. The recent reforms of electoral laws lag far behind what is needed, amounting to merely cosmetic changes instead of the fundamental change needed to facilitate fair and transparent elections.

The crisis that followed the November 2017 elections showed that reform is urgently needed and how tired the people are of not being taken seriously. The government is trying hard to sell its policies as a success.

Photo: picture-alliance/AP Photo

But the electorate is neither convinced of its security measures nor of its economic programmes.

FAILED POLICY

The judicial system is failing too. One indicator is that many offenders go free: 94 % of murders remain unpunished. The share is worse – 97 % – for murders of women (femicide). The femicide rate is rising continuously. This is one reason why ever more women are leaving Honduras.

Asked why she is leaving, a woman named Joselyn points to poor security and the general lack of opportunities: "There's no work, and if anyone has work … What then? The wages aren't enough to pay the bills, and the mareros (editor's comment: youth gangs) take protection money out of those wages."

Only a small percentage of the approximately 4 million people who are capable of working actually has a job. The government focuses on producing raw materials and energy to the detriment of indigenous and rural communities. Almost 40 % of the workforce is employed in agriculture, with most working in subsistence farming. They are very poor, and their livelihoods are at risk.

Almost one third of the land has been awarded to companies through concessions. Many communities are resisting such projects. Those who object are being threatened and criminalised. The government has increasingly outlawed social protest; the freedom of civil society to act has been steadily restricted. In 2018 alone, more than 130 human-rights activists were charged, and more than 700 instances of threats were recorded by the non-governmental organisation COFADEH (Comité de Familiares de Detenidos-Desaparecidos en Honduras – Committee of relatives of detained and disappeared persons in Honduras).

The situation of many Hondurans is characterised by underemployment, casual labour and lack of security. In addition, almost 1 million young people between the ages of 12 and 30 neither work nor attend school or university (see article by Rita Trautmann in Debate section of D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2018/11). Many of those who do not wish to be recruited by youth gangs or to be a burden on their families seek their fortunes in the USA. The situation is appalling. There is reason to suspect that the government finds it economically advantageous to have a large number of people emigrating and sending remittances back home. Yet of the thousands of Hondurans fleeing their country since the end of 2018, only a small share will manage to build a new life in the USA.

Migration from Honduras to the USA has been going on for decades. What is new is the collective and thus visible exodus from the country. It clearly demonstrates to the world the failure of Honduras' government and its institutions.

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Climate of fear and violence

Alongside El Salvador and Guatemala, Honduras is part of the region known as the Northern Triangle. Of the world's regions that are not currently at war, the Northern Triangle is among the most dangerous. The main reason is drug-related crime. Security policy is a major concern for the governments in this region.

The strategy of Juan Orlando Hernández, the president of Honduras, is to respond militarily. Since 2013, he has created various specialised military units and a military police force. The conventional police has a reputation of lawlessness and is led by a special commission that has, for years, been subject to seemingly never-ending "cleansing process". The militarised police is increasingly becoming dominant. This policy has serious budgetary consequences. From 2011 to 2017, spending on security and defence increased by 112 %. In 2018 alone, more than $ 6.6 million was spent on purchasing weapons, ammunition and equipment for the military. The strategy has been in place for five years, and according to official statistics, the murder rate has gone down.

However, the murder rate is only the tip of the iceberg. It is only of limited significance in terms of assessing the general security situation. Honduras is a transit country for drugs that are trafficked from Colombia to the USA. Drug cartels have ties to the economic elite and the government of Honduras. Therefore, no effective action is being taken against drug-related crime.

A general climate of violence and fear affects many people. The number of massacres has increased. Attacks on small businesses are common, and so is attempted extortion. Things are especially tough in the transport sector. Generally speaking, no one in Honduras is safe from demands for protection-money. (rt/dm)

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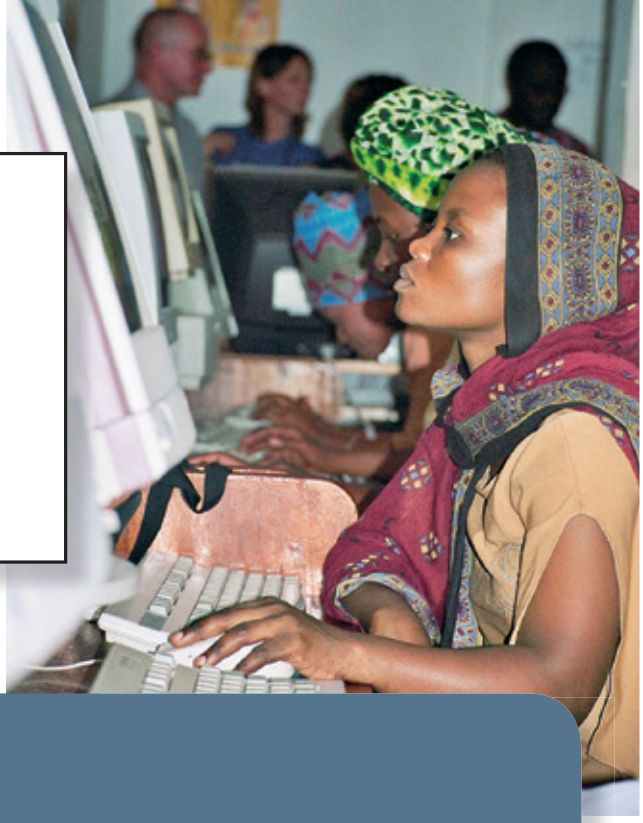

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