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Expert panel: How Germany can become climate neutral

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How activists in the Arab region fight discrimination

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Focus: Digital trends

Title: The fastest computer in Africa in 2016 at the Centre for High Performance Computing (CHPC) in Cape Town, South Africa.
Photo: picture alliance / dpa / Nic Bothma

FOCUS

Digital trends

Africa is catching up

Digitalisation is progressing in Africa. Despite a lot of constraints like poor infrastructure and funding, a new generation of tech entrepreneurs is pressing ahead. One of them is Eyram Tawia, co-founder and CEO of Leti Arts, one of the first companies developing computer games in sub-Saharan Africa. He shared his insights with D+C/E+Z`s Sabine Balk. **PAGE 23**

West Africa's Silicon Valley

The Otigba Computer Village in Lagos is not only in Nigeria of relevance as a marketplace for ICT products and services. Its employment opportunities are important, but most jobs are informal. Formalising the businesses, however, is easier said than done. And formalisation could have negative effects, as Johannes Paha, assistant professor at the Justus Liebig University in Gießen, and Lydia Wolter, who wrote her bachelor's thesis on the topic, explain. **PAGE 25**

New digital world order

With the "Digital Silk Road" China aims at a leading role in the new digital world order. Experts like Charles Martin-Shields, senior researcher at the German Development Institute in Bonn (Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik – DIE), are worried that China curtails the freedom in cyberspace. All players would have to ensure that the internet serves the common good.
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Struggling to be heard

Sri Lanka's suppression of free speech takes many forms, from violent attacks on political opponents of the regime to a draft law giving the government the final say on what is published. A handful of independent online start-ups are doing their best to be heard despite the heavy odds, reports Arjuna Ranawana who himself works for EconomyNext, one of those online media. **PAGE 30**

Transforming informal enterprises

Digitalisation can make a difference in the informal sector, boosting technology, creating new jobs and improving the work environment. A paper by GIZ, Germany's development agency, assesses opportunities. Rishikesh Thapa who recently earned his master's degree in International Relations and Cultural Diplomacy from the Furtwangen university summarized it. **PAGE 33**

Risks and opportunities

Society and the economy are being transformed from the industrial age, which was characterised by analogue technologies, to the age of knowledge and creativity, which is characterised by digital technologies and innovations. This transformation is taking place worldwide, but it differs from region to region.

Interestingly, developing and emerging countries are ahead in some technical innovations. One reason is that analogue processes are often so established in rich industrialised countries that the necessary transformation steps are slow. Examples are payment by mobile phone and using digital processes in administrations, called e-government. While in Germany people still mainly pay in cash or by direct debit from their bank accounts, in Kenya the mobile payment system M-Pesa has been established since 2007. The situation is similar in countries like China or India, where payment by mobile phone is growing rapidly.

Digitised processes have many advantages for both service providers and customers. They are often a convenient, fast and cheap alternative to analogue techniques and they enable easy access to many services that were previously inaccessible. However, there are also many dangers and uncertainties, as very few people know exactly what digital transformation means and which areas of life will be affected. Even experts cannot predict the development with precision.

Disadvantages include:

- danger of repression through state digital surveillance,
- loss of privacy through digital collection of all personal data and digital activities,
- loss of jobs through automation processes,
- dependence on technologies that may be vulnerable to disruption, misuse or criminal attack and
- being cut off from people who lack technical equipment and knowledge.

Many experts warn of these dangers and call on policymakers and society to be vigilant. The German Advisory Council on Global Change (WBGU), an expert panel appointed by Germany's Federal Government, also focuses on digitalisation. It warns that digitally driven growth involves excessive consumption of resources, thereby accelerating environmental damage and global warming. The Council says that digital transformation should occur in alignment with preserving natural resources.

It is therefore essential that each individual is made aware of the risks of digitalisation. Policymakers must address these risks and safeguard citizens from them. Digitalisation should benefit everyone, not only those who promote it. This means that digital transformation must take place according to certain rules.

This requirement applies equally to rich and poor countries, although rich countries have an obligation to support developing countries and emerging markets and provide the necessary know-how. For this effort to succeed, people – whether citizens, policymakers or entrepreneurs – must first understand what digitalisation means and how it can be used. This should be taught to children from primary school onwards.

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.

SABINE BALK
is a member of the editorial team of D+C Development and Cooperation / E+Z Entwicklung und Zusammenarbeit.
euz.editor@dandc.eu

Magazine

Fight against racism

Racism exists in the Arab world too. People with dark skin are discriminated against and often see their rights curtailed. Activists have had enough of such treatment and are starting to rise up. The greatest progress has been made in Tunisia, reports Beirut-based journalist Mona Naggar.

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No interest in the common good

Authors who deal with racism typically write about the suffering of the targeted community. Heather McGhee, by contrast, considers wider impacts in her book "The sum of us". She argues convincingly that the USA's white majority pays a high price for the nation's systemic racism. Hans Dembowski, D+C/E+Z´s editor in chief presents her theses.

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Debate

Crisis in Ethiopia intensifies

The conflict in northern Ethiopia continues to escalate in a vicious circle of mutual mistrust and violence. The unrest is spreading to other regions of the country and other segments of the population. Interventions by external parties have so far only made the situation worse, explains Markus Rudolf, senior researcher at the Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC).

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Photos: picture-alliance/dpa/Wael Hamzeh; picture-alliance/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Concentrated solar power can be used to produce eco-friendly hydrogen, which can then be traded internationally: Morocco's Noor III was installed in Quarzazate with financial support from Germany's KFW development bank.

CLIMATE CRISIS

Germany's path to net-zero emissions

While no one can say how exactly voters will decide in Germany's general election in September, we know quite precisely what the next Federal Government must do in the next four years for the country to achieve net-zero emissions by 2045. The agenda is spelled out in a recent high-profile publication.

By Hans Dembowski

The German Council for Sustainable Development (Rat für Nachhaltige Entwicklung), an institution that gives advice to the Federal Government, and Leopoldina, Germany's National Academy of Sciences, joined forces for this purpose. Their joint paper "Klimaneutralität" ("Climate neutrality") was launched in early June. An English translation will be made available soon.

The current Federal Government recently passed a law according to which net-zero emissions must be German reality by 2045. The Constitutional Court had forced it to step up its ambition. Now, Leopoldina and the Sustainability Council spell out how that can be done. The core messages are that "the scarcest resource is time" and that "systemic action" is urgently needed accordingly. Systemic action means crosscutting measures in all economic sectors and fields of policy-making as well as all levels of government – from the supranational European Union to small municipalities.

The publication's point is that fast decarbonisation is possible, but only if certain choices are made soon. For example, there simply is no time to develop new technologies. The transformation must be achieved with options available today. In the energy sector, that basically means wind power and photovoltaic in Germany. Hydrogen can be produced to store energy, but it is only green if it is produced with renewables. Given that the capacity for wind power and photovoltaic in Germany are too limited to power manufacturing, it will be necessary to import green hydrogen from abroad. This need, in turn, has implications for foreign relations, trade policy and development cooperation.

The authors do a very good job of showing that the range of policy-actions choices for achieving climate neutrality in 25 years is quite narrow. They argue that humankind needs a circular economy which does not depend on ever-increasing extraction of natural resources, but reuses and recycles metals and minerals. Getting there requires legislation in the fields of waste management, commodities markets, industrial licencing and international trade. Tax law must set appropriate incentives moreover. These are areas policymakers have considered separately. However, coherent legislation is not enough, according to Leopoldina and the Sustainability Council, it must also be technically sound and implemented competently. On top of all that, new infrastructure is needed, some of which will have to be built and managed by state agencies.

As the experts acknowledge, government action alone cannot achieve the change needed. The strategy they propose therefore includes awareness raising and inviting people to become pioneers of the transformation, which must be balanced fairly so no community feels left behind. At the same

Photo: picture-alliance/photo shot

time, the European Green Deal must be implemented stringently in Germany.

The authors further insist that:

- private capital must be mobilised large-scale for the transformation,
- about 50% of industrial facilities in Germany require reinvestment in the next decade, and it must be geared to sustainability, and
- transport, buildings and land use must undergo fundamental change.

This agenda is daunting, as its authors concede. It is not a wish list of romantic environmentalists, however, it is what Germany's National Academy of Sciences and the Sustainabilty Council consider necessary. They insist, moreover, the price of non-action would exceed the transformation costs due to massive damage and disruption. Grasping eco-friendly business opportunities, moreover, can safeguard Germany's industrial competitiveness.

PRINCIPLES FOR DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Considerations articulated by the top leaders of the German Development Institute in May point in a similar direction. Anna-Katharina Hornidge (director) and Imme Scholz (her deputy), spelled out several guidelines on the Institute's website. They insist that development policy must be geared to sustainability and promote every human being's right to self-determination. These principles are enshrined in the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals and must guide German development policy accordingly.

The two scholars write that the perspective must be global. Moreover, development is not an automatic consequence of economic growth. They speak of a cross-scalar, multi-sectoral mandate that spans policy fields at national and international levels. Moreover, the protection and provision of global public goods is said to be essential. It will depend on planetary perspectives as well as dialogue with local communities. Accordingly, the two authors want Germany's international development policy to focus on multilateral cooperation in order to shape multilateral standards and regulations.

It is not a coincidence that these principles fit in well with the paper published by Leopoldina and the Sustainability Council. Both papers are reality based, after all. Moreover, Imme Scholz is not only the deputy leader of the German Development Institute, but also the vice chair of the Sustainability Council (full disclosure: she is also a member of D+C/E+Z's advisory board).

LINKS

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HANS DEMBOWSKI
is editor in chief of D+C Development and Cooperation / E+Z Entwicklung und Zusammenarbeit.
euz.editor@dandc.eu

Female migrant domestic workers demonstrating against exploitation and discrimination in Beirut 2015.

ARAB REGION

Disparaged and discriminated against

Racism exists in the Arab world. People with dark skin are discriminated against and often see their rights curtailed. Activists have had enough of such treatment and are starting to rise up. The greatest progress has been made in Tunisia.

By Mona Naggar

Language, the mirror of daily life, is revealing. In standard Arabic as well as in various dialects, there are a number of racist expressions for people with dark skin. They are degrading and dehumanising because they emphasise the superiority of people with white skin. Some of these expressions can be traced back to when the Islamic and Arab world still practised slavery and were involved in the slave trade.

These expressions have outlasted slavery and even become set phrases and figures of speech that are used daily. Black is often synonymous with a bad omen in these sayings. The colours black and white are also used as opposites to stand for good or evil, with reference to the selection of a life partner, for example, or descriptions of feelings or experiences.

Nevertheless, there are signs of change: the Black Lives Matter movement has attracted much attention in Arab countries. First, there was widespread coverage in local and regional media and talk shows, as well as demonstrations of solidarity and online campaigns in support of the protests, especially in the US. Second, the movement encouraged people in the Arab region to take a closer look at racism.

Zainab Mariam Kanaan understands these matter. The journalist is Lebanese, but her mother is from Sierra Leone. In June 2020, at the peak of the Black Lives Matter protests, she published an account of her personal experiences on her Facebook page, expressing solidarity with the protests in the USA and describing discrimination she has been facing since she was a child. Kanaan wrote that she was stunned to observe Lebanese expressing sympathy with Black people in the US, while doing nothing to address racism at home.

The young woman described how she was – and continues to be – confronted with debasement, insults and stereotypes at school, at university, in taxis – and even

Photo: picture-alliance/dpa/Wael Hamzeh

among the extended family. Stereotypes were even perpetuated in religious teaching. The famous story of Bilal, for example, is ambivalent. The first person to call people to their prayers in Islamic history, was from Ethiopia. This fact is used to prove Islam's antiracist stance. On the other hand, descriptions of Bilal use racist terms.

During her adolescence, experiences like this made Kanaan feel self-hatred and the relationship with her mother became difficult. However, she acknowledges that, thanks to her Lebanese citizenship, she is better off than other people exposed to Lebanese racism. In particular, migrant workers from South Asia suffer. The kafala (sponsorship) system means that many migrants live in slavery-like conditions. They are tied to a Lebanese citizen who is called their "sponsor", but can actually dictate their wages and working conditions. Moreover, sponsors can restrict migrants' freedom of movement. This kafala system is in force in many countries of the Arab Gulf (see my article in the Focus section of D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2017/10).

Sana Al Fazani is from Libya's southern region. Her experiences there resembles those made by Kanaan in Lebanon. She reports that she is not taken seriously in conversation because of her skin colour, and she complains about being bullied at the university. The country's elites are mostly white, she points out.

Activists in the region agree that while people are prone to condemn racism in western countries, they tend to be ignorant of the phenomenon in their own world region. Mohamad Azmi, the director of the Egyptian Monitoring Centre on Racism, published the results of an investigation in 2018. Together with co-authors, he examined Egyptian media, ranging from news reports to talk shows and movies. According to their findings, half of the films produced in Egypt between 2007 and 2017 disparaged or made fun of people with dark skins or Upper Egyptian dialects. People from Upper Egypt were given stereotypical roles as janitors or servants. Racist language and hate speech, moreover, was used in about one third of the talk shows and news reports that were produced between 2011 and 2016 and dealt with topics from Upper Egypt.

According to the study, the number of media jobs held by people with dark skin is vanishingly small. Therefore, one of the changes Mohamad Azmi calls for is adequate representation of people with dark skin in the media. Furthermore, he wants the media to implement ethical principles and legislators to finally pass an anti-racism law.

Arabic expressions and figures of speech reveal other regional and local racist phenomena in Arab countries. For example, they denigrate Bedouins, women and Kurds in comparison with Arab men. They also disparage people based on their faith, sexual orientation or disability. The list is long.

Tentative progress is being made, however. Tunisia is the first Arab country to have passed an anti-racism law. An intense discussion about racism emerged there after the 2011 revolution. It resulted from a vibrant civil society making use of the freedom of expression. In October 2018, the Tunisian Parliament passed a law that defined racism and made racist statements and deeds punishable by law.

Passing a law, however, is not enough. Khawla Ksiksi, the co-founder of "The Voices of Tunisian Black Women", says the law only exists on paper, since victims of discrimination and racist attacks don't have the means to take lengthy and costly legal action against perpetrators. According to her, there is still not enough political will to implement the national strategy that the law envisions. Ksiksi is a lawyer and says she dreams of seeing pictures of Black children in textbooks and Black Tunisians assume top posts in the government and the courts.

MONA NAGGAR
is an independent journalist from Beirut.
mona.naggar@googlemail.com

Slave-like conditions persist until today

All the countries in the Arab League have ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD). Nevertheless, only Tunisia has passed legislation that makes racism and discrimination punishable by law.

In some Arab countries, laws allowed slavery to persist well into the 20th century. All of these were gradually repealed – in Saudi Arabia and Yemen in 1962 and finally in Mauritania in 1980. Nonetheless, slave-like conditions still endure for about 10 to 20 percent of the population of Mauretania.

In the Arabic Gulf states and Lebanon, the kafala system (a sponsorship system that labourers and domestic workers from South Asia and some African countries are subject to) creates racist and discriminatory structures. MN

Patrice Gaudensio is a refugee artist from South Sudan who lives in Egypt. He says he has experienced racism and discrimination several times in Cairo streets.

Photo: picture-alliance/ASSOCIATED PRESS/Maya Alleruzzo

BODILY AUTONOMY

Women's rights are human rights

Worldwide, women enjoy only 75 % the legal rights of men, say the authors of this year's report from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The lives of millions of women are determined by others; their bodies are not their own.

By Dagmar Wolf

Just over half of women and girls in middle- and low-income countries have the right to decide for themselves whether they have sex, use contraception or seek medical care. In some sub-Saharan countries, including Mali, Niger and Senegal, the figure is even below 10 %. These and other findings are included in the latest UNFPA State of the World Population Report.

The reasons that so many women are deprived of the right to decide for themselves are seen to reside in patriarchal societies and norms. They allow men, as head of the family, to subjugate women. Patriarchal practices include forced marriage, child marriage, dowry, widow inheritance or marrying rape victims to their rapist. Women are thus reduced to victims and even become tradable commodities. UNFPA also mentions female genital mutilation as part of an overarching patriarchal order designed to control sexual and reproductive rights.

UNFPA points out that the situation for many women and girls is even worse in crises like the current Covid-19 pandemic. When schools are closed, girls are at greater risk of sexual violence. Because of lockdown restrictions and austerity measures in countries with high levels of debt, many sexual and reproductive health services are not delivered. In countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria and Sudan, where marriage is seen as a way of protecting girls from the negative economic consequences of the pandemic, female genital mutilation is being performed increasingly to ensure premarital virginity.

The rights to bodily autonomy and integrity are recognised in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Many countries have laws to protect women and children. Nonetheless, women and girls are denied their rights. To some extent, plural legal systems are to blame. They let traditional and modern norms coexist in spite of their incompatibility.

Securing bodily autonomy and equality for women requires changes in norms and behaviour, the report says. Men need to be brought on board. They have to reject outdated patterns of privilege and dominance. Moreover, they must do their fair share of unpaid care work. At present, this burden rests on women and girls, denying them education and equal opportunities. UNFPA wants law enforcement to:

- take account of existing laws,
- uphold women's rights and
- question their own biases.

UNFPA also states that there are some positive trends. In Rwanda and Uganda, for example, the report notes an increase in the percentage of women able to make autonomous decisions about health, contraception and sex. In Uganda, the upturn is a significant 12.3 %. However, a great deal more progress is needed to achieve gender equality, the UN's fifth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG). UNFPA therefore calls for:

- an end to impunity for sexualised violence (from single violations to mass rape as a weapon of war),
- compulsory comprehensive sexuality education in schools,
- more progress on equal opportunities for high-quality education and decent work,
- promotion of gender-sensitive attitudes among men and boys,
- an end to discrimination against women in civil services, legislatures and leadership positions,
- affordable quality health care and affordable access to services such as child- and eldercare
- support and funding for women's groups and movements.

UNFPA also sees a duty for international development policy makers and humanitarian aid. In 2018, only four percent of the total development budget of the 30 largest donor countries was deployed to support programmes for gender equality and women's empowerment. That is not enough.

Child marriage is a common phenomenon in poor countries: A 13-year-old girl from Mali with her daughter.

Photo: Jürgen Bätz/picture-alliance/dpa

LINK

UNFPA, 2021: My body is my own. Claiming the right to autonomy and self-determination. ***https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/SoWP2021_Report_-_EN_web.3.21_0.pdf***

DAGMAR WOLF
is the editorial assistant at D+C Development and Cooperation / E+Z Entwicklung und Zusammenarbeit.
euz.editor@dandc.eu

Diversity has increased and so have tuition fees: University of California, Berkeley.

DIVERSITY

Why racist attitudes lead to neglection of common good

Authors who deal with racism typically write about the suffering of the targeted community. Heather McGhee, by contrast, considers wider impacts in her book "The sum of us". She argues convincingly that the USA's white majority pays a high price for the nation's systemic racism.

By Hans Dembowski

The subtitle is programmatic: "What racism costs everyone and how we can prosper together". The core argument is that a society that marginalises large population groups fails to develop a healthy understanding of the common good. As a result, public infrastructures and social services stay inadequate. Those, who are wealthy enough to buy everything they need, are not affected much, but for the vast majority life is harder because essential things like health care, formal education or transport become very expensive. In the USA, not only Black people are denied things that would make their lives easier and better. The white majority's opportunities are restricted too (also see my contribution in the Focus section of D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2021/08).

Public swimming pools are an example. Up to the 1960s, McGhee reports, American cities used to compete with one another, building bigger and better facilities. Local communities were proud of their pools, but access was restricted to the white majority. Things changed when the civil-rights movement demanded desegregation, and law-courts ruled in their favour. McGhee tells the story of how local governments began closing the public pools. That seem preferable to sharing them with people of darker skin colour. In Montgomery, Alabama, McGhee writes, all public parks were shut down, including the zoo, with all animals being sold or killed. Where previously only the Black population had been excluded, nobody had access anymore.

McGhee is a former president of the New York City based think tank Demos, which specialises in social policies and inequality. She grew up in a Black neighbourhood of Chicago. The research for this book included long interviews with people across the nation. The guiding question was: "Why can't we have nice things?" The point is that public infrastructures and services tend to be much better in other advanced nations than in the USA. It became increasingly clear to McGhee, that systemic racism is the underlying reason.

UNINTENDED SIDE EFFECTS

After the civil-rights movement, conservative policymakers became very successful in making the white majority believe that social-protection systems basically serve a lazy and undeserving minority, so government spending should be minimised. The author does an excellent job of showing how the results of such thinking permeate American society. Unemployment benefits are comparatively skimpy in the USA, so losing a job means hardship for most people. Masses of people still lack a health insurance, and very many of them are white. Obamacare has made a difference, but the

Photo: Ben Margot/picture-alliance/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Protest against racism in New York in July 2021.

share of those without access to health care when they need is still bigger than it typically is in advanced nations.

Government-run schools are another example. They are funded with locally-raised taxes, so prosperous white neighbourhoods have comparatively good schools. Per child and year, McGhee writes, they spend considerably more than predominantly non-white schools in poorer districts. Prosperous school districts tend to have very restrictive borders and hardly admit anyone from outside. Poorer districts, by contrast, cater to larger areas. Middle-class people who cannot afford to live in the nicest neighbourhoods are thus excluded from the best public schools. As a result, many families – including people of colour, to some extent – opt for more expensive private schools.

Housing and real-estate markets are marked by systemic racism too. Aspiring Black families bought expensive homes in good middle-class neighbourhoods, with the unintended side-effect of real-estate prices beginning to stagnate or even fall in those areas. Their white neighbours' personal wealth was thus diminished, and the negative feedback loop meant that Black people's opportunities for accumulating wealth stayed quite limited. Homeownership normally serves a dual purpose: families live there and their home becomes more valuable. For Black families, that typically did not work out. What happened instead was that white neighbours began to leave, and more Black people moved in. For white families buying a home typically was a much better financial investment than for families of colour. Nonetheless, conservatives read white families' greater prosperity as the result not of better opportunities, but of better choices in life.

IMPERSONAL MARKET FORCES

McGhee uses examples like this to prove that racism is about much more than a personal dislike of people with a different skin colour. In the real-estate sector, impersonal market dynamics of supply and demand determine prices. How individuals feel about interacting with people who are not exactly like themselves is of minor relevance. Indeed, white parents who worried about the value of their home and the quality of their children's education saw strong incentives to leave even if they opposed racism themselves.

The author points out that racism ultimately only serves the most prosperous elite. Middle-class people may not like to pay taxes, but they depend on public services that are provided with tax money. Policies that emphasise low taxes and minimise public spending hurt the poorest most, but they also deprive others of the ladders they would need for upward mobility. To the extent that racism helps to divide the middle classes, middle-class interests become neglected in political life.

According to McGhee, the US government did an excellent job of building a large middle class from the 1930s to the 1960s, as long as Black people stayed excluded. When social movements made segregation unacceptable in the 1960s, government policies began to shift towards deregulation and reduced public spending. One result was that higher education became very expensive. The system of state universities had originally been created to expand opportunities for "the people", excluding people of colour. As the system became more racially diverse, however, public spending was cut and tuition fees increased. Young people of all skin colours are now denied opportunity accordingly, and their demands for "free college" are becoming more popular.

VOTER SUPPRESSION

The history of racist voter suppression in the USA is long of course. Current efforts once again target Black communities, as McGhee points out, but they affect less advantaged white people as well. If, for example, a driver's license is required as a voter ID, poor people who cannot afford one, are excluded.

If a society, moreover, pays little attention to the public good, it will do less to prevent environmental pollution. In many cases, after all, prosperous people will not feel personally affected by local pollution, and less fortunate people who do suffer the consequences lack a say in public life. In McGhee's eyes, even the climate denial of Republicans in recent decades can be traced back to divisive politics. Policymakers who are uninterested in the public good, after all, are unlikely to show any concern for the global commons.

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HANS DEMBOWSKI
is editor in chief of D+C Development and Cooperation / E+Z Entwicklung und Zusammenarbeit.
euz.editor@dandc.eu

Photo: picture-alliance

A new water pipeline will improve lives in Tanzanian village in measurable ways.

AID EFFECTIVENESS

Digital tools are key for evaluation purposes

Since October 2019, Jochen Kluve has been leading the evaluation department of KfW Development Bank. In our interview, he elaborated goals, methods and results.

Jochen Kluve interviewed by Hans Dembowski

What are your innovations in regard to evaluations?

The way we work keeps evolving continuously. We focus on:

- ex-post assessments of completed development projects,
- data-based impact measurement of ongoing projects and
- institutional learning.

The first task has been our core duty for more than 20 years, and the other two tasks have been dealt with sporadically. We are now focusing more on them.

What exactly is data-based impact measurement of ongoing projects?

Well, a good example is a water pipeline currently being built in Tanzania. Within a range of 24 kilometres, villages can be connected to it. If they are farther away, that is not feasible. This setting makes it possible to compare villages and measure impacts. Our evaluators interview people who get water from the pipeline as well as people who do not, allowing us to measure precisely how the new infrastructure is changing lives. We collect quantitative data related to water consumption, regarding the prevalence of diarrhoea, for example. It is challenging to implement this kind of rigorous impact evaluation, but it helps improve the project, so it is worthwhile. However, we can only afford to support a limited number of projects this way. In the next few years, we plan to evaluate 10 to 20 projects in real time.

Is digitalisation changing how you work?

Yes, it is the key to state-of-the-art evaluations. Consider geodata on afforestation programmes, for example. In cooperation with the French development bank Agence Française de Développement, we have launched MapMe, an open source project designed to build databases concerning conservation areas. Moreover, mobile telephony is making it easier to collect data in developing countries and transfer the information internationally. These things help us in developing countries. At the same time, digital innovations contribute to more institutional learning within KfW development bank. For example, we have coded and programmed an app that gives users interactive

Photo: KfW Bankengruppe/Andrea Hölke

access to the full contents of all evaluation reports in the bank's archives. Relevant knowledge can thus be found fast. You enter a few search terms and immediately get the evaluation results that you need – ranging from general lessons learnt to detailed analyses. This tool is extremely useful. Creating the app was a major effort and took a year, and from October on, all KfW staff members can use it.

Will the public get access too?
Yes, we plan to make that happen in the not too distant future, but we want to make sure everyone in the bank has full access first. Of course, we use digital technology for our public outreach. Our most recent comprehensive evaluation report, which documents the results of the past two years, is available in a print edition as well as in a digital version. The latter includes videos and interactive maps.

What is the comprehensive report's core insight?
It includes a host of details, but the first, overarching message is our success rate. Translated into school grades ranging from 1, that is, very good, to 6, 86 % of KfW projects would have earned a 3, which is the German equivalent of the American C. This success rate does not mean that there aren't any weak points. The average grade was 2.8, and it varies from sector to sector. The average grade for water projects was 3.1.

In my eyes, your success rate is neither surprising nor convincing. International development agencies – including the World Bank, the GIZ and the KfW – typically report success rates of about 80 %, and that looks dubious to observers.
I can only speak for KfW. We have been applying the international evaluation standards defined by the OECD-DAC for two decades, we give assignments to independent experts, we are diligent in regard to methods and we publish all our results. The way we work is transparent and the methods are state-of-the-art.

And yet there is scepticism. A colleague who has spent many years working for the World Bank and the GIZ once told me that success rates of around 80 % are systemically important. They are high enough to confirm an agency's legitimacy, but low enough to admit some cases of failure.
I am a scholar, and we scientists welcome criticism and scepticism. That said, it does

Limiting economic Corona damage

The KfW Development Bank's evaluation report for 2019/20 addresses Covid-19, among other issues. The global health crisis is known to have devastating economic effects, and low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) are particularly hard hit.

The evaluation report makes suggestions on how to counteract this economic trend, also drawing on World Bank experience. According to the report, three types of economic and social policy measures make sense:

- With liquidity injections and more generous loans, companies that are suffering from the pandemic and the lockdown can be supported.
- To help the unemployed and their families, social assistance via cash transfers is useful. Where social safety nets are still weak, they need to be expanded. In addition, government agencies can award contracts to create and secure jobs. However, such measures must be linked to compliance with sanitation measures.
- Thirdly, to further strengthen the resilience of the economy, investments should be made in the education and training of the labour force. In the medium term, this serves both the income of the employees and the productivity of the enterprises.

Typically, KfW evaluates completed projects (see interview with Jochen Kluve). However, the report also addresses new methodological concepts. These include, for example, the so-called Rigorous Impact Evaluation (RIE), which is intended to prove causal relationships, i.e. to check whether a project actually triggers the desired impact.

RIGOROUS EVALUATION

RIE is modelled on pharmaceutical research. Those who study the effectiveness of a drug need a control group that is not administered the drug in order to check whether the effects achieved in the intervention group are actually due to the drug. Participants in both groups should be as similar as possible so that the novel drug is actually the decisive variable. This is achieved by randomisation, i.e. the random assignment of test participants to each experimental group.

The RIE transfers this approach in part to the evaluation of development policies. For this, economist Esther Duflo and her colleagues Abhijit Banerjee and Michael Kremer received the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2019. KfW also evaluates projects using RIE methods. One example is a project in Burkina Faso that aims to reduce malnutrition among young children by providing their mothers with transfer payments and education in hygiene, health and nutrition.

Over three years, mothers of children between one and a half and two years old receive the cash transfers and educational opportunities, while a control group of mothers of children between two and two and a half years old do not. At the end of the period, the calorie intake of the children in both groups could be compared with the calorie intake before the project started and with each other. One result could be that the calorie intake of the children in both groups has increased, but that the children who were part of the project have a higher calorie intake than the non-participants. This would prove the positive impact of the project. Data on the situation of the women and children and their environment collected before, during and after the project phase can also be used to determine the impact of the project on other factors, such as whether there is less domestic violence.

Maren van Treel

not make sense to cast general doubt on results. For debate to be constructive, you would have to point out what is supposedly wrong with our methods and explain why you do not trust conclusions. We are applying methods that are well-defined, universally recognised and transparent. If these methods yield a particular success rate, that rate cannot be allegedly wrong only because it coincides with the success rates of other institutions.

You need independence to do evaluation work. How does the KfW ensure that you are independent?

First of all, the head of the evaluation department is recruited from academia, and that was true of my predecessors as well. Second, I report directly to the board of the KfW Banking Group, so I'm not involved in the immediate operations of the Development Bank, the work of which I assess. Finally, my department determines what questions we find important and what projects we evaluate. Our results can be quite uncomfortable for the Development Bank, which is obviously the case when we find fault with a project. After all, someone is responsible for that project. However, we are not primarily focusing on success or failure. The tangible results of every single evaluation are what makes our work relevant.

Please give some examples.

Well, results show that supporting the financial sector works well when loans from KfW enable banks in partner countries to hand out credit to small and medium-sized enterprises. They also tell us that the more professional our partners' operations are, the more effective this approach becomes. The obvious implication is that our partner banks themselves require advice and support in places where the financial sector has not fully developed yet. In a similar way, we see that the KfW's policy-based lending is generally quite successful. KfW gives loans to government authorities so they can implement policies they have agreed with us. Our data show that performance improves the more intensive the exchange with partners, the more precisely goals are defined and the more accurately spelled-out the criteria are on which the payment of the next tranche hinges. Findings of this kind are of great practical relevance for the bank.

LINKS

KfW Development Bank: Evaluation Report 2019/2020.
https://www.kfw-entwicklungsbank.de/Bilder/Evaluierungsbericht-2021/Startseite/KfW-Evaluation-report_2019_2020.pdf
MapMe
https://mapme-initiative.org

JOCHEN KLUVE
is professor of economics at Berlin's Humboldt University and has been leading the evaluation department of KfW Development Bank since October 2019.
jochen.kluve@kfw.de
https://www.kfw-entwicklungsbank.de

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Afghan police officers in a poppy field in 2006.

WITHDRAWAL OF TROOPS

Stop blaming victims for western failure in Afghanistan

The western-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) has suffered defeat. Opinion pieces in various German media keep reiterating that it was a mistake to try to build a modern democracy in a society which is, the authors state, marked by "mediaeval traditions" and "tribal attitudes". This narrative is self-serving because it avoids even mentioning the serious flaws that marked a western intervention in Afghanistan. It is also condescending because it blames failure on the victims, the Afghan people. As editor in chief, Hans Dembowski has been observing the conflict for two decades and he now concedes that two crucial issues are still not well understood in western countries.

By Hans Dembowski

Any serious assessment of what happened in the past 20 years needs to take into account:

- that Islamist fundamentalism is not mediaeval, but essentially modern and
- that Afghanistan is not an isolated developing country, but actually very well integrated into the world market, though only in its illegal version of the global drug trade.

RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM

After 20 years of German troops deployment to Afghanistan, the German public should have a deeper understanding of Islam. Yes, it is true that the Taliban claim to be promoting Islam in its true form, but most Muslims around the world, especially those with a deeper understanding of theology, do not agree.

Sharia law can be interpreted in many different ways. Indeed, Muslim scholars have been debating the underlying principles for centuries and developed several different schools of thought. The Taliban version is an extremely sectarian interpretation. They want us to believe that it is the essence of Islam, but that is not true. I find it embarrassing that many Germans apparently still cannot tell fundamentalist propaganda from the rich traditions of a world religion.

Given that many people in the west still are largely ignorant, it's worth repeating once more that there are three different and mutually incompatible varieties of Islamist fundamentalism: The Shia regime in Tehran has very little in common with the Wahhabi fundamentalism promoted by Saudi Arabia, and the various offshoots of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood have a completely different history. All three varieties of political Islam only became internationally relevant in the 20th century (see my book review in Focus section of D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2019/10). They have been crowding out more tolerant and peaceful Sufi traditions throughout the Muslim world in recent decades.

Afghanistan's Taliban are basically inspired by Wahhabism, and their relations with Iran have never been friendly. The radical ideology was fostered in refugee camps in Pakistan. Back then, the Soviet Red Army was trying to bolster a communist government in Afghanistan, and the US government was eager to support what it called "freedom fighters" in the country. Saudi missionaries preached their version of fundamentalism in refugee camps in Pakistan, and Islamist rebels who returned to Afghanistan could rely on American support. The sad truth is that the USA contributed to the growth of the Taliban when they still seemed a convenient force in the Cold War against the Soviet Union.

Photo: Farahnaz Karimi/picture-alliance/dpa/dpaweb

After the defeat of the Red Army, civil war continued in Afghanistan, and in the late 90s the Taliban managed to control almost the entire country. By then, western attitudes to them had changed. They were no longer considered to be useful, and their rule was appallingly despotic.

After the terror attacks on New York and Washington on 11 September 2001, US President George W. Bush decided to invade Afghanistan. The idea was to make sure it would never again become a safe haven for Islamist terrorists. One implication was that western aid would have to help to build an Afghan democracy.

NATO and later the UN joined the US effort after US troops had conquered Kabul in late 2001. However, the US troops primarily focused on hunting down terrorists and fighting criminals. They did not pay much attention to civilian casualties, which caused serious resentment. The only Afghan institutions the international community really invested in were the army and the police. The judicial system and the civil service attracted rather little donor attention, and elections remained marred by controversies and increasingly low turnout.

In the remote rural areas of all developing countries, traditions which are passed on informally from generation to generation matter more than formal legislation. Typically, the traditional norms have religious connotation. Western agencies often struggled to tell traditional settings from Taliban fundamentalism, and that helped the extremists pose as the true representatives of both faith and people.

GLOBALLY TRADED COMMODITY

Illegal drugs were a serious problem right from the start. Afghanistan is the world's most important producer of opium, supplying about 90 % of the globally available commodity. During the civil war, opium money had kept various militias afloat, and of course the Taliban had benefited too.

There are no reliable statistics, because nobody documents precisely what happens on black markets. However, experts reckon that opium may have accounted for up to one third of gross national product in Afghanistan even in recent years (see Janet Kursawe in the Focus section of D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2018/12). Drug money not only helped the Taliban to keep going, others were involved in the business as well.

German journalists regularly bemoan corruption in Afghanistan, but the plain truth is that one should not expect anything else in a country where an illegal industry is so important. Those who invest in this business need to ensure their investments are safe. They bribe officeholders, but they also employ brutal thugs. Organised crime is inherently violent.

In some ways, Mafia gangs resemble informal militias. In Afghanistan, the distinction between militia and gang often does not make much sense, and former warlords still tend to be in command. Their power does not simply result from mediaeval traditions and tribal attitudes. It depends on export revenues to a considerable extent. As is true of Mafia gangs, it also depends on a perverse sense of security they project. In a civil war, people learn to rely on the protection of strongmen, no matter how appalling those strongmen are. It is only of secondary importance whether armed men belong to regular units or not, especially since the official security forces will often be affected by corruption.

Western governments knew what was going on all the time, but they had no strategy to thwart the drugs business. It was impossible to eradicate opium cultivation because:

- far too many livelihoods depend on it and
- far too many powerful players were involved in it.

A modern economy needs to be formalised, but an illegal industry cannot be formalised. Given that the drugs industry – which today also includes heroin processing, cannabis cultivation and crystal-meth labs – was so important, attempts to build a modern, truly democratic state could not succeed. The western public basically looked away, and policymakers did not come up with unconventional and innovative policies that might have turned opium money into legally earned money. Opiate addiction is a terrible curse, so legalisation is not a convincing option. Perhaps the international community should have simply bought most of the opium harvest at attractive prices and then destroyed it. That would have been expensive – but the New York Times estimates that the war cost the US government $2 trillion anyway. Buying the drug instead of destroying fields would at least not have alienated local people.

Three decades before President Bush declared his "war on terror", US President Richard Nixon had declared a "war on drugs". The idea was to free western societies of illegal drugs, which were treated not as a health problem but a law-and-order issue. The war on drugs has failed, and western countries are awash with various illegal substances.

Western countries are slowly and incrementally changing their approach to this issue. Prominent leaders including former Swiss President Ruth Dreyfus have called for more radical reforms with a focus on regulation rather than prohibition, but such advice has largely not been followed (see Eleonore von Bothmer in Focus section of D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2018/12).

The dysfunctional international prohibition of drugs has not reduced the demand for illegal substances. It has made demand stronger. The black market is most profitable – and it is undermining viable statehood in many places, including Colombia and Mexico, transit routes through the Sahara desert or slum areas of Rio de Janeiro and Los Angeles. There can be no rule of law where the livelihoods from masses of people depend on illegal drugs. That western governments shied away from this conundrum is an important reason why ISAF failed – and it did not help that they ignored lessons concerning rural power structures and traditions in strife-torn countries.

HANS DEMBOWSKI
is editor in chief of D+C Development and Cooperation / E+Z Entwicklung und Zusammenarbeit.
euz.editor@dandc.eu

Song of home

When Mahani Teave, a Chilean pianist originally from Easter Island, left home at the age of nine, she aimed for an international musical career. And she succeeded: After earning her music degree in mainland Chile at the age of 17 and continuing her training in the United States and Germany, Teave established herself as one of the most outstanding Latin American pianists of her generation.

But something was missing. Even at the best moments of her career in Europe, she thought of home. "I felt the weight of the island," she recalls. "There were no pianos there. I thought, 'What about the future of the island's talented children?' "

Two decades after leaving the island, Teave followed that impulse. In 2012 she returned and opened a music school with the help of donors and friends. For the first time, Easter Island had pianos and instruction for musically talented kids. The new school was called Toki Rapa Nui. The word "Toki", of Japanese origin, means "time of opportunity", and "Rapa Nui" is the name for Easter Island in the indigenous Polynesian language.

The move back to Easter Island was the fulfilment of a dream, but also a huge cultural change. After years as an international pianist, Teave returned to one of the most isolated inhabited spots on earth. Easter Island, with about 7,750 residents, is a volcanic island in the South Pacific ocean, 3,700 kilometres west of Chile. It is a 5.5 hour flight from Santiago on the mainland.

Easter Island is mainly known for nearly 900 monumental statues called moai – carved human figures with oversized heads created during the 13th–16th centuries. It became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1995, with much of its territory protected within the Rapa Nui National Park.

The island, which was annexed by Chile in 1888, lives mainly from tourism. Many of its young people, lacking opportunities on the island, go to the mainland for education and careers.

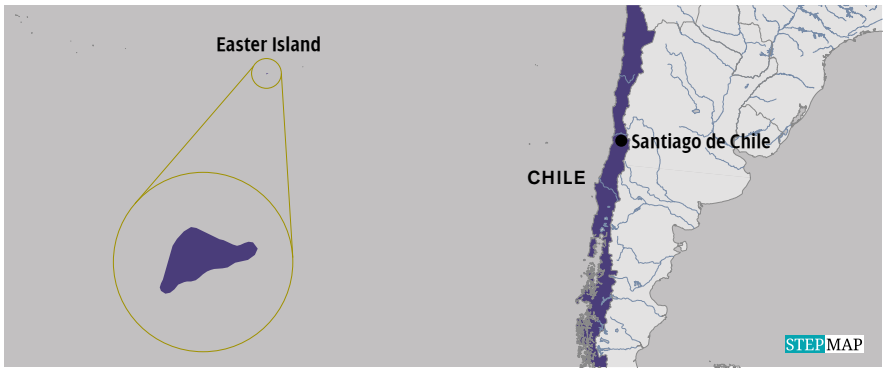
As a result, the native Rapa Nui culture is struggling to survive. It is this risk that Teave decided to address. By moving to the mainland at an early age, "I skipped a lot of stages in my adolescence", she recalls. She hopes her music school will enable its approximately 100 students to develop their talents while remaining in their own culture.

Running the school – which in the meantime has become an NGO with additional activities in environmental protection – demands Teave's full attention. Concerts and travel abroad are largely off the agenda. Yet an international audience still beckons: Teave's first album, "Rapa Nui Odyssey", released this year, earned a high rating on the US's Billboard charts. The documentary film "Song of Rapa Nui", which tells Teave's story, received an Emmy nomination.

All income from the album and documentary go to the music school, Teave says. Despite having traveled the world, she has never doubted that Rapa Nui is her true place on earth.

JAVIER A. CISTERNA FIGUEROA
is a Chilean journalist based in Concepción.

cisternafigueroa@gmail.com



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ENGAGEMENT GLOBAL gGmbH
Service für Entwicklungsinitiativen
Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 40
53113 Bonn
Phone: +49 (0) 2 28 2 07 17-0
Fax: +49 (0) 2 28 2 07 17-150
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Dr. Hans Dembowski (DEM; editor-in-chief; responsible for content according to Germany's regulations), Sabine Balk (SB; managing editor), Dagmar Wolf (DW; assistant)
Freelance support: Katja Dombrowski (KD), Aviva Freudmann (AF), Monika Hellstern (MH; social media), Jan Walter Hofmann (JWH; layout), Malcolm Bell (translation), Claire Davis (translation)
Phone: +49 (0) 69 75 91-31 10
euz.editor@dandc.eu

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ARAB SPRING

Shared disappointment

Tunisia's young democracy is in danger. Its death would be a bad omen for Libya and the entire Arab region.

By Moutaz Ali

On 25 July 2021, Tunisia's President Kais Saied sacked the prime minister, Hichem Mechichi, and suspended the parliament for 30 days. Moreover, he said he would personally investigate cases of corruption as a general prosecutor. Some Tunisians worry that he has basically declared the end of the country's young democracy. Ennahda, the moderately Islamist party, spoke of a coup.

The full truth is that dissatisfaction was running high in the country. Major protest rallies had taken place only hours before the president declared his decisions on TV. Whether the demonstrations were orchestrated or spontaneous is not clear. In any case, many Tunisians responded to Saied's action with joy.

Mabrouka Khedir, the editor-in-chief of Assabah News, a newspaper, says that people are frustrated after years of economic, social and cultural crisis. In her eyes, the political elite is guilty of "corruption, misuse of power and neglect of people's lives". According to Ahmed Kadri, a media and communication expert, Covid-19 broke the camel's back. The epidemic had hit the country hard in recent weeks. In this dramatic situation, Saied had no other choice than to resort to emergency powers, says Emad Al Alam, the editor-in-chief of the Libyan newspaper Al-Akhbaria.

The popular support the president is enjoying may fade away fast if he does not get a grip on the country's many problems. It is a bad sign that Saied has extended the emergency powers until further notice. The Voice of America wonders whether he will be able to save Tunisia's democracy by using undemocratic means.

Bahija Belmabrouk, another journalist, finds it worrisome that some bloggers have been arrested. They were accused of "saying unacceptable things about the army and president". International observers point out that the scenario in which Egypt's President Abel Fattah Al-Sisi grabbed power in a military coup in 2013 was similar. Two years after the Arab Spring, Egyptians had grown disappointed in Mohamed Morsi, the elected president of the Muslim Brotherhood, and were expressing their discontent in large rallies. Al-Sisi has since ruled Egypt with an iron fist and was appointed president after elections that were neither free nor fair.

The Arab Spring started in Tunisia, and the new democratic order has lasted for 10 years there. However, a fast succession of governments has not been able to tackle people's grievances, including poverty and unemployment. Ennahda is Tunisia's version of the Muslim Brotherhood, but its leader, Rached Ghannouchi, proved to be less dogmatic than Morsi. After the coup in Egypt, Ennahda joined various coalition governments. Gannouchi has declared it to be an organisation of "Muslim Democrats". However, many Tunisians now consider Ennahda and other political parties to be corrupt and out of touch.

By contrast, President Saied has a reputation of integrity. He is a legal scholar and his supporters believe he will modify the democratic order making it more effective, but not less democratic in the long run. History shows, however, that those who grab power rarely hand it over voluntarily again.

Across the border in Libya, people are paying close attention to what is happening in Tunisia, though most believe that it will not have immediate impacts on their own country. The two nations' histories are quite different.

Both were under autocratic rule until 2011, but Tunisian institutions were always stronger. As Libyan journalist Mahmood Shaman points out, there is liberal heritage that goes back to Habib Bourguiba, who led Tunisia to independence from France in 1956. Tunisian civil-society organisations and especially trade unions are far more firmly entrenched than their Libyan counterparts.

Accordingly, the revolutions of 2011 led to different results. Tunisians managed to adopt a democratic order, while Libya basically became a failed state, suffering bouts of political violence. What people in both countries share, however, is a sense of disappointment in Europe. We all had hoped to get more support for the transition to democracy. It would, nonetheless, be a bad omen for Tunisia and other Arab countries, if Tunisia, the region's only democracy, were to become a dictatorship again.

MOUTAZ ALI
is a journalist in Tripoli, Libya.

ali.moutaz77@gmail.com

It remains to be seen whether President Kais Saied has suspended the democratic order to improve or abolish it.

Photo: Tunisian Presidential Image/picture-alliance/AA

HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCY

Crisis in Ethiopia intensifies

The conflict in northern Ethiopia continues to escalate in a vicious circle of mutual mistrust and violence. The unrest is spreading to other regions of the country and other segments of the population. Interventions by external parties have so far only made the situation worse.

By Markus Rudolf

The conflict began in November 2020 with armed clashes between the Ethiopian central government and the regional government of Tigray (see my article in D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2021/01, Debate section). At that time, there was already a food shortage, caused by a plague of locusts in the previous year. Then there was the Corona pandemic, which has not abated to this day.

The parties to the conflict are, on one side, the armed forces of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and, on the other side, the Ethiopian armed forces (ENDF), the Eritrean army (EDF) and militias from neighbouring regions. In addition to the military clashes, a propaganda battle is increasingly raging over the narrative of who plays which role in the conflict and who is responsible for which atrocities and massacres.

Humanitarian aid has become a political issue and the civilian population a pawn in the battle for global public opinion. The central government denounces one-sided reporting by the west and refuses any outside intervention. Diplomatic relations with key allies and neighbouring countries are at an all-time low. Experts, politicians and journalists usually exacerbate the already deeply entrenched divisions. Ethiopia is threatened with ever increasing isolation.

The sharp dispute over the credibility of opponents is not a by-product of the war but its actual starting point. Large sections of the population suspect that former political cadres were behind political unrest between 2018 and 2020. Until Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed took office in 2018, the TPLF had dominated Ethiopia's politics for years through violence, censorship and repression.

Due to decades of human-rights violations, large parts of the population have a strong aversion to the former government. Many see the current violence between ethnic groups as a consequence of the TPLF's divide-and-rule strategy, which elevated ethnic federalism to constitutional status.

Today, Abiy Ahmed and his supporters seek to overcome the ethnic tension through centralisation, and they believe that this cannot be achieved with a TPLF that continues to foster these tensions. In Tigray itself, however, recent events and fears of generalised violence directed at their own ethnic group have caused ranks to close behind the TPLF.

The bottom line is that this is a power struggle between politicians who are former guerrilla fighters or see themselves as following this tradition and who use all means to discredit their opponents. Since the beginning of the conflict, the TPLF has portrayed the famine as deliberate and part of an attempted genocide by the Ethiopian central government. The Abiy government in turn blames the TPLF for the miserable conditions, the violence and the blocking of access routes – without admitting that a multitude of players are increasingly out of control.

Any trust that opponents will deal in good faith has been completely lost. Reports of massacres, torture, mass rapes and other crimes by one side are consistently denounced as propaganda by the other. Those who condemn the acts automatically are seen as the mouthpiece of the opponents and thus reaffirm the belief in a conspiracy against one's own camp.

Government supporters see relief operations for Tigray or camps for Ethiopian refugees as a smokescreen for supporting the TPLF. Following blockages and attacks on aid convoys, unknown individuals murdered three staff members of Doctors Without Borders, a NGO, in June. In August the central government revoked the licences of several NGOs, accusing them of spreading misinformation. The UN responded by condemning the generalised bashing of humanitarian organisations.

The dilemma now is that humanitarian aid is urgently needed, but any intervention from outside potentially worsens the emergency. The international community must quickly find alternatives to the current approach to protect the local population from even more suffering.

MARKUS RUDOLF
is a senior researcher at the Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC).
markus.rudolf@bicc.de

Famine looms in Ethiopia – UN and other organisations are impeded in providing aid.

Photo: picture-alliance/ASSOCIATED PRESS

COLONIAL PAST

German heritage in Burundi

At the beginning of the 20th century, Burundi was a German colony. From 1916 to 1962, it then came under Belgian rule, which had a much greater impact on the country. Nevertheless, traces of the German era can still be found.

By Mireille Kanyange

When the Europeans divided Africa amongst themselves at the Berlin Conference in 1884, the territory of present-day Burundi was allocated to Germany. The first German missionaries and soldiers arrived in this part of German East Africa in 1896, but the construction of facilities such as schools and hospitals did not begin until 1909. Only seven years later, Belgian troops occupied the protectorate and put an end to the brief period of German rule.

The main historical site linked with the German colonial period is Kiganda in the central province of Muramvya. Kiganda was the capital of the then Kingdom of Burundi. The ruler, King Mwezi Gisabo, initially resisted the German occupation. But his forces were armed with bows and arrows, which were no match for the firepower of the German troops. So the king eventually submitted to the colonisers in 1903, signing the "Treaty of Kiganda". Burundi did not regain its independence until 1962.

Among other things, the Germans abolished the traditional barter system and introduced rupees and heller. In the national language Kirundi, the word for coin is "amahera", which is derived from the German "Heller". Similarly, the word "ishule" can be traced back to the German "Schule" (school) and "intofanyi" – a more pronounced modification – to "Kartoffel" (potato), a crop plant that the Germans brought to Burundi.

But German heritage is not only reflected in the language. It is also recalled by places like the German Cemetery in Rugombo in the north-western province of Cibitoke. It contains the graves of ten German and other soldiers who fought in the First World War. The German embassy and Germans living in Burundi hold regular services of remembrance there.

There are also the "German Craters" in Rutana, a province bordering on Tanzania. The spectacular gorge landscape was a battleground during the First World War, where German troops fought against other invaders. Today, the mountains are used as a training ground by the Burundian army.

GERMAN-BURUNDIAN CONNECTION

The connection between Germany and Burundi was strengthened in 2017 when German was added to the curriculum of the University of Burundi. Around 20 students are enrolled on the programme. German teacher Helmenegilde Ntabiriho sees many advantages to learning the language, including the opportunity to gain scholarships. In addition, he points out that many works of world literature are written in German and it is an important language in science.

Lucien Nahimana, a Burundian who has lived for many years in Germany, says: "It's a very important language to know and it's easy to learn." Renaud Niyonkeza is an actor and has toured Europe with his company. He too believes that German is an important language. "I learned some basic words and that helped me a lot," he says.

Germany supports Burundi through bilateral and European cooperation. Organisations operating in Burundi include GIZ (Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit), the Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources, the Christian peace organisation Eirene and Welthungerhilfe. Areas in which they are active include water and sanitation, community development, media and conflict prevention.

In 2015, when then President Pierre Nkurunziza's attempt to seek a further term in office triggered popular opposition on the streets, cooperation reached a low point. At present, Germany and the EU are engaged in a political dialogue with Burundi's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is responsible for international development cooperation. At the heart of the dialogue is the Cotonou Agreement, which makes democratic principles – especially respect for human rights – the basis for cooperation.

MIREILLE KANYANGE
is a journalist and reporter for Radio Isanganiro in Burundi.

mika.kanyange@gmail.com

This training pharmacy in Bujumbura was set up by the German organisation Burundikids.

Photo: Horimbere Nadège/Fondation Stamm

INEQUALITY

Why taxes beat philanthropy

Since the marriage of Bill and Melinda Gates has gone sour, they are breaking up. First, they said they will keep running their eponymous foundation together, but now they are not so sure anymore.

By Hans Dembowski

What they do with their lives, is their private affair – and so is what they do with their money. They claim to be promoting the public good. How they define it, is another private affair. Their foundation made grants worth $5 billion in 2019. Things it supports include vaccinations, renewable energy and women's empowerment. The latter, of course, is more Melinda's hobbyhorse than Bill's. According to media reports, he likes technology, while she is increasingly involved in socio-political matters.

To some extent, rich individuals deserve praise for donating to charitable causes. However, large-scale philanthropy reflects oligarchic power. What looks like selfless action, can actually entrench controversial technologies. The Gates Foundation, for example, has a history of supporting genetic modification agriculture. Not everyone, moreover, trusts the superrich. No, I do not think the Gates Foundation uses vaccinations to inject microchips into people in order to monitor their every move. Though conspiracy theories of this kind do not make sense, they do show that many people view tech billionaires with deep suspicion.

It matters that Gates does not simply owe his massive wealth to free-market competition. When Microsoft, the company he started, was young, customers did not buy its software because it was superior, they bought Microsoft products to ensure their IT infrastructure was compatible with what others were using. So Gates' fortune arose from network effects. Microsoft grew strong in a market niche that emerged because antitrust authorities were putting breaks on the influence of IBM in the 1980s. In the late 1990s, Gates found himself embroiled in anti-trust disputes. Regulators understood that Microsoft's increasingly monopolistic power was harmful, so they prevented the corporation from dominating the internet.

Neither the definition of the common good nor the funding of what it requires must be left to superrich oligarchs. Broad-based debate, public deliberation and responsible government are indispensable in the pursuit of the common good. Business interests matter, but so do environmental and social impacts. Taxes serve the purpose of funding public goods – from roads to schools and hospitals to law courts – with public money.

Taxes also help to redistribute wealth in ways that prevent unacceptable poverty. A just social order does not arise from the benevolence of the rich. It arises from a social contract that ensures everyone contributes to the public good according to their capabilities. We must not return to feudal times, when it was generally assumed that the rich and powerful always knew best.

In past decades, nonetheless, the international community allowed some major corporations to largely escape taxation. A tiny minority of people became extremely rich. We have a global trade regime, but not a global tax regime. It is good that governments are now cooperating on introducing a minimum corporate tax that will apply internationally. In Venice in July, the finance ministers of the G20 leading economies agreed on a proposal. It is supported by more than 130 national governments.

Pooling taxation power this way does not invalidate sovereignty in any way. On the contrary, it makes the nation state viable long-term. Much work remains to be done to stop the race to the bottom and ensure sufficient tax revenues everywhere, and progress feels excruciatingly slow in view of the escalating climate crisis. Nonetheless, these are definitely steps in the right direction.

PS: Inequality has become extreme. Philanthropy is only one way in which some billionaires display their wealth. Others show it off by investing in private space travel with little pretence of serving the public good. The motto of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is "leave no one behind". By contrast, what is not on the SDG agenda is facilitating the excessive escapism of very few very rich people who think it is fun to take off into space.

HANS DEMBOWSKI
is editor in chief of D+C Development and Cooperation / E+Z Entwicklung und Zusammenarbeit.
euz.editor@dandc.eu

Melinda and Bill Gates in 2019.

Photo: Gates Foundation/picture-alliance/PhotoShot

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Olmoran, a warrior figure from one of the computer games by Leti Arts, a Ghanaian-Kenyan game developing company.

Digital trends

Society and economy are undergoing a transformation from the analogue to the digital age. Digitisation creates many new opportunities and makes processes and work easier. However, the development also bears numerous risks and dangers such as loss of personal freedom and jobs as well as dependence on technology. Policymakers ought to accompany and regulate the digital transformation as well as protect citizens from dangers. It is essential that everyone learns how to handle the new technologies and assess them.

This focus section has a bearing to almost all UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). It also relates to the SDG motto Leave no one behind.

Photo: Leti Arts

GAMING INDUSTRY

The opportunity is right now

Digitalisation is progressing in Africa. Despite a lot of constraints like poor infrastructure and funding, a new generation of tech entrepreneurs is pressing ahead. One of them is Eyram Tawia, co-founder and CEO of Leti Arts, one of the first companies developing computer games in sub-Saharan Africa. He shared his insights in a D+C/E+Z interview.

Eyram Tawia interviewed by Sabine Balk

What is your company Leti Arts doing?

We make games and digital comics in African contexts with African storytelling. We have offices in Accra, Ghana, and in Nairobi, Kenya, and we have 10 full-time employees. We create superheroes and place them in phantastic worlds in Africa in the near future. That's the fundamental idea. We created a computer game called African Legends that soon will be followed-up by an advanced version called Africa's Legends Reawakening. We also have a publishing platform called Afrocomix. It is an app we use for selling products like wallpapers, short animations, comics or graphic novels. Around 60 creators are sharing their content on this platform. Consulting is our third major activity. You can hire us to design a game or an app for you. That is how we fund our game development for now.

Can you give me an example of an app you created for an organisation?

We made apps for several organisations. Some are funded by UN agencies, civil-society organisations, government entities, the World Bank and the likes. The games have serious topics such as Malaria prevention or reproductive health education. One example is the interactive story game platform myjorley.com. Players make choices about sexual and reproductive health. This consulting branch is very important, it is how we generate revenues. Gaming is still very weak in Africa and it is very hard to make money from it. All game developers on the continent are still struggling to make money.

So what is your longer-term plan regarding sales?

We are talking to partners in the film and publishing industry who want to buy some of the rights of our superhero games. We have exciting stories to tell and are creating exciting games. We think that Africa's Legends Reawakening, our new game, will unlock revenues once it is ready. Until then, we have the revenues from our other products.

Why is it so hard to make money with gaming? It is a huge industry in the western world.

Gaming is a new industry here in Africa. So far, a domestic industry hardly exists. We are raising awareness of new options and want to contribute to changing the mindset in a positive way. To do so, we need to create the right ecosystem, and that takes time. It really matters that our games are created here, in Africa, in spite of all difficulties. The major challenge is skills. There are hardly any universities or even high schools that teach game design.

Superheroes Ananse, Oya and Olmoran of Leti Arts' new game Africa´s Legends Reawakening.

Photo: Leti Arts

Africa needs to train more people. We are part of the change, and want our games to compete equally with American games. We focus on local expertise and talent.

How do you enhance skills?

I am a full-time game developer. I try to serve as a role model, and I want to encourage other people to become role models too. When we started creating games in 2009, we were basically the only ones. That is why I tell my story and I even wrote a book about it. I want to be a positive example, encouraging others. My own approach was learning by doing, which can be very effective. But we also have to train young people in this field. Years ago, I founded an non-governmental organisation that focuses on education. It is called "Steam Africa" which stands for "science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics". We use the process of designing games to teach computer science, because making a game involves all the relevant skills, including programming and software design. On the other hand, the arts are relevant too for story writing and artistic work. We teach authors to write stories for a digitised product.

How does one join your programme?

We do not have any formal structure so far. But I am putting together a partnership to see how we can run formal skills training. I've been presenting the idea in conferences, and I've tested it in several countries, including Zimbabwe, Ghana and Belgium. I have taught different target groups – adults, university students, kids. I believe that my approach is good. Now in the Covid-19 era, I did some online teaching for the first time. Our company trains interns, moreover.

What about formalising the skills training?

As far as I know, only very few universities have started game development courses. I am aware of one in Kenya and one in South Africa. I believe that a lot more universities should teach computer science and game design. At my university, the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), as far as I know, I was the first one to actually create a game. I wanted to prove it can be done in Africa. After me, more students started game projects. Moreover, governments should have a fund for game companies, like the government of Finland has. Finland is a giant in the games industry. They make lots of money. Africa should do so too. African companies could become a huge force globally. We have great potential, we have 1 billion people and the youngest population in the world. In the USA, the gaming industry is bigger than the movie and music industry combined. If this is possible there, why should it not be possible in Africa? The opportunity is right now.

Don't you worry that foreign companies will come in and take over the market?

No, I am not afraid at all. We think that we are going to be partners. Foreign companies cannot succeed without us. We know our people and understand our markets. But it will not happen overnight, we must be patient. It may take us 10 years or so to catch up with the world market. But it will certainly happen. We saw it with the fintech and other tech industries. They have grown fast on the continent in recent years. M-Pesa started making financial transactions by mobile phone possible in Kenya in 2007.

Is the infrastructure good enough in Africa?

No, but it's getting better and better. In some areas, infrastructure is still a problem, especially in the countryside. But devices like mobile phones are there. We have better access to technologies now thanks to 3G/4G internet and a much improved coverage than 4-5 years ago. Speed is still a challenge at certain parts but will improve too. Also data pricing is still very expensive. But we have to stop complaining now and act. We must not sit and wait any longer.

Are you satisfied with how the African tech industry has developed?

I'm not only satisfied, I am amazed how innovations are spreading despite the many constraints. I have colleagues, who made farming more attractive through agritech initiatives. For example, farmers in remote areas can check the weather. I have colleagues who made health care accessible through online apps. The interesting thing about the gaming industry is that it enables other industries as it leverages all sectors. So, once gaming can make money it will work out. And we are on a promising path. The industry is getting very exciting now. We have over 40 designing studios all over Africa. There are some in Ghana, South Africa, Kenya, Senegal, Egypt, Tunisia, Nigeria, Uganda and Ethiopia. And we are connected to each other. We are involved in running a project with three other companies and funding from GIZ. It shows how studios can work together and produce quality content. It is a revolution to have a lot of Africans creating African stories.

But funding is still a problem, isn't it?

Yes, it is a problem. Before 2009, we tried getting funding for most of our game projects but it didn't work out as getting funds from the traditional banks and individuals into a game company is a great risk. However, funding bodies like MEST who invested in us when we started in 2009 have come to set some standards in the space as we still do not get loans or other services from most financial sector players in Africa. Though this is still tough as we've never raised any more funding since 2009 due to the same factors of high risk and reluctance in investing in the space. We know it would be difficult, so we do not try to raise funds in an aggressive way. We operate by generating the money we need from our consulting branch. But from this year on, we actually want to attract financial investors to scale up our business. It makes sense now that we have adequate products and generating revenues. So far, we don't have a fixed business model, but we need one to expand faster.

So, are you confident that your African superheroes will sell?

Yes, I am. Unfortunately, we had to delay the launch of Africa's Legends Reawakening for almost a year, partly because of funding problems. But we are confident we'll be able to roll out the first version soon. And we have a real success story. In cooperation with one of Ghana's major telecom companies, we launched a trivia version of the game. It is called "Hottseat" and is doing very well. I think it will turn out to be one of the ground-breaking revenue generating games of the African business.

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EYRAM TAWIA
is CEO and co-founder of Leti Arts.

info@letiarts.com

NIGERIA'S ICT MARKET PLACE

Success due to combination of factors

The Otigba Computer Village in Lagos is of relevance as a marketplace for ICT products and services not only in Nigeria. Its employment opportunities are important, but most jobs are informal. Formalising the businesses, however, is easier said than done. One of Otigba's strong points is that young people acquire knowledge and skills there.

By Johannes Paha and Lydia Wolter

The Otigba Computer Village in Lagos, Nigeria's biggest city, is known as "West Africa's Silicon Valley". It serves as a marketplace for the sale of ICT products and related services, including the repair of used products. ICT stands for information and communications technology. Otigba differs from Silicon Valley in the US, which is primarily a centre of innovation and corporate headquarters. Nonetheless, Otigba is very important. The Computer Village probably is Africa's largest ICT market.

Among the reasons for its success are positive education spill-overs. Experts pass their knowledge and skills to others. About 50 % of the persons working here have a college degree and 30 % have undergone technical skills training. Skilled workers teach young, untrained colleagues how to sell software, repair mobile phones and exchange batteries, for example.

Formal education opportunities are quite limited in Nigeria, so on-the-job training is particularly relevant. Trainees in Otigba learn to take on more responsibilities or open their own businesses. They become multipliers themselves.

Job mobility is high in the Computer Village, and there are many start-ups. Both phenomena facilitate knowledge transfer and skills training. The village-like character of Otigba helps. People are closely connected, sharing resources and knowledge.

TOO FEW JOBS IN THE FORMAL SECTOR

Job opportunities are good in Otigba's informal sector, but that should not be over-

Not only young Nigerians use smartphones.

Photo: Daniel H Williams/picture-alliance/AP Photo

rated. Indeed, it reveals a need for state action. There obviously are not enough jobs in the formal sector, which observe labour law and social-protection rules – including Nigeria's minimum wage. The informal sector is growing fast, not least because it is largely unregulated and its businesses are not registered.

At first glance, the formalisation of the informal businesses therefore looks desirable. However, there are downsides as well. As labour becomes more expensive, existing jobs may be at risk.

Policymakers face a dilemma. Informal structures arise without regulation and official planning. They ensure livelihoods for many people and are therefore valuable. Informality, however, is also problematic in many ways. Businesses circumvent issues such as environmental protection and occupational safety. There are no social safety nets, and contracts are not enforced reliably. Infrastructure – from power supply to financial services – remain insufficient.

Formally organised sectors go along with higher costs but they are also more productive. Informal businesses cannot create broad-based prosperity, though they do prevent extreme poverty in settings where formal companies cannot thrive. Government policies should therefore formalise informal structures carefully and cushion the negative consequences with appropriate countermeasures (see contribution by Rishikesh Thapa on p. 33 in this issue).

All of this applies to Otigba. Garbage piling up in public places and intermittent electricity supply are evidence of overburdened infrastructure. To a large extent, these issues are linked to what made Otigba successful in the first place, specifically the high concentration of economic activity within a small area. Many of the companies are small and benefit from the agglomeration effects of the cluster. For example, the procurement costs of input goods are comparatively low. Moreover, thanks to the high concentration of similarly qualified and specialised workers, the supply and demand of talent matches up better and more often. Specialised employees can switch quickly and easily from one company to another, without facing a long commute or having to change their homes. These things boost productivity.

First-mover advantages were helpful too. They contributed to Otigba growing to its present size. The Computer Village was the first ICT marketplace where a corresponding service industry was established. It expanded as ever more ICT products were sold. Customers would easily find a mobile-phone contract and could thus use their new mobile phone immediately. When they bought a new laptop, they could have the necessary software installed or they could also acquire other accessories right away.

Customers were made aware of such opportunities in large part due to advertising in local and regional media. Because prices and product information were published in newspapers buyers could compare what was on offer. Before long, customers from all over Nigeria – and even beyond – were coming to Otigba.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS AND OVERBURDENED INFRASTRUCTURE

Serious downsides, however, include environmental hazards such as diseases, pests, uncollected waste or clogged traffic. Moreover, there is a lack of housing. Rents are high and real estate is expensive.

Such forms of market failure require corrective state action. Infrastructure must be expanded, including streets, parking space and reliable public transportation. Constant gas and diesel shortages need to be addressed. Moreover, Otigba needs a stable electricity supply, internet coverage and reliable wastewater disposal.

The Nigerian government wants to solve these problems by moving the Computer Village from Otigba to Katangowa. While Otigba simply does not have enough space, the new location should provide sufficient land on 15 hectares for the government's expansion plans. The new ICT and innovation centre is meant to include three marketplaces with over 1000 businesses each. There are plans for parking lots, loading and unloading zones, warehouses and workshops for assembly operations. Reliable power supply has been promised as well, and it would be a considerable competitive advantage in a country where 40% of the people have no electricity and over half of the people are used to interrupted services only.

The government expects that the relocation and improved conditions will allow the Computer Village to grow faster. Whether that happens will depend on how well the businesses cope with the relocation and the formalisation that it necessarily implies. Indeed, the relocation may actually destroy Otigba's agglomeration effects as well as its positive external educational effects.

One major concern is that customers will stay away from the decentralised location because travel distances are too long. Furthermore, retail space and real estate may well prove unaffordable for many merchants, so some businesses may not be in a position to relocate at all.

Local people have also voiced complaints. The new location is not on previously unused land. A clothing market which was marked by similar problems as the Computer Village was removed to make space.

Nonetheless, Otigba's development is a success story. The Computer Village is a good illustration of self-reinforcing growth being kickstarted by a large number of risk-taking, well-educated and high-skilled workers. Success depended on a variety of factors, including agglomeration effects, positive externalities and first-mover advantages. The interplay is obviously difficult to replicate, which must be kept in mind when more plans are made to formalise previously unregulated economic development.

JOHANNES PAHA
is an assistant professor at the Justus Liebig University in Gießen. He specialises in competition and development.
johannes.paha@wirtschaft.uni-giessen.de

LYDIA WOLTER
is a student of economics and English at the University of Potsdam. This essay is based on her bachelor's thesis.
lywolter@uni-potsdam.de

CYBERSPACE

Defining the new digital world order

The Digital Silk Road – China's programme to catalyse telecom connectivity worldwide – envisions a global digital infrastructure that relies on Chinese suppliers and Chinese-influenced technical standards. This could make China the leader in a digital new world order – and cyberspace would become less free.

By Charles Martin-Shields

Donor countries often include particular technologies in their international development programmes to help their own industries. China is now doing this with internet technologies. In 2015, China launched the Digital Silk Road – a massive project to drive digitalisation worldwide – as a component of its Belt and Road infrastructure initiative. Under the Digital Silk Road programme, Chinese internet infrastructure firms, in particular Huawei, are expanding their already strong global presence.

In a related move, China recently released a white paper signalling its interest in shaping the rules and norms of internet protocol – the rules that define how data should be delivered over the internet. Together with the spread of Chinese technologies, a greater Chinese influence on technical standards could shape the rules of internet access and use for years to come.

It is nothing new for donors to use development aid to further their own interests. One example is the US government's export of genetically-modified crops and yield-boosting seed as part of a 2002 food aid programme. While the crops were intended to relieve hunger, these exports also benefited US developers of the related bio-technologies. China is doing something similar for its digital technology industries under the Digital Silk Road project (see box "Food aid with a catch", p. 28).

Favouring domestic industries in development programmes is not inherently a bad thing. However, the element of donor self-interest should be clear and transparent. Such clarity can help all sides involved to align interests fairly. That includes multilateral institutions, private businesses and civil society.

The current battle for dominance in global telecoms goes well beyond economic advantage, however. The outcome will determine how cyberspace itself is governed. It will shape the "rules of the road" for internet traffic, including the regulations governing internet access and protection of data privacy. As political theorist Langdon Winner explained (1980), the choice of a particular technology has political consequences and is often driven by political motivations. In his view, technological "artifacts" thus have political relevance.

BATTLE FOR MARKETS

The technology artifacts involved in the Digital Silk Road carry a political message about outcomes as well. The choice of software programmes and hardware components has an impact on who leads the telecoms market. If enough countries use Chinese internet technologies, that benefits providers of ancillary equipment using the same standards, to the detriment of suppliers using different technical standards. By increasing its control over the infrastructure, China creates new global markets for its software and e-commerce firms. The beneficiaries include:

- the internet conglomerate Tencent,
- the e-commerce giant Alibaba,
- the digital infrastructure and devices manufacturer Huawei and
- the global satellite system BeiDou.

Indeed, several African and Southeast Asian countries have already adopted

Huawei managers at an event to promote a new mobile device in Nairobi in 2019

Photo: picture-alliance/Photoshot

BeiDou as an alternative to the US Global Positioning System. Further, Chinese giant Huawei has built 70 % of Africa's 4G mobile telecoms networks and will supply a standalone 5G system to Rain, South Africa's mobile data-only network. Huawei has more 5G contracts than any other telecoms company. Indeed, half of them are in Europe.

In all, exports under the Digital Silk Road project have boosted Huawei's share of the global telecom equipment market by 40 % since the Belt and Road Initiative began, according to David Sacks (2021) of the Council on Foreign Relations. He adds that, once Huawei builds a country's 5G network, that country is likely to choose Huawei to upgrade those systems when newer technologies become available. This effect could shut out western competitors for decades to come.

FOLLOW THE DATA

Beyond conferring commercial advantages, gaining control over other countries' internet infrastructure may also give China direct access to that country's data streams, such as those generated by sensors in "smart city" networks and in online communication of all types.

Accordingly, privacy and security issues are red flags for some western nations as well as Belt and Road partner countries. The concerns include losing control of systems to hackers, inadvertently losing data due to technical problems and enabling commercial espionage and spying on political opponents. Based on such fears, several countries, including many NATO members, have either banned the use of Huawei's 5G technology or limited the scope of its use in their national cellular phone systems.

"While China's Digital Silk Road has the potential to enhance digital connectivity in developing economies, it simultaneously has the capacity to spread authoritarianism, curtail democracy and curb fundamental human rights," writes Clayton Cheney of the Pacific Forum, a US-based foreign policy research institute.

Yet China is not the only country willing to use its telecoms technology to gather data from network users. US technology giants such as Google and Facebook do the same on a massive scale, stating they do so for commercial purposes. China makes telecoms equipment available to governments that abuse human rights, but the US government invests in companies whose equipment could be misused the same way.

One example is Palantir Technologies, a US-based software firm that specialises in big-data analytics. Its early funding came from the US Central Intelligence Agency's venture capital fund. Since its founding in 2003, the firm has expanded beyond its core market of intelligence and law enforcement and has started providing data services to the development and humanitarian sector.

SETTING STANDARDS

Another source of concern for western countries is China's increasingly active role in setting global technical standards for data transmission. Chinese activity in standards-setting fora and its growing worldwide commercial presence in internet systems are fuelling these concerns. Together these factors could put China in a position to exert greater control over access to the World Wide Web, thereby challenging the very basis on which cyberspace has been governed.

China's implicit goal is to reduce global dependence on US-based tech giants such as Google, Facebook, Intel and Amazon—and, at the same time, to change the Sili-

Food aid with a catch

Choosing a particular technology for inclusion in an aid programme often serves obvious political aims. For example, the USA and the EU do not agree on the safety of genetically modified crops. In 2002, the US decided to include genetically modified maize in food-aid shipments to southern Africa. With some 14 million Africans at risk of dying of hunger, recipients gladly accepted those crops. By doing so, they implicitly also accepted the underlying technology.

Some argue that this aid package had as much to do with gaining leverage for genetic modification as with alleviating hunger. US food aid policy "was intended to promote the adoption of biotech crops in southern Africa, [thereby] expanding the market access and control of transnational corporations and undermining local smallholder production," wrote Noah Zerbe of California-based Humboldt State University. He added that one result was greater food insecurity in Africa.

The US government might counter that genetic modification of crops helps to boost agricultural yields over time, thereby helping to prevent future food shortages. However, the US undeniably was pursuing commercial interests. The technology for genetically modifying seeds was developed in the US, and increased use of that technology boosted the revenues of the technology developers. CMS

US commercial interests involved: test cultivation of genetically modified maize in South Africa in 2011.

Photo: Neil Overy/picture-alliance/imageBROKER

con-Valley-influenced rules of internet use. Richard Ghiasy, a policy advisor on Asian geopolitics, and Rajeshwari Krishnamurthy of India's Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies state (2021): "For China, the Digital Silk Road ... engenders a less US-centric and a more Sino-centric Asian and global digital order."

While China's government has been clear that it wants to expand the reach of its internet technologies and standards, western countries have been less forthright. Instead, they have repeated the mantra that the internet must remain a free, ungoverned space. However, civil liberties online are increasingly challenged even under the US-led dominance of cyberspace. Half of the world's data traffic is moved by large US-based companies like Facebook, Amazon and Google. The internet is rife with commercial surveillance, and it is hard to tell what exactly western spy agencies are doing. The Chinese alternative would likely add more surveillance by state agencies.

The challenge is to find an alternative that does not involve surveillance at all. China may be guilty of using state-owned enterprises like Huawei to expand its sphere of digital influence. However, until western donor countries are honest about their own interests in promoting their technologies abroad, the global south might be left with two equally unpalatable options: An internet of exploitative commercial surveillance, or an internet of civil liberties-curtailing state surveillance.

A third, better option may be possible. If donor countries start from a resolve to ensure civil liberties and transparency, they could insist on data protections and 5G standards that fulfil those requirements. They could provide incentives for hardware firms to avoid putting spyware in transmission devices and for data analytics firms to take privacy and data protection seriously.

The internet can be a powerful force for public good. But for it to fulfil that goal, donor countries must commit to deploying digital technology to achieve a greater goal than promoting their own political and commercial interests.

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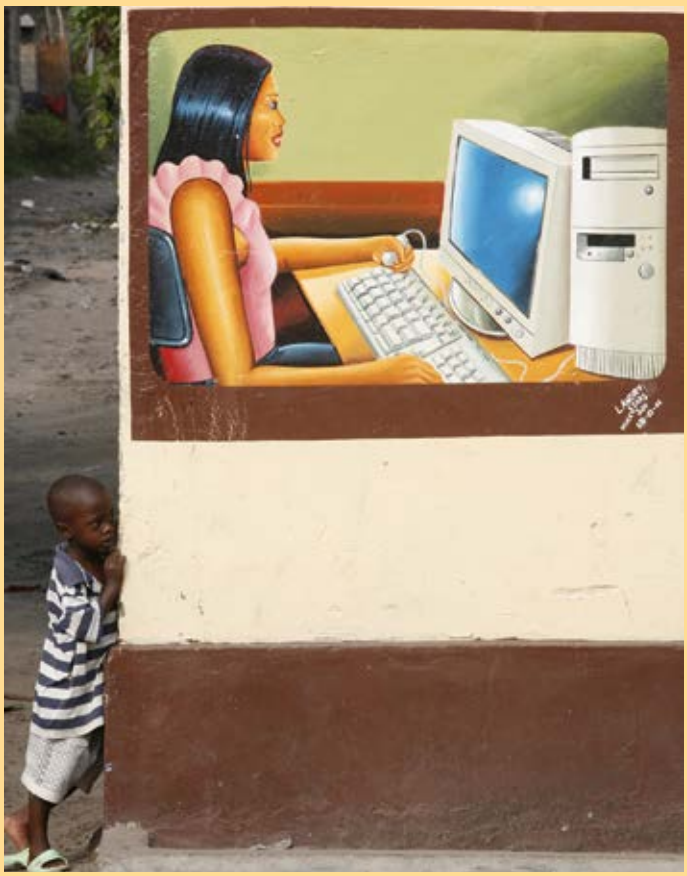
CHARLES MARTIN-SHIELDS is a senior researcher at the German Development Institute in Bonn.

charles.martin-shields@die-gdi.de



Global standards shape local practice: Congolese advertising.

Photo: Pascal Deloche/GODONG/Lineair

Rules of the road

Setting technical standards for data transmission may seem like a job strictly for engineers. However, the process can be highly political, as it confers power on the standard-setters – both in gaining commercial leverage for their countries' products and in influencing how the network is accessed and used.

It thus comes as no surprise that China is exerting increasing influence in the setting of global technical standards for the internet. China has expanded its role in the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), the United Nations agency overseeing radio, TV and internet transmission standards. The ITU's current Secretary General, Zhao Houlin, publicly supports China's efforts to shape these standards.

At the same time, under its Digital Silk Road programme, China is installing its telecoms and internet technologies in countries around the world. This widespread presence can also serve to alter the internet's rules of the road because of the capabilities embedded in the equipment.

In particular, there are growing concerns in the west that these technologies could be used for spying for commercial or political purposes. "Security-related concerns regarding China's Digital Silk Road include potential risks to national critical infrastructures, intelligence sharing and defence integration," the British think tank International Institute for Strategic Studies found in February 2021. CMS

ONLINE MEDIA

Struggling to be heard

Sri Lanka's suppression of free speech takes many forms, from violent attacks on political opponents of the regime to a draft law giving the government the final say on what is published. A handful of independent online start-ups are doing their best to be heard despite the heavy odds.

By Arjuna Ranawana

For advocates of free speech, the media landscape in Sri Lanka can be daunting. Almost all private media companies are owned by a small class of wealthy and powerful individuals, either directly or through conglomerates they control. These oligarchs, almost always aligned with the government, use their news outlets – including print, broadcast and online properties – to promote their political agendas. The revenue from these outlets is of secondary importance; their main function is to advance the owners' goals, which may include winning lucrative government contracts.

The government, too, operates its own media empire. It owns the country's largest print outlet with publications in Sinhala, English and Tamil, two television stations, a radio station and websites. Various political parties also have their own media organs.

Since only half the population has internet access, terrestrial television and radio broadcasting is a major source of news and information. Broadcast stations, including those that are privately owned, are careful to remain on good terms with the government.

The privately-owned Hiru TV and Radio and the TV Derana networks are the most popular choice for Sri Lankans, according to a 2019 survey by International Media Support (IMS), a Danish-based NGO. Both are owned by businessmen who support President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. These stations suppress or vigorously refute criticism of the administration. In this environment, it is difficult for independent media outlets to be heard.

Nonetheless, politically unaffiliated online media are starting to make inroads. It helps that half of the population has internet access. According to IMS, 40% of respondents to their media survey get their news from websites, and 31% get news from social-media sites in particular.

Even more encouraging, the survey shows that Sri Lankans find ways to discern facts from fakes. For example, people regularly check three or more news sources to guard against being misled. "Many audience members have a good sense of what good journalism means, and are critical of superficial, sensational and sometimes unethical coverage," says Emilie Lehmann-Jacobsen, an IMS media adviser.

ENTER THE INDEPENDENTS

The growing popularity of online news sources creates opportunities for media start-ups. Some of these are truly independent, editorially and financially, with no links to businesses or political parties. In some cases, independent news providers are starting to be heard and appreciated.

The independents have the advantage of having started out as online outlets – unlike mainstream institutions, which typically grafted websites onto existing print and broadcasts channels. On the downside, the independents must build relationships with large companies to survive financially, and this could eventually affect their independence. To be viable, news sites must attract at least 250,000 page views per month. Equally important, they must guard against being shut down by the government. To reduce that risk, some start-ups rent server space abroad.

To remain competitive, start-up websites must generate a strong social media presence by promoting their stories on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and spreading their content on YouTube. The IMS survey shows that 80% of Sri Lankans access Facebook and 75% watch YouTube videos. Many others also receive news through WhatsApp and IMO, a video calling and instant messaging app. So a focus on marketing and promotion of content is essential.

A greater concern is dealing with limits on freedom of speech. The Rajapaksa administration has low tolerance for criticism. It monitors online channels alongside other media outlets (see box page 32). This can have bad consequences for people posting content that is contrary to official views.

In late May, for example, a government official posted photos of depleted forests on Facebook, thereby casting doubt on govern-

Government as a family affair: Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa (left) greeting President Gotabaya Rajapaksa (right) with another brother, Chamal Rajapaksa (who now is serving as irrigation minister) during an official ceremony in August 2020.

Photo: picture-alliance/NurPhoto/Tharaka Basnayaka

The Sri Lankan website EconomyNext.com is still providing independent analysis.

ment denials of deforestation. The official was arrested and charged. Similarly, an environmental official dared to publicly oppose timber harvesting by companies allied with the government. This official faces intimidation by members of parliament belonging to Rajapaksa's party, the SLPP (Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna or People's Front).

Earlier this year, a woman who aired her views on a live quiz show concerning environmental destruction near her home was visited by both the police and wildlife officials. More recently the Health Ministry banned medical personnel from commenting publicly on the government's handling of the Coronavirus pandemic.

To keep a tight clamp on online speech, the government is drafting a law restricting what can be written and said online. The draft law, similar to those in force in Singapore and Malaysia, requires online platforms to issue corrections or remove content that the government declares to be false. The law applies to all online channels, including social networks, search engines and news aggregation websites. Media companies failing to comply would face heavy fines. Individuals would face fines and/or imprisonment.

The government's justification for this law is that the "spread of false information on the internet poses a serious threat and is used to divide society, to spread hatred and to weaken democratic institutions". More likely, the government wants to suppress expressions of dissatisfaction with itself. Citizens' complaints include a mishandled coronavirus response, an economy in the doldrums, high unemployment and allegations of corruption. Mainstream media gloss over all these matters.

HAVING THE FINAL WORD

In effect, the draft law gives government the final word on what is fact and what isn't. Free Media Movement (FMM), a watchdog group formed by Sri Lankan journalists, warns that the draft law is "an opportunity for the authorities who have a long track record of abusive interpretation to define 'false news' – creating a path for violating the right to freedom of expression".

Besides, the government already has laws available to arrest and punish anyone who purveys falsehoods, says lawyer Bhavani Fonseka of the Centre for Policy Alternatives, a policy research and advocacy organisation in Sri Lanka. She says: "There are many laws, including those based on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, that have been misused to suppress writers."

Sadly, the major purveyors of false information are the state-controlled and state-influenced newspapers and broadcasters. Despite professing to self-regulate, state-influenced broadcasters have yet to draft a code of practice. The membership of the Broadcasters Guild, which was formed in 2017, is dominated by companies aligned with the current government. These channels play a big part in disseminating false information and fanning ethnic and religious conflicts.

As a counterbalance to misinformation from such channels, groups of journalists have come together to act as informal fact checkers. A major focus of these fact-checking efforts is information related to Covid-19 and related measures. Journalists' methods for setting the record straight have included posting short YouTube videos consisting of interviews with experts who correct the official record. In addition, journalists have reported election-related misinformation to the relevant authorities.

Journalists are not the only fact-checkers trying to correct misinformation. Local groups such as Verité Research, an independent think tank, do fact-checking as well, and publish their findings. Similarly, Citizen Fact Check, a Sri Lankan group, publishes articles on its website. Such initiatives have helped cash-strapped start-ups continue their reporting and fact-checking, and some backed by international NGOs.

EconomyNext is one of the independent news websites that cooperates with foreign partners. They have helped to train staff or fund programmes such as a documentary series on race and politics. Moreover, international advice is contributing to broaden the websites' reach.

The start-ups' efforts to provide independent analysis do not please the government, of course. A crackdown seems inevitable. And this will not serve the interests of the Sri Lankan people.

LINK

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ARJUNA RANAWANA
is managing editor of EconomyNext, an economic, financial and political news service with a primary focus on Sri Lanka.
Twitter: @ARanawana25

Screenshot: https://economynext.com/opinion

Working in fear

Sri Lanka's leaders are suppressing free speech through attacks and intimidation. Between 2006 and 2015, when Mahinda Rajapaksa was president of Sri Lanka and his brother Gotabaya was defence secretary, journalists lived in fear. Under the two strongmen, journalists who dared to criticise were subjected to threats, physical attacks, abduction and murder.

Now the brothers are back in power, and their roles have switched. Following presidential elections in 2019 and parliamentary elections in 2020, Gotabaya became president and Mahinda prime minister. But the same fear tactics are being applied. Media outlets that are state-owned keep to the government's line. Those that are not state-owned tend to practice self-censorship.

The period of relative freedom between 2015 and 2019 seems increasingly a remote memory. Yet even during those years journalists faced some official intimidation. After all, it is not easy for those in power to change their practices overnight. During the interim period, even poets and short-story writers were arrested occasionally, in violation of the UN's 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Sri Lanka is a signatory to that covenant, which guarantees – among other liberties – freedom of speech. That freedom exists mainly on paper in Sri Lanka. Since his election in 2019, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has waged "a campaign of fear and intimidation against human rights activists, journalists, lawyers, and other perceived challengers", Human Rights Watch stated in a report in March 2021.

A month earlier, the Centre for Justice and Accountability, a human rights organisation, detailed the government's campaign to silence journalists, repress press freedom, and perpetuate impunity for these attacks. The report was backed by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), a press freedom organisation.

The report includes crimes against journalists when Gotabaya Rajapaksa was secretary of defence between 2005 and 2015. Authorities allegedly killed 25 reporters and other media people, mostly in the country's northeast, the stronghold of the Tamil ethnic group. The murdered journalists included the editor of Tamilnet, Dharmaratnam Sivaram, and the editor of the Sunday Leader newspaper, Lasantha Wickrematunge. In a civil suit filed in the state of California, Wickrematunge's daughter Ahimsa charged the president with responsibility for her father's death.

The list of killed, assaulted and "disappeared" journalists from that period goes on. The deputy editor of weekly newspaper The Nation, Keith Noyahr, was abducted and tortured. The editor of the Rivira newspaper, Upali Tennekoon, was stabbed, Poddala Jayantha, a reporter in the Sinhala language, was abducted and assaulted. Political cartoonist Pradeeth Eknaligoda disappeared. Many other journalists were arrested and detained, some for years, under anti-terror laws. Taking note of the fate of their colleagues, many Sri Lankan journalists fled into exile.

According to the CPJ, a unit within Sri Lanka's military intelligence apparatus known as the "Tripoli Brigade" carried out the violence – and is being protected today by the current administration. Police officers investigating these crimes have been arrested, assigned to non-investigative jobs or forced into exile. The main investigator of those crimes, Police Superintendent Shani Abeysekara, was demoted and later arrested on charges of creating false evidence. Another key detective, Inspector Nishantha Silva, fled the country the day after Gotabaya Rajapaksa was elected president; he is believed to be in Switzerland.

The Rajapaksa brothers are not the only politicians guilty of Intimidating journalists. Successive governments since the early 1970s targeted media people and practiced various forms of censorship, including shutting down printing presses and requiring pre-publication approval of articles. In some cases government officials even limited the availability of newsprint. Press repression in Sri Lanka is a matter of degree, not of kind. AR

Commemorating Lasantha Wickrematunge, a slain journalist, in 2020.

Photo: picture-alliance/NurPhoto/Akila Jayawardana

SKILLS TRAINING

Transforming informal enterprises

Digitalisation can make a difference in the informal sector, boosting technology, creating new jobs and improving the work environment. A paper published by the GIZ, Germany's bilateral development agency, assesses opportunities.

By Rishikesh Thapa

The GIZ authors admit that it is difficult to assess the impact of digitalisation on the labour market. Job losses are common in the formal economy, as automation makes workers redundant. On the other hand, digitalisation may well mean progress in the informal economy.

The informal economy consists of businesses that are neither officially registered nor stringently regulated. They mostly do not pay taxes and their productivity is typically low. According to GIZ insights, however, digitalisation can improve matters if employees acquire new skills, often including basic literacy. However, owners are only likely to invest in equipment and training if other risks do not look too great. The implication is that poor infrastructure (in terms of water and power supply or transport, for example) is a serious obstacle.

On the upside, according to GIZ, financial digitalisation can make accounting easier, increase sales and boost profitability. At the same time, the internet can facilitate and improve interaction with customers, clients and suppliers.

In the longer run, digitalisation can help to formalise a business as it becomes more productive. Access to e-government services can simplify administrative processes. The scope for improving occupational health or providing social-protection services (including health insurance) increases too.

The research paper cites Kenya where the cashless payment system M-Pesa has triggered considerable progress. It has made financial transactions much easier, with the result of informal markets becoming more transparent. Access to loans and other financial services have improved too. The GIZ similarly appreciates Mexico's Tabletas Concanaco programme. It has the dual aim of making informal enterprises more productive and taxing them. The companies are equipped with software and free internet access. Ultimately, the revenues of the companies concerned and the government increase.

The greatest challenge, according to the GIZ authors, is poor skills, so technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is essential. Opportunities for acquiring relevant knowledge vary from place to place, but tend to be better in urban areas.

To some extent, informal business can benefit from TVET courses run by non-governmental organisations or private-sector training centres, the GIZ states. Online learning can prove useful too. The authors report that some universities, libraries and other public institutions are involved in relevant internet platforms and courses, with target groups including school dropouts, persons with disabilities, returning migrants and other disadvantaged people. Different target groups, the experts point out, often need different TVET courses. Gender, age and prior education of participants are relevant too.

Mobile learning, which relies on mobile-phone technology, is said to have an immense potential for reaching out to a great diversity of people as it is easy to use and cost efficient. The authors emphasise that mobile learning has delivered good results in agriculture.

The GIZ paper highlights different kinds of skill requirements. Literacy and numeracy are basic, but non-routine tasks generally require cognitive skills of an increasingly higher order. Moreover, it is often important to know how to interact competently with others. Handling data, coping with computer snags and protecting privacy matter too.

TVET initiatives help to promote entrepreneurial skills, the authors add. They advise organisations that offer TVET courses to pay attention to digital opportunities in the informal sector and to network among one another internationally. Countries with fragmented TVET systems and underperforming education sectors in general would benefit in particular, the authors state.

Mobile phone shop in Zanzibar.

Photo: Ton Koene/Lineair

LINK

GIZ, 2020: Digital transformation in the informal economy.
https://www.govet.international/dokumente/pdf/giz2020-0256en-digital-transformation-informal-economy.pdf

RISHIKESH THAPA recently earned his master's degree in International Relations and Cultural Diplomacy from the Hochschule Furtwangen University.
official.anthro58@gmail.com

In Ethiopia, humanitarian aid has become a political issue – as a result the population has to suffer. **Page 18**

Photo: picture-alliance/ASSOCIATED PRESS