

SDGs FOR ALL

A Monthly Magazine of INPS Southeast Asia in association with
IDN-IN Depth News and Soka Gakkai International



SDGs FOR ALL **Issue 2 May 2023**

**RHETORIC OF 'FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION'
AN EMPTY PROMISE?**

**ONE YEAR LATER?
SRI LANKA'S PROTEST MOVEMENT
WHAT HAS IT ACHIEVED?**



THE DEBT BURDEN – WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to our second edition of SDGs For All.

This month we continue our focus on Debts.

I hope you will enjoy reading this issue and your feedback is greatly appreciated. While Sri Lanka's debt crisis has been widely and falsely reported as a "Chinese debt trap", the much broader and real crisis created by reckless and lucrative lending by International Sovereign Bond markets controlled by the West has been underplayed and even ignored.

We have two focused articles on specific issues that impacts on the debt crisis in Sri Lanka and Ghana, and in our SDG Eye-openers from non-IDN sources section we link you to articles from the Africa and India on further perspectives on the debt crisis facing the Global South.

In an Op-Ed article we question UNESCO's 'Freedom of Expression' principles and calls for a rethink to promote 'freedom of expression' towards accountability on development rights principles.

We have an interesting feature on how a women's led program in Morocco is helping to empower women through creating space for pursuing personal and collective empowerment.

We draw your attention to two projects in Cuba and Ghana that address issues of sustainable development in healthcare and food security respectively through innovative local initiatives.

In the section on reports from regional and international organisations we bring to your attention new reports that address a global job crisis; calls for debt relief to assist green recovery; tourism potential for mountain ecosystems; and the dangers of plastic pollution to sustainable development.

We hope that you find this publication useful and interesting.

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Chaotic scenes at a government hospital outpatients clinic. Photo Credit: Hemali Wijerathna.

Multiple Problems Bring Sri Lanka's Healthcare System to Brink of Collapse

By Hemali Wijerathna

COLOMBO — In the face of the current economic crisis, Sri Lanka's free healthcare system, which was the envy of South Asia not long ago, is now at the brink of collapse. It is facing multiple problems with a lack of drugs, doctors migrating and the government strictly implementing a 60-year retirement policy for government doctors.

Currently, there is a shortage of more than 90 essential medicines in most government hospitals in the country, according to the Government Medical Officer's Association (GMOA).

The GMOA secretary Dr Haritha Aluthge told IDN that the hospital network in the country would collapse due to these shortages. "We have observed that the current medicine shortage seems to be on the rise daily. (In the) branch hospitals (even in) Colombo essential medicine including paracetamol, piriton and salive are in short supply." Emergency medicine such as aspirin, which is used to prevent strokes, is in short supply even at the Colombo general hospital—the country's largest hospital.

Another major factor threatening the collapse of the health service in Sri Lanka is the shortage of specialist doctors. Economic crisis has forced them to leave the country. Meanwhile, the policy of retiring government employees at 60 is also contributing to the problem.

The departure of specialists and other doctors from the country has affected the

health service to such an extent that the children's ward of the Anuradhapura teaching hospital had to be closed recently. It has facilities to treat 60 patients at a time, and according to hospital sources, nine doctors of the Anuradhapura teaching hospital have left the service including four pediatricians. With no doctors to treat the children, the patients there at the time had to be transferred to other wards.



Ruins of the ancient capital of Anuradhapura – where hospitals have existed even 2000 years ago. Photo Credit: Kalinga Seneviratne

The closure of the children's ward has also prevented medical students from Rajaratha University getting clinical training. Dr Dulan Samaraweera, director of the Anuradhapura teaching hospital told IDN that the doctors had gone, but he's unable to say how many. The children's ward however, has been reopened now with government providing the necessary specialists. The child patients transferred to other wards are now back.

Since the advent of the financial crisis a year ago, nearly 500 Sri Lankan doctors, including specialists, have left the country, many not even informing the health ministry. GMOA says that in addition to leaving without notice, 52 doctors including young specialists, have been served with notice to vacate the post within the last two months as they have left the country without informing the health ministry.

While doctors are leaving, the government does not appear to have a solution to the shortage of drugs especially for severe diseases. The helpless patients and their families are constantly suffering from this crisis. The most serious 'issue' here is that the surgeries that should be done before certain diseases become incurable are delayed due to the shortage of drugs.

The system, it is believed, was not prepared in the face of the economic crisis in the country, to allocate dollars for the import of medicines. Under an Indian loan scheme, the government allocated the equivalent of USD 114 million to the state pharmaceutical corporation, but only USD 68.5 million was used to purchase medicines. Recently, Sri Lanka Medical Association (SLMA) revealed that it was used for non-essential medicines.

Dr Ananda Wijewickrama, a member of the National Institute of Infectious Diseases, said that 80 per cent of the drugs imported under the Indian credit facility were found to be unregistered and unassisted drug in the country. There is a risk of suspending kidney transplants, and non-emergency surgeries will also have to be stopped.

Recently, at a media conference, President of the College of Anaesthesiologists and Intensivists of Sri Lanka, Dr Anoma Perera, warned that the health system is on the brink of a collapse. The most serious issue is the shortage of aesthetic drugs in government and private hospitals, and due to this all-caesarean surgeries related to child birth will be delayed. Surgery will have to be stopped by anesthesiologists and intensive care physician she said, speculating that it would have to happen in the near

futures, due to the shortage of drugs in hospitals

At present there is a situation where even some antibiotics are not available in government and private hospitals. Due to this, doctors are asking the public not to waste medicines, and to be aware of their medical conditions and take care to live carefully.

Many government doctors IDN spoke to commented on condition of anonymity. A doctor from a government hospital said that due to the shortage of a type of clip required, laparoscopic surgeries have not been performed for about three months at the hospital where he works. Due to the non-performance of the surgeries, he said that the laparoscopy machine in the hospital has not been used for more than three months. However, he said that the required clips, which are not available in the hospital, are available in private sector hospitals and pharmacies.

A doctor working in another government hospital said that due to the lack of reagents required for the creative protein test and the trooping test on heart attack patients, those test are not being performed at present. Since these tests are unavailable in government hospitals, he said that patients coming to hospitals have to go to private sector laboratories for these tests. A doctor in another leading government hospital said that there was a shortage of several types of antibiotics in the last months.

In a random survey, several patients, who came to the medical clinics of the Colombo national hospital, said that they are still not getting some medicines.

“I come to the clinic once a month. I come for treatment to skin diseases,” said Shantha Karunarathna who came from Panadura about 30 km from Colombo. “When I came last time, I was told that two medicines were not available. So, I had to take them outside. Now it is the same this time too. But that medicine is expensive. It is difficult for someone like us who don’t earn daily wages”.

Another patient, who came to get treatment for the viral fever that is spreading these days, said that some of the medicines that were prescribed for him were not available, so he was prescribed to get them from outside.

Meanwhile, GMOA spokesman Dr Haritha Aluthge told IDN that already 500 doctors have migrated within last year due to the crisis in the country and if the 60-year retirement rule were to be applied a further 800 doctors, including 300 specialists, would be on their way out by the end of the year. “This will result in in dire consequences”, he warns.

Dr Aluthge said that several provincial hospitals are already short of doctors and on the verge of collapse and the retirement rule could only aggravate the situation.

“Sending public servant abroad on no pay leave certainly is not the answer to the present problem,” he points out. He also said the doctors who had gone abroad on scholarships are not returning and so are the interns undergoing training overseas. “The problem is not in the clinical services that are being adversely affected by specialist issues, but also the health sector administration,” notes Dr Aluthge.

[Transmitte by IDN-InDepthNews on 11 May 2023]

Zimbabwe Government is Muzzling Politically Conscious Artists

By Farai Shawn Matiashe

HARARE — As a crucial election approaches, President Emmerson Mnangagwa's regime is in overdrive cracking down on politically conscious musicians who encourage people to register to vote and sing against corruption.



Zimbabwe's most celebrated reggae and dancehall artist Winky D. A screen shot from the YouTube.

The southern African nation is set to hold its general elections in August this year.

Mnangagwa, leader of the ruling party Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (Zanu PF) will be seeking a second term against Nelson Chamisa, a more youthful and charismatic leader of the opposition party Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) whom he narrowly beat in the 2018 polls.

On 4 March, overzealous police stopped Zimbabwe's most celebrated reggae and dancehall artist Winky D's performance in Chitungwiza, about 25 kilometres from the capital Harare.

Born Wallace Chirumiko, Winky D was unceremoniously hauled off the stage by cops when he was about to sing a song titled *Ibotso*, a Shona word translating to curse in English. In performing this song, he collaborated with a young Hip Hop artist Mukudzeyi Chitsama popularly known as Holy Ten, from the controversial album *Eureka* released on 31 December last year.

Ibotso associates Zanu PF leaders with disowning questions about corruption and massive looting of public resources by political elites.

Holy Ten happily performed the song at a show in neighbouring South Africa in March.

Marshall Shonhai, a music critic, said in a country like Zimbabwe which purports to be a constitutional democracy and has such an extensive bill of rights, what happened to Winky D in Chitungwiza should never happen again.

"It was a clear violation of his constitutional rights chief amongst those rights being the right to freedom of expression. As an artist, he has the right to express his ideas freely and without censorship or discrimination," Shonhai told IDN.

Revellers who were singing along at the concert in Chitungwiza were amazed to see the officers invading the stage stopping Winky D just as he was about to sing the anti-corruption song *Ibotso*.

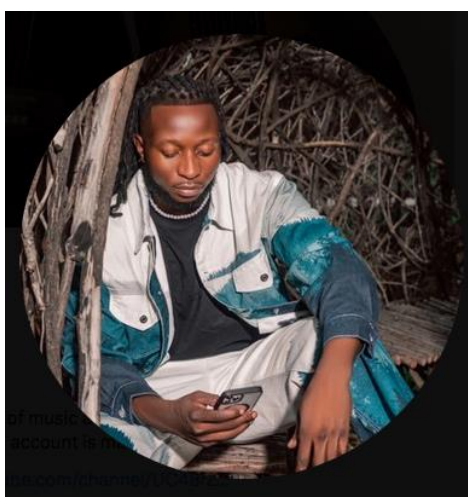
In *Eureka* album, Winky D features young artists including Enzo Ishall, Shingai, Herman, Tocky Vibes, SaintFloew, Anita Jackson and Killer T, Mwenje Mathole, and Nutty O.

This masterpiece of an album contains songs that raise different socio-economic issues from corruption and abuse of State resources to poverty.

Winky D's management has in the past maintained that they are apolitical, and fans interpret his songs the way they want.

Another artist Baba Harare, born Braveman Chizvino, had his show in Chitungwiza sanctioned by the police during the same period.

The current law states that event planners should notify the police of their intent to hold public shows for peacekeeping purposes.



Baba Harare phot from his twitter handle @BabaHarare1

Baba Harare has been vocal through his social media platforms encouraging youths to register to vote and critics say this is why he is being targeted by the Zanu PF regime.

It is widely believed that the ruling party does not want youths to register in numbers because due to the high unemployment rate and economic malaise, they will likely vote for an alternative party thus anyone encouraging youths to register to vote automatically becomes a CCC vote mobiliser.

“I think my recent Twitter activity was not necessarily coming from a place of political consciousness. It was coming from a place of frustration. I guess I was always told if you are

frustrated about a situation, do something about it,” Baba Harare told local media last year about encouraging Zimbabweans to register for 2023 general polls.

This is not the first time that Winky D or other musicians have been attacked for singing against poverty in Zimbabwe.

Early last year, dancehall chanter Ricky Fire was attacked on social media by suspected Zanu PF supporters after he had performed at the CCC star rally ahead of local elections in March 2022.

Born Tulani Takavada, Ricky Fire openly endorsed Chamisa and supported CCC just after its launch. He was even clad in yellow clothing synonymous with the opposition party's colours. He received messages and calls threatening his life.

Singer and producer Sanii Makhilima based in Australia has been attacked several times online for being a staunch supporter of CCC and criticising the massive looting of public resources by Mnangagwa's government.

Born Lungisani Makhilima, the talented music producer encourages youths to register to vote for change in the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections.

Winky D and his Vigilance Band members were attacked by a machete-wielding gang associated with Zanu PF in Kwekwe in Midlands province on the eve of Christmas in

2018. This was after Winky D had released a song titled Kasong Kejecha that talks about corruption, the deteriorating health sector, and the currency crisis.

The song was even denied airplay at State-owned radio stations as Zanu PF leaders and supporters who control them were not happy with the lyrics.

In 2020, the police cancelled Winky D's highly publicised concert in Harare citing a raft of measures to curb the spread of the deadly COVID-19 virus. But critics say it was targeted as other artists had proceeded with their shows during the same period.

In 2022, police officers disrupted Winky D on stage at a show in Borrowdale, a leafy suburb in Harare.

Shonhai deems the attacks on Winky D show a lack of tolerance. "It is actually surprising that such would happen, one would reason that a political party might want to present itself as 'tolerant' to divergent views especially going towards an election but then this is Zimbabwe where perceived dissent is not looked upon kindly," he said.

Shonhai is of the view that Winky D's music is powerful and youths can relate. "What his music is talking about is simply the day-to-day issues that ordinary people are grappling with. He sang about what people are already experiencing."

Obert Masaraure, Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition spokesperson, pointed out that Winky D's music builds consciousness among citizens, particularly young people. "Winky is trying to wean young people from drugs and get them to a point where they seriously reflect on the root cause of the national crisis," he told IDN.

"This can potentially build a movement of young people fighting back against unemployment and poverty in general as we are witnessing in Kenya, Namibia and South Africa. This movement can either vote the current government out or push the regime out through mass action."

Lazarus Sauti, a media researcher, told IDN that for decades, violence has marred and continues to scar elections in Zimbabwe. "Targeted as well are artists who are seen as pro-opposition and anti-government. A few months before the general election, the attacks against Winky D are not shocking," asserted Sauti.

"The administration is attempting to frighten voters in order to influence the election's outcome. They can accomplish this by ostracizing socio-politically engaged musicians like Winky D," he added.

Soon after launching the album in Harare, Winky D received criticism from Zanu PF-aligned artists and youth movements including the Economic Empowerment Group which held a press conference in January asking the government to ban Winky D from performing in Zimbabwe arguing that his songs



Students at University of Zimbabwe photo from Baba Harare twitter handle

“incite violence”.

Zimbabwe Broadcasting Cooperation (ZBC), a national broadcaster, had to issue a statement clarifying they had not banned Winky D’s music.

Other artists such as rapper Awa Khiwe, Quonfused and Baba Harare posted solidarity messages on their social media platforms. Politicians too, including Chamisa, an opposition party leader, has called on the government to “stop stifling artistic freedoms”.

Zimbabweans have always interpreted music along political lines since the colonial and post-colonial eras. During the colonial era, the white minority government used repressive laws to stifle musicians like Chimurenga (liberation) music guru Thomas Mapfumo who were politically conscious.

After independence during Robert Mugabe’s era, Zimbabwe’s music legends like Leonard Zhakata, Mapfumo and the late Oliver Mtukudzi have had their songs banned on the radio over political messages in their songs.

Mapfumo migrated to the United States where he has been living in exile for two decades until 2018 when he returned to perform at a music concert in Harare.

“The same draconian censorship laws that existed in (pre-independence) Rhodesia still apply today. Many artists have been censored but it has not been done officially or publicly, artists are simply denied airplay,” Shonhai pointed out.

[Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews on 3 May 2023]



Corrupt adoption practice has nothing to do with the rights of the child, but with meeting market demand. Credit: UNICEF/Marco Dormino.

European Bureaucrats May Be involved in Child Smuggling

By Aurora Weiss

VIENNA — A case that may implicate Croatian bureaucrats came to light in December 2022 when an alert immigration officer at Zambia's Ndola airport detained eight Croatian citizens on suspicion of child trafficking and falsification of documents.

At the start, the validity of the documents on the adoption of children from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was questionable because international adoptions from there have been completely prohibited since 2017. The suspected persons have since been officially arrested and charged with attempted child trafficking, and the trial is about to be heard in the Supreme Court in Zambia.

A Congolese lawyer who was an intermediary in issuing false adoption documents was arrested too. He has admitted that everything took place outside the rule of law.

At the [UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances](#) (CED) on 21 March, after several

months of silence, Dickson Matembo, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs and Internal Security of Zambia, for the first time confirmed the long-awaited information.

The eight Croats who were detained in Zambia in December on charges of attempted child trafficking used travel documents obtained based on false adoption documents. Also, Zambia wants to return the children, who are now "officially Croatian citizens", to their native DRC.

Resource-rich DRC has been in chaos due to ongoing conflicts since 1998 and over 5 million people have died due to the conflict, and another 1 million infected with HIV. This has left over 700,000 orphaned children in the country. Foreigners, however, have not been able to adopt legally from the DRC [since 2017 when a new family law code was passed](#).

On the basis of false documentation (seen by IDN), that was issued in the DRC and submitted to the courts in Croatia, adoptions were certified without checking the authenticity of the original documentation. At that moment, the false court decisions on adoption received from the Congo became official in Croatia.

Based on them the children could be registered, and the Ministry of the Interior would issue the travel documents. After that, they would be transported via Zambia to Croatia.

"The authenticity of the adoption decision itself could be doubted at the start because the documentation did not arrive through diplomatic channels, which is standard procedure in such cases," point out a specialist in child rights and adoption Roelie Post.

"It is not the practice for the Croatian Ministry of Interior to issue travel documents in the receiving country for a child who has never seen his adoptive parents or been in Croatia."

The press office of the Ministry of Social Welfare and Family claims that the ministry does not have any supervision over international adoptions from countries that are not signatories to the Hague Convention, as is the case with the DRC.

It is difficult to determine how many children the Croatian courts recognized over the past decade. The Ministry of Interior issued documents for 94 children, and the Minister of Social Welfare and Family, Marin Piletić, in a media statement, said that 131 children were adopted from the DRC. The numbers do not match, and as IDN has learned from confidential sources, all traces of the other 37 children who are supposed to be in Croatian families are being lost.



Congolese children playing with a Senegalese blue helmet. Photo MONUSCO/ Myriam Asmani via Wikimedia Commons

According to the data of the newly founded 'Association of Adoptive Parents from DRC International Adoption – Croatia', 104 children were adopted plus 4 children who live

in three families outside Croatia. No one from Homeland Security has addressed the correct numbers, checked where these children are, and in what conditions they live. Croatian authorities would not be so carefree with children from Croatia.

“The price for a child is from 15 to 40 thousand euros. The owner of the orphanage where Croats adopted children, Emmanuel Kabongo, charges approximately \$ 10,000 per child someone chooses. Extra costs go to lawyers, court interpreters, travel and accommodation, and the costs start from 15 and can go up to 40 thousand euros,” a reliable source revealed to IDN.

Judges in the Croatian city of Zlatar accepted bribes to approve adoptions in one day, and the adoptive parents themselves admitted this to IDN.

Regarding the lack of documentation and court decisions, IDN consulted Professor Dubravka Hrabar, a specialist in family law, who has observed this issue from the legal framework.

“Something like this is a disciplinary procedure if not a criminal offense. They should have been removed from duty to reduce the possibility of concealing evidence and influencing witnesses while the investigation is ongoing. But the key problem is that there is no investigation in Croatia,” said an alarmed Hrabar.

“The recognition of a foreign court decision cannot be justified only with one court seal,” she points out. “We also cannot pretend that they do not exist because, in addition to electronic records, they must be archived in paper form, where each court decision is recorded separately and must be archived and up to 50 years.”

“Judicial reasoning is an integral part of the court decision, which every judge is obliged to present. How is it possible that nothing is written in the explanation in these court decisions?” asks Hrabar.

The payments continued even when the Croatian parents came to Zambia to pick up the children who were supposed to arrive from the DRC. After the adoptive parents arrived at the hotel room, they would take their travel documents, both from them and from the children, with the excuse that they needed to arrange additional documents before bringing the children.

They were not able to refuse it because they had already invested too much. After that, these same people would come back and ask for the money needed for the additional documents, usually costing about 2,000 dollars. “Extortion takes place very subtly”, claims the person who witnessed it, but since they took their travel documents, “there is no way for going back,” testified a source from Croatia who went through the procedure of illegal adoption that wanted to stay anonymous.

This action was also confirmed in the court on 26 May by a police officer who arrested the Croats at Zambia's Ndola airport and testified that Steve Mulija, who prosecutors say was the mastermind of the Congolese child adoption operation, charged \$2,040 per child to transport them to Zambia from an orphanage in DRC. The police officer said in court that he saw a WhatsApp correspondence between one of the accused Croats, and Steve Mulija who worked in agreement with Emmanuel Kabong, the head of the orphanage in Congo from which the children came.

The Dutch specialist Roelie Post, who worked for more than 20 years in the European Commission as a pioneer for children's rights and closed international adoptions from Romania, knows well the modus operandi of international adoptions. She is also the author of the book *Romania: For Export Only*. Post claims that the international "adoption store" moved to the DRC after the closure in Romania.

"This not only violates the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child but also, if it is an order, payment, and delivery, as in this case: it is child trafficking! It is forbidden to trade with human beings. Corrupt adoption practice has nothing to do with the rights of the child, but with meeting market demand", stressed Post.

On the surface it all looks altruistic, you are adopting children and doing more good by adopting those children, but that is part of the marketing used by marketers. If we look deeper, the adoption industry is full of people who make money off orphans who are not orphans. This is how it turned out with children from the DRC.

Some adoptive parents (who did not want to be named) told IDN that they knew that the children were not abducted because they regularly hear from their parents in the DRC. Those people who claim to be the parents of these children demand money from the adoptive parents, in this case, Croatian citizens, which can be seen as emotional blackmail.

Post claims that the mafia (i.e. organized crime), is hiding behind agencies and mediators for international adoption. "In addition to the false documentation that we have seen in the Croatian cases, there are also children who are fraudulently separated from their parents in order to meet the demand for Western adoption," noted Post.

Post said she has noticed that the same people are found within the industry and operate in several countries at the same time. According to her, it is a traveling circus. The middlemen set up a "shop" and if they are caught, they go to another country and open a store there. What is created is an industry, and the product is children. They were moved to the other side of the world in a completely different culture because someone, a consumer, wants a child.

The lack of political will in Croatia to carry out an investigation has given the impression that employees of public and state bodies were involved in organized crime and that the case was being covered up. Croatia ratified the CED convention last year, so now [the Committee on Enforced Disappearances \(CED\) at the Office of UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner](#) has jurisdiction over this issue.

[Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews on 31 May 2023]

After this story was transmitted it was reported that a Zambian judge has acquitted the four Croatian couples who had been held for nearly six months on child trafficking charges on June 1st. "The prosecution has failed to make out sufficient evidence" against the eight, judge Mary Mulanda told the court in Ndola, north of the Zambian capital Lusaka. "I therefore acquit them," she said (source: AFP)

** The above articles were produced as a part of the joint media project between The Non-profit International Press Syndicate Group and Soka Gakkai International in Consultative Status with ECOSOC. Our mission is the reporting the underreported about the plan of action for People, Planet and Prosperity, and efforts to make the promise of the SDGs a reality.*



The manual scavenger has to enter the drains barefoot and without a mask. He ends up inhaling toxic gas and swallowing dirty water, but now considers these as unavoidable occupational hazards. | Photo Courtesy: Vijay Pandey/TwoCircles.net

Indian State Elections: Ruling BJP Vows to Eradicate Manual Scavenging

Special IDN SDG News Feature

BENGALURU — India's southern state of Karnataka is due to go to the polls on May 10, and sustainable development goals (SDG) issues such as sanitation, food security and free nutrition for the poor, free housing sites for the homeless and free cooking gas cylinders for the poor are top billing in the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) election manifesto released on May 1.

An interesting item in the election manifesto is the eradication of manual scavenging in the state an issue that has bugged the state for years. This is an occupation that has been assigned to the low-caste Dalit population for centuries in the caste-driven society of India. In modern India, dry toilets—meaning toilets without flushing sewage systems—are still common in many parts of India and manual scavenging is the effective removal of excreta from the dry toilets which has been linked to forced labour or slavery for years.

The manual removal of human excreta using brooms, small tin plates, and baskets carried on the head has been the assigned occupation of the Dalits. But Dalits themselves are no longer prepared to do this work and Hindu nationalist BJP politicians see it as appropriate to include the eradication of this practice in their election manifesto.

Questions have been asked in India about this practice regarding why people are continuing in this occupation despite the availability of other dignified livelihood

sources. Why is manual scavenging in practice in towns and cities where other cleaner options for survival exist?

The Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993, has prohibited the employment of manual scavengers as well as the construction or continuance of dry latrines. It described this practice as "dehumanizing" and called for municipal by-laws for the conversion of dry latrines into water-seal latrines. Karnataka state legislature has also passed this law.

Manual scavenging still exists in India mainly due to the continued presence of unsanitary latrines where human waste must be cleaned physically, rather than by a machine or sewage system. Many of such unsanitary latrines are dry latrines that don't use water.

The prohibition of insanitary latrines and employment and engagement of manual scavengers have been banned by another Act—The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers And Their Rehabilitation Act of 2013. It specifically stated that it is the responsibility of local authorities to ensure the elimination of such latrines.

Speaking at a workshop on March 14 this year, the Karnataka Safai Karmachari (persons engaged in sanitation work) Commission Chairperson Kote Shivanna said that some 90 scavengers in the state have died since 2020 while manually cleaning manholes, septic tanks, and open drainages. He admitted that though the 2013 Act prohibited this employment it still happens and there were 7080 manual scavengers still employed in Karnataka.

Shivanna told the workshop participants that the Bengaluru-based National Law School of India University has been commissioned to do a survey of scavenging workers in the state.

While speaking at the same workshop, Chorannah Shivanna, state convenor of Dalit Sangharsha Samithi, said that surveys have failed to identify all the Safai Karmacharis used as manual scavengers. "The general public tends to employ them by paying a lesser fee since private agencies that use modern technology charge more," he noted.

A manual scavenger named only as Nagaraj told *Deccan Herald* newspaper that local bodies have invested in desilting, jetting, and cesspool machines to clear underground drainage blocks, stop manhole outflow, and so on. "But we are used as manual scavengers when complaints spike during the rainy season or when machines can't be used in narrow lanes," he explained. "Most of us are not provided hand gloves and safety jackets while entering a manhole or a safety tank."

It is still not clear if BJP government is re-elected in the state, how they would go about eradicating this age-old menace which is also immersed in the Hindu caste system.

Chairperson of the National Safai Karmachari Commission, Venkateshan said that in case of death due to manual scavenging, officers heading respective local bodies too should be punished. At present, only the contractor is being booked. He also advocates for fines to increase from 100,000 rupees to 250,000 rupees.

[Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews on India, 3 May 2023]



“It pains me to see OFWs being abused—more so slaughtered by people whom they selflessly served,” Pangasinan 3rd District Rep. Rachel Arenas said. Source: STAR / Rudy Santos

Philippines Mulls Banning Deployment of Workers to Kuwait

A special SDG feature deploying Philippines media resources

MANILA — A brewing row between the Philippines and Kuwait over the treatment of Filipino migrant workers has come to the limelight here after a Kuwait Times report on 9 May said that Kuwait has

suspended all work and entry visas for Filipino expats because the Philippines government allegedly violated a labour agreement between the two countries.

When the ban was announced suddenly—and confirmed by the Philippines government only on 15 May—815 Filipino workers were at the Manila international airport about to board a flight to Kuwait. Some 514 of them were due to be employed as domestic workers.

“The OFWs who arrived in Kuwait, one day after the suspension was issued, were not taken off the plane and sent back to the Philippines,” noted [Philippine Star](#) in an editorial, where they pointed out that since 2018 at least four Filipino domestic workers have been sexually abused and murdered. “Do not contact Kuwait for visa issuance” it said, adding, “Filipinos should look for work in other countries, not Kuwait where the employer is abusive and cruel”.

The Philippines government has guaranteed to provide financial assistance to those affected by the visa ban. Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) Assistant Secretary Paul Cortes said in a media statement released through the Philippines Information Agency on May 15th that the affected OFWs (Overseas Filipino Workers) will be encompassed within the Department of Migrant Workers' (DMW) National Reintegration Program.

The National Reintegration Program provides OFWs and their families with opportunities for accessing projects and services that would help them mitigate the social cost of migration and cushion the impact of forced repatriation due to unexpected events.

According to Cortes, the Kuwaiti government's decision to suspend work visas solely applies to Filipino individuals who possess new entry visas or intend to enter the country for the first time for employment purposes.

Meanwhile, a senior administration lawmaker is seeking a total ban on the government's deployment of OFWs to Kuwait due to “heinous crimes committed” on the Philippines' migrant workers reported the Philippines Star.

Rachel Arenas, who chairs the committee on foreign affairs of the House of Representatives has argued that such a ban would be “an act of retribution” and the Philippines government should not allow such visa bans to be used as bargaining chips

in the negotiations underway for a revision of the employment agreement between the two countries signed in 2018¹.

“It pains me to see OFWs being abused—more so slaughtered by people whom they selflessly served. This barbaric act against our OFWs should be condemned by humanity and the entire international community,” she was quoted by the Philippines Star.

The Philippines government issued a ban on the deployment of first-time domestic workers to Kuwait earlier this year after a Filipino domestic worker was murdered there in January.

Cortes reminded the Philippines government that the ban in deploying domestic workers to Kuwait is rooted in its deplorable history of maltreatment against OFWs, especially domestic workers. “This only happens in Kuwait, and the Kuwaiti government seems to have no teeth in implementing their laws. Our OFWs should be sent to countries that will treat them with dignity, protect their rights, and promote their welfare,” she said.

“This total deployment ban must be enforced until the Kuwaiti government sits down with our officials and agree to our demands. Until then, we should not entertain their demands and acts of intimidation,” Arenas told the Star.

Out of the total of over 270,000 OFWs deployed in Kuwait, 196,000 are household workers, while 30% work in industries such as tourism and hospitality according to Philippines government figures.

A Philippines government delegation headed by DFA Assistant Secretary for Middle East and African Affairs Mardomel Melicor which also includes other government officials involved in migrant issues, was in Kuwait last week to negotiate a new employment agreement. There is no official statement on its outcome.

An issue of contention between the two governments is the ‘Shelters for Overseas Filipino Workers’ that is administered by the Philippines embassy in Kuwait. The shelters help Filipino workers who are fleeing from abusive employers. But Kuwaiti officials have accused embassy staff of “smuggling maids unlawfully” to the country.

“We know that they have an issue over that because that’s what they’ve been telling us for a while now. That’s why we expect it to be among the things we will discuss,” Undersecretary for Migrant Workers Eduardo de Vega told Radio Super Radyo DzBB.

Under the Philippines [Migrant Workers And Overseas Filipinos Act Of 1995](#) it requires the establishment of Migrant Workers and Other Overseas Filipinos Resource Centers “in countries where there are large concentrations of Filipino migrant workers.”

“Actually—honestly, if that’s their issue then it would be non-negotiable for the Philippines because we will not close down our shelters there since it is required under

¹ https://migrationpolicy.unescwa.org/sites/default/files/policies/2018_Kuwait_MOU_Philippines.pdf

our law," de Vega said. He also added in another media interview that currently the Kuwait shelter hosts 466 OFWs.

Migrant Workers group Migrante chairperson Arman Hernando said on a TV interview with ANC's "Rundown" last week that "the issue is not with the bilateral labour agreement, but with the system of work there, particularly the kafala system."

The kafala system, which is in place in Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates, requires migrant workers to be sponsored by a citizen or company in the host country. Upon arrival their passports are taken so that they cannot flee the country if the employer abuses them.

"It prohibits the exercise of so many rights of our fellow Filipinos and gives employers in Kuwait license to abuse them," Hernando, who described the policy as "very stringent", said.

The DMW said in January when the Kuwait deployment ban was announced that what they need is a revision of the 2018 bilateral labour deployment agreement to include more safeguards for OFW in Kuwait like the agreement signed in 2017 between the Philippines and Saudi Arabia². Last week's talks in Kuwait is believed to be centered on that.

Remittances from OFWs is a major foreign exchange earner for the Philippines and they have been sending workers abroad for decades as Filipinos seek better wages and opportunities overseas. Remittances from Filipinos abroad reached \$36.14 billion in 2022.

** This report was compiled by IDN-InDepthNews SDG news desk drawing on resources of [PhilStar](#), [Philippines Star](#), [INQUIRER.net](#), [PIA](#) and [Filipino Star](#).*

[Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews on 24 May 2023]



Filipino Overseas Workers fuelled Philippines' national international airlines Cebu Pacific and Philippines Airlines at Manila International Airport. Photo: Kalinga Seneviratne

² https://migrationpolicy.unescwa.org/sites/default/files/policies/2017_KSA_MOU_Philippines.pdf

Hunger & Starvation Threaten Quarter of a Billion People Worldwide

By Thalif Deen

UNITED NATIONS — A new report on world hunger by the [Global Network Against Food Crises \(GNAFC\)](#) is a setback to the UN’s highly-publicized goal of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger by 2030—an integral part of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)



Far from achieving progress in the fight against hunger, the latest numbers indicate a reversal in the battle front.

WFP/Arete/Fredrik Lerneryd. WFP staff, Francis Mpoyi, measures baby's arm during a routine check-up in Kalemie, Democratic Republic of Congo.

Released May 3, the "Global Report on Food Crises" (GRFC), warns the high levels of acute food insecurity require urgent food and livelihood assistance for the fourth consecutive year in 2022.

Over a quarter of a billion people were estimated to face acute hunger, with economic shocks and the Ukraine war contributing to the increase.

In 2022, around 258 million people across 58 countries and territories faced acute food insecurity at crisis or worse levels, up from 193 million people in 53 countries and territories in 2021.

Emily Farr, Global Food and Economic Security Lead at Oxfam said: "For global hunger to rise for a fifth consecutive year in a world of plenty is a stain on our collective humanity."

She said decades of progress made to end poverty and hunger are now being fast reversed by conflict, economic shocks and climate change.

"Arms dealers, warlords, big polluters, and food monopolies are making the planet increasingly uninhabitable, driving more people from their homes and lands and wiping out the income of millions already struggling to put food on the table.

"In East Africa alone, one of the worst affected regions, climate-induced drought and ongoing conflict have left over 36 million people in extreme hunger—nearly the entire population of Canada—up from 24 million last year. Over 85,000 people are already facing starvation."

Families are being forced to eat dry leaves, beg, or have their girls married at young ages to survive, she declared.

Danielle Nierenberg, President and co-founder of Food Tank, the think tank for food, told IDN the new report highlights a stark reality—that conflict, the climate crisis, and inequality and injustice are the root causes of hunger and poverty across the globe.

But "we"—policymakers, corporations, multi-lateral institutions, producers, and citizen eaters--can make the changes necessary to create food and economic systems where no one is left behind.

The next few months are critical as world leaders meet at Aim4C, Climate Week/UNGA, and, of course, COP28—"the decisions we make now can ensure that those who are currently hungry not only have the means to survive, but to thrive", she warned.

The 2023 report is described as the result of a collaborative effort among 16 partners to achieve a consensus-based assessment of acute food insecurity in GRFC countries.

The report aims to inform humanitarian and development action by providing independent and consensus-based evidence and analysis.

Launched in 2016 by the European Union, FAO and WFP, the GNAFC seeks to better link, integrate, and guide existing initiatives, partnerships, programmes and policy processes to sustainably address the root causes of crises.

The alliance now includes the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the World Bank.

In a [foreword to the report](#), UN Secretary-General António Guterres says more than a quarter of a billion people are now facing acute levels of hunger, and some are on the brink of starvation. That's unconscionable.

This seventh edition of the GRFC "is a stinging indictment of humanity's failure to make progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 2 to end hunger, and achieve food security and improved nutrition for all".

In fact, we are moving in the wrong direction. Conflicts and mass displacement continue to drive global hunger. Rising poverty, deepening inequalities, rampant underdevelopment, the climate crisis and natural disasters also contribute to food insecurity, Guterres argues.

"As always, it is the most vulnerable who bear the brunt of this failure, facing soaring food prices that were aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic and, despite some declines, are still above 2019 levels due to the war in Ukraine.

All this, while humanitarian funding to fight hunger and malnutrition pales in comparison to what is needed," he declared.

Asked about reports of food being looted across Sudan, UN Deputy Spokesperson Farhan Haq said May 3 that WFP has reported about 17,000 metric tonnes having been looted out of a stockpile of more than 80,000 metric tonnes of food that the agency had in Sudan in different parts of the country.

"So, the looting occurred in many different areas... but they are right now in the process

of trying to evaluate the stocks that were lost”, he noted.

Guterres said the food crisis demands fundamental, systemic change. This report makes clear that progress is possible.

“We have the data and know-how to build a more resilient, inclusive, sustainable world where hunger has no home—including through stronger food systems, and massive investments in food security and improved nutrition for all people, no matter where they live”.

With collective action and a commitment to change, he argued, “we can ensure that every person, everywhere, has access to the most basic of human needs: food and nutrition.”

Elaborating further, Oxfam’s Farr said while the pandemic and the Ukraine war have made food and energy unaffordable for millions, 95 food and energy corporations made a whopping \$306 billion in windfall profits just last year.

“This is a rigged economic system that exploits and starves the poorest and rewards the richest”.

“We need an urgent and fundamental shift in our humanitarian system if we are to put the brakes on the speeding hunger crisis. Funds must be used to equip poor countries to prepare for and cope with reoccurring economic and climate shocks before they happen, and rich donors must immediately inject money to meet the UN appeal for response”.

“But just “band-aid” funding will only temporarily delay the problem. We must do more in resolving conflict, inequality, and climate change. Warring parties must lower their guns”.

Rich polluting nations must cut their emissions. Governments must tax the rich and polluters to free funds for social protection and climate mitigation, to help vulnerable people cope with shocks, she declared.

“This is a moment in history that will judge whether we will prioritize our collective humanity over greed of a powerful few.”

[Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews on 4 May 2023]

Southern Africa Looks Forward to Productive Landscapes

By Rita Joshi

BONN, Germany — The largest living structure on earth, spanning 8,000km across Africa, is ushering in a new era of sustainability and economic growth. A game-changing African initiative launched by the African Union in 2007 aims to restore the Sahel's degraded landscapes and transform millions of lives, according to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification ([UNCCD](#)).



Greening the vast landmass of Africa. Photo source: UNCCD

The 16 members of the Southern African Development Community ([SADC](#)) have committed to accelerating multi-sectoral transformation through the SADC Great Green Wall Initiative ([GGWI](#)).

A major objective of the SADC Initiative is to create productive landscapes in Southern Africa that are socially inclusive, economically prosperous, and environmentally sustainable. By 2025, the goal is to establish multisectoral partnerships in collaboration with countries and key partners and to obtain an indicative US\$ 27 billion in pledges.

In March 2023, the UNCCD Global Mechanism, African Union Development Agency-NEPAD, SADC Secretariat, AUC and Commonwealth Secretariat jointly convened more than 50 regional and international partners in Cape Town, South Africa. The occasion marked a landmark moment for the implementation of SADC GGWI. During this gathering, participants identified concluded with specific next steps and recommendations to facilitate financial backing and organized action on the ground.

Making strides, the World Bank paired with the SADC Secretariat, UNCCD, AUC, AUDA-NEPAD and the Commonwealth Secretariat to invite the SADC Ministers of Finance to attend a gathering on 12 April at Washington DC's Spring Meetings. The attendees praised what had been accomplished so far and recognized GGWI as a critical part of coping with regional tribulations. They also articulated the need for an economic examination of inattention and 'regular procedure'.

There are immediate effects of desertification, land degradation, and drought in Southern Africa, which covers a total land area of 10 million kilometers. Climate change, biodiversity loss, and unsustainable development practices in agriculture, energy and infrastructure also pose challenges.

In his welcome remarks, Floribert Ngaruko, World Bank Group Executive Director Africa Group 1, said the Spring Meetings were recognized as a critical gathering to

engage and discuss the SADC Great Green Wall Initiative, confirming that it demonstrates Member States' commitments towards deeper regional integration as articulated by the SADC Treaty, SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) 2020-2030, and other regional policies and strategies.

A green and resilient future for the SADC region is achievable with our collective efforts, said H.E. Elias M. Magosi, SADC Executive Secretary. As part of the implementation of the Initiative across the 16 SADC nations, he stressed the importance of building capacity for resource mobilization.

In line with the SADC GGWI Strategy, the financing and development partners expressed their commitment to leverage opportunities and to mobilize financing for the region.

The Great Green Wall is an exciting initiative that brings together many different actors and is part of a comprehensive economic and development plan. Louise Baker, Managing Director of the UNCCD Global Mechanism, commented, "Even if we succeed in restoring land, we need to ensure that it results in tangible benefits like access to renewable energy, infrastructure, markets, and livelihoods. Otherwise we are only halfway to achieving our vision."

GGWI is expected to grow exponentially in scale and impact over the next two years with the support of countries and partners in the region. There is still much work to be done, but the message from the countries and the partners is clear: political support is already there—embedded in existing structures and frameworks of the SADC—what is needed is better coordination and collaboration across sectors and actors.

[Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews on 19 May 2023]

Poor Countries Face Collapse Over Unsustainable Borrowing

By Lisa Vives, Global Information Network

NEW YORK — African countries that borrowed billions of dollars from international creditors and private lenders face painful repayment demands that threaten their budgets for schools, power, food and fuel.

After nail-biting negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Ghana's Finance Minister Ken Ofori-Atta announced this week that \$600 million was scheduled to arrive soon—the first tranche of a 34 billion bailout approved by the lending institution. The remaining funds will be available over the next three years.



Burden of Debt. Image source: Prime Business

"I believe we have some excellent news to discuss today with the approval yesterday of a \$3 billion-3-year program for Ghana," the minister said. "As you know Ghana has been facing a severe economic and financial crisis with a debt burden assessed as

unsustainable.”

Ghana faced soaring inflation, high debt and a weakening currency when negotiations began with the IMF last July for a bailout package. The IMF agreed to the bailout after a two-week visit to the West African country.

The IMF funds should help Ghana emerge from a financial crisis made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic but will require changes to the country’s tax system and public spending.

According to the World Bank, Ghana is one of the most indebted countries on the continent, with a debt of \$58 billion representing 105% of its GDP. Other countries with a heavy debt load are Angola, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sudan, Tunisia and Zambia.

"We focus a lot on the external debt to international creditors, but it is important to bear in mind that most of Ghana's public debt is domestic debt held by the country's commercial banks," said Marc Raffinot of Paris Dauphine University and a development specialist.

Back in January, 26 civil society and aid organizations penned an open letter calling on international creditors to cancel Ghana’s debt. Ghana’s public debt stood at over \$46.7 billion by the end of September 2022, of which 42% was domestic debt.

According to the World Bank’s International Debt Statistics, 64% of Ghana’s scheduled foreign currency external debt service between 2023 and 2029 is to private lenders.

Twenty percent of the debt is to multilateral institutions and 6% to other governments. Notably, while mainstream reporting on Ghana’s debt scenario tends to emphasize China as the country’s “biggest bilateral creditor,” only 10% of Accra’s external debt service is owed to Beijing.

Meanwhile, Catholic Bishops serving in the humanitarian and development arm of the Church in Africa appealed to the Group of Seven (G7) countries who met in Hiroshima, Japan, to support African countries that are struggling with poverty, including the possibility of canceling debts that are “unpayable”.

“Last year, over 300 million people experienced food insecurity, exacerbating drivers of conflict and social tension in many African countries and making governance more fragile,” they said

“There is a need for financial reform along ethical lines that would produce in its turn an economic reform to benefit everyone,” Pope Francis was quoted to say. "We are all debtors: to God, who is so generous, and to our brothers and sisters. We are all 'in deficit' in life. And we need mercy."

[Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews on 22 May 2023]



University of the South Pacific in Suva, Fiji. Photo: Kalinga Seneviratne

India Partners with the South Pacific University To Launch Climate Change Research Institute

By Joeli Bili*

SUVA, Fiji — A partnership forged between the Government of India and [The University of the South Pacific \(USP\)](#) will see the establishment of a new center for climate change, coastal and ocean management in Fiji.

[The Sustainable Coastal and Ocean Research Institute \(SCORI\)](#) at USP's Suva campus was launched on 22 May by India's High Commissioner to Fiji, Palaniswamy Subramanyan Karthigeyan, who described the initiative as a celebration of the future.

"This is a meeting of the best minds from both sides in the scientific, technology world and possibly being on the frontline of climate action," Mr Karthigeyan said. He added, the institute would have India's unstinted support and the way forward was going to be more critical.

"Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, we have lost quite a bit of time in taking this initiative forward and we have the momentum to make sure that this is not lost sight of and we make it a benchmark project not just for the region but the entire world," he said.

"The onus of responsibility is on all of us to make sure that we do justice to that. The best way to do that is to make it a benchmark project in the shortest possible time, and

to make it a sustainable model of excellence.”

Mr Karthigeyan echoed similar sentiments made earlier in the day by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the [3rd India-Pacific Islands Cooperation \(FIPIC\) Summit](#) in Papua New Guinea. PM Modi focused on the problems faced by the Global South, including the issues of climate change, natural disasters, hunger, poverty, and various health-related challenges among others.

“I am glad to hear that the Sustainable Coastal and Ocean Research Institute has been established at The University of the South Pacific in Fiji. This institute connects India’s experiences in sustainable development with the vision of Pacific Island countries,” he said in an address at the summit in Port Moresby on 22 May.

“In addition to research and development, it will be valuable in addressing the challenges of climate change. I am pleased that SCORI is dedicated to the well-being, progress, and prosperity of citizens from 14 countries,” Modi added drawing attention to India’s desire to partner the region in tackling issues that regional countries have placed priority on.

PM Modi said Pacific Island countries were not Small Island States, but rather, large ocean countries He noted it was this vast ocean that connected India with the Pacific region.

“The Indian philosophy has always viewed the world as one family. Climate change, natural disasters, hunger, poverty, and various health-related challenges were already prevalent.

“Now, new issues are emerging. Barriers are arising in the supply chains of food, fuel, fertiliser, and pharmaceuticals,” Mr Modi said.

India, he said, stood with its Pacific Island friends during challenging times, whether it was vaccines or essential medicines, wheat or sugar.

USP’s vice-chancellor and president, Professor Pal Ahluwalia, said the unwavering support and endorsement of SCORI by PM Modi and the Fijian Government underscored the significance of the institute in advancing climate change and oceans management in our region.

“With the establishment of SCORI, we embark on a new chapter of cooperation between India, Fiji, and The University of the South Pacific,” he said.

“This institute will serve as a hub for the exchange of knowledge, ideas, and cutting-edge technologies, ensuring that our work in climate change and oceans management remains at the forefront of global research.”

Through the collaboration of esteemed scholars from India and Fiji, Prof Ahluwalia said the University aimed to publish ground-breaking research and set new agendas in the field of coastal and ocean studies.

“This institute will greatly enhance our research activities and capacity building, contributing to the sustainability of the Pacific Ocean and aligning with the [Blue Pacific](#)

[2050 Strategy](#) launched by our Pacific leaders,” he said.

USP deputy vice-chancellor and vice-president (education) Professor Jito Vanualailai said that SCORI will serve as a hub for research and development to meet the needs of Pacific Island countries.

“SCORI will spearhead research and development initiatives that address pressing issues in the region,” he said.

“Together, we strive to develop policies for sustainable management and protection of marine and coastal ecosystems while effectively tackling coastal hazards and vulnerabilities stemming from global warming, ocean acidification and climate change.”

USP’s director of research, Professor Sushil Kumar, said the project was a reality due to the integral role played by some “remarkable individuals and organisations”.

Professor Kumar thanked the governments of Fiji and India for their support to foster collaboration and partnership under SCORI.

He said apart from the Ministry of Earth Sciences, Government of India, several Institutes such as the National Center for Coastal Research are part of the collaborations.



The idyllic Pacific Islands. How long would it last? South Islands Fiji. Photo: Kalinga Seneviratne

The center will have a dedicated focus on areas of common interests such as coastal vulnerability, coastal erosion and coastal protection, monitoring and mapping of marine biodiversity, ocean observation systems, sea water quality monitoring and capacity building.

SCORI will be funded and maintained by the Government of India for five years until it is handed over to USP.

*Joeli Bili is a final-year journalism student at The University of the South Pacific’s Suva Campus. He is a senior reporter for *Wansolwara*, USP Journalism’s training newspaper and online publication.

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Photo Credit: UNESCO

UNESCO Needs to Rethink Freedom of Expression

Viewpoint by Kalinga Seneviratne

SYDNEY — At a time when the West has weaponised human rights, the United Nations body that promotes freedom of expression need to rethink what it means.

Every year [UNESCO](#) (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation) mark World Press Freedom Day (WPF) on May 3 with a particular theme and this year is its 30th edition.

UNESCO has mainly provided a platform through their WPF to civil society (NGO) groups that are funded by western agencies to shape the free speech agenda. With many countries in the Global South seeing these groups involved in so-called “colour revolutions” as a security threat, it is time, as an inter-governmental organisation, UNESCO paid some attention to the views of its member states who are not of the western alliance.

This year’s theme is ‘Shaping of Future Rights: Freedom of Expression as a Driver of all other human rights’.

UNESCO has given four special briefs in their website for campaign action on the day. First of which is the “misuse” of the judicial system to attack freedom of expression. It focuses on the use of criminal defamation to silence journalists, but no mention at all about how the UK and US judicial systems are being used to silence Julian Assange of Wikileaks.

Yonden Lhatoo, the Chief News Editor of the Hong Kong based South China Morning Post in a recent videolog made a powerful indictment regarding the Assange case.

“There is no limit to the insufferable hypocrisy of these gangsters in glass houses,” he said referring to the US, UK and Australian government action against Assange. “They defecate all over on human rights and press freedom in the name of national security, when it suits them, calling it ‘justice’, when a country they don’t like do something of that sort, its ‘repression’—how convenient”.

Safety of foreign journalists and those covering protests are two other issues, while the

fourth UNESCO brief is about journalism and whistleblowing.

The 16-page UNESCO brief on whistleblowing talks about the new electronic means of leaks to media and publishing of such information. It mentions “Pub/Leaks” and “Latamleaks” in Latin America but no mention of Wikileaks. It also argues that whistleblowers and publishers must have guarantees of protection and that their actions do not lead to negative consequences, such as financial sanctions, job dismissals, undermining their family members or circles of friends, or threats of arbitrary arrest. But, no mention whatsoever about the Assange’s case including western financial institutions blocking donations to Wikileaks³.

The document seems to distance itself completely from this case because the US considers Assange a computer hacker not a journalist. The brief talks about the benefits to society from whistleblowers that “allow people to get information and evidence of acts of corruption, human rights violations, or other matters of unquestionable public interest” but no direct reference to war crimes, that Wikileaks exposed through whistleblowers like Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden.

Unfortunately, today, it is okay to talk about war crimes if the Russians are doing it but not when the Americans, NATO or Australians are involved.

In June 2019, the Australian Federal Police raided the newsroom of Australia’s national broadcaster ABC after they have exposed Australian forces’ war crimes in Afghanistan. They took away the laptops of some journalists in an attempt to trace the whistleblowers describing the action as a “national security” operation.

Today human rights arguments have lost credibility because of these double standards. Thus, it is interesting to note how China is now pushing a new human rights agenda via the United Nations.

In July 2021, China succeeded in getting a resolution adopted at the 47th session of the UN Human Rights Council on development rights⁴. It affirmed that the eventual eradication of extreme poverty must remain a high priority for the international community and that international cooperation for sustainable development has an essential role in shaping our shared future.

The resolution was adopted by 31 votes to 14 against. Interestingly those voting against were 12 European countries plus Japan and South Korea. While joining China in voting for it were Russia, India, Pakistan, Cuba, Indonesia, Philippines and Fiji, plus a number of African and Latin American countries.

The vote itself gives a good indication of the new trends in the human rights agenda promoted by the Global South.

This brings us to the question of where freedom of speech stands in this human rights agenda.

Human rights according to this agenda are what is prescribed in the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals(SDGs). Providing clean water and sanitation to the people, a good

³ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-britain-wikileaks-idUSTRE79N46K20111024>

⁴ <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G21/199/81/PDF/G2119981.pdf?OpenElement>

education, developing and nurturing sustainable systems of agriculture to provide food security to people, protecting the environment and protecting communities from the impacts of climatic change, empowering women, providing proper housing and healthcare to people, and so forth and so on.

Governments should be held accountable to providing these rights to people, but that cannot be achieved by the media always accusing governments of corruption, or people coming out to the streets shouting slogans or blocking roads or occupying government buildings.

Reporters need to go out to the communities talk to the people and find out how they live, what is lacking and how they think these services could be provided by governments. Journalist could even become a facilitator of a dialogue between the people and the government.

Human rights is a marvellous concept on paper, but its practice is today immersed in double standards and hypocrisy. Media has been a party to this.

In 2016-17, I was part of a team at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok to develop curriculum to train Asian journalists in what we call “mindful communication for sustainable development”. It was funded by UNESCO, and we used Asian philosophical concepts in designing the curriculum, to encourage journalists to have a compassionate mindset in reporting grassroots development issues from the peoples’ perspective.

We want to develop a new generation of communicators, who would not demand rights and create conflicts, but work with all stakeholders, including governments, to help achieve the SDGs in a cooperative manner rather than confrontation.

It is time that UNESCO listen to the Global South and rethink about why we need to have freedom of speech and for what purpose.

** Dr Kalinga Seneviratne is the deputy global editor of IDN-In Depth News and is also currently a consultant to the Journalism Program at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji. He is the former Head of Research at the Asian Media Information and Communication Center (AMIC) in Singapore.*

[Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews on 3 May 2023]



Young people in Brussels protesting against secret trade deals in 2016.
Photo Credit: Wikimedia Commons

Women Transform their Horizons in Rural Morocco

Viewpoint By Yossef Ben-Meir

MARRAKECH — A research study reveals the positive community impact of sustainable agricultural initiatives when preceded by women’s empowerment workshops, leading to participatory action, enhanced community well-being, and decentralization.

Since 2016, the [High Atlas Foundation \(HAF\)](#) has implemented self-discovery workshops that encourage and equip women to recognize their intrinsic value, identify their goals, and strategically consider their plans for the future. The “Imagine” program takes place over four days and provides a space for pursuing personal and collective empowerment.

Imagine utilizes a rights-based approach that integrates Morocco’s Family Code—Moudawana—and facilitates women’s exploration of their legal protections. Cooperative-building activities also enable women to increase their financial independence and access to equitable development.



Imagine empowerment workshop participants join hands in a closing ceremony. Photo Credit: HAF.

The High Atlas Foundation recently conducted a comparative impact analysis with two groups of women in the Toubkal rural municipality of the Taroudant province following two climate actions. In 2017, HAF hosted an Imagine empowerment and

development experience with women in the Aguerzrane village.

During the experience, the participants examined social relationships in their lives that influence their ability to advance their goals. Throughout the workshop, participants further considered their outlook on work and money, emotions and body, sexuality and spirituality (in a Moroccan-Islamic context), and their vision for the future.

After the participatory planning experience, the Aguerzrane women decided to build an organic fruit tree and medicinal herb nursery. This method of cultivation, the women realized, would generate income through plant sales in their region as well as contribute to the existing household needs of the community. The nursery was built in 2018 on newly constructed agricultural terraces built on formerly eroding mountainsides, and the nursery has been productively operating ever since. The provision of regular technical training has been provided by highly qualified volunteers through the [USAID Farmer-to-Farmer Program](#).

The second village, Missouri, is one kilometer north of Aguerzrane. In 2018, HAF received a request from their farmers for cherry, walnut, and almond trees, and HAF met the request. The Imagine workshop and participatory methods were not facilitated in this community, but the farmers received, planted, and maintained the trees based

on the quantity and variety they preferred.

HAF then assisted a graduate thesis study that examined the social and economic effect on both villages: Aguerzane, which participated in the women's empowerment workshop prior to receiving seeds and materials; and Missouri, where trees were provided without inclusive participatory planning. The researcher, Nora Martetschläger, spent three months living with the communities, engaging in individual and communal data gathering procedures to analyze [multidimensional poverty](#).

[In her published summary of the analysis](#), Nora found that “although the other village [Aguerzane], where fewer trees were planted, performed worse overall on most poverty indicators, women's participation in education and employment was higher because of more individual and collective awareness and action in those areas.”

In Missouri, however, there was a negligible income benefit for the women despite reported increases in household earnings and food security. There was no increase in girls' participation in education or women's literacy. However, two families moved to the city – likely partially enabled by the new income – where there are more opportunities for girls' participation in education.

This study illuminates a significant challenge in the connection between women's empowerment and scalable climate action for inclusive systemic change and national resilience. HAF's women's empowerment workshops have proven to be an effective strategy for improving cross-sectoral sustainable development. However, the demand for such strategies is limited by organizational capacity. Upon reviewing Nora's study, HAF took remedial action in Missouri by facilitating Imagine workshops. Funds from the Darden School of the University of Virginia will be used to build agricultural terraces on an eroding mountainside the Missouri community designated for the women's group.

However, the limiting issue of capacity remains: HAF has 15 empowerment trainers and anticipates planting a minimum of 1.7 million trees with 10,000 farming families in 160 municipalities this year. These objectives are indicative of a broader structural challenge to the implementation of strategic, community designed solutions.

HAF lacks the finances and personnel to implement and monitor climate-smart agriculture to ensure that women and girls are the direct beneficiaries, despite having a strategy to achieve national scale.

This study also reveals the potential challenges to implementing decentralization without first solidifying participatory experiences at the local level. The enhanced subnational power afforded by decentralization will entrench existing class and gender based stratifications in subnational jurisdictions. Climate-smart agricultural projects could have the same effect of affirming inequitable power and resource distribution if such projects are not founded on participatory experiences. Women's and girls' participation and management in all phases of development must be front and center in order for climate actions to positively impact their lives, families, communities, and country.

**Dr. Yossef Ben-Meir is President of the High Atlas Foundation and a Visiting Professor of the University of Virginia. [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews on 29 May 2023]*



Achieving debt sustainability and economic resilience in Africa

Multilateral development banks should listen to African stakeholders; lend in local currency, collaborate with regional and national bodies such as Public Development Banks; and focus on creating

local wealth, not just jobs.

Source: African Renewal

Link: <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/may-2023/achieving-debt-sustainability-and-economic-resilience-africa>

Climate-stressed Indian farmers seek to escape debt and suicide

India's farmers face mounting losses as drought worsens, with some even driven to suicide, spurring calls for social protection to ease the pressure.

Source: Eco-Business

Link: <https://www.eco-business.com/news/climate-stressed-indian-farmers-seek-to-escape-debt-and-suicide/>



In Vietnam, waste pickers fight the climate crisis, but with no social safety net



Without being formally recognised, Vietnam's vulnerable waste workers cannot organise themselves to demand better working conditions and receive lower prices for the trash they collect. They also face increasing competition.

Source: Eco-Business

Link: <https://www.eco-business.com/news/in-vietnam-waste-pickers-fight-the-climate-crisis-but-with-no-social-safety-net/>

India builds more hospitals as population surges but doctors in short supply

The problem is a lack of doctors, a shortage that is reaching crucial levels as India becomes the world's most populous nation. India's doctor-to-patient ratio hit a record high of 1.2 doctors per 1,000 patients in 1991, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), but as its population surged, the ratio dropped to about 0.7 in 2020.

Source: Economic Times of India

Link: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/india-builds-more-hospitals-as-population-surges-but-doctors-in-short-supply/>



Fiji's National Budget To Address Labour Shortage

Government is determined to address Fiji's labour shortage problem, says Minister of Finance Professor Biman Prasad. "Employers are looking for painters, tile layers, carpenters, even drivers are leaving the country because they find

lucrative offers in Australia and New Zealand. So what we are putting in place is trying to ensure that we keep training" he told a budget consultative meeting.

Source: Fiji Times

Link: <https://www.fijitimes.com/2023-2024-national-budget-plans-for-labour-shortage/>

Cuba's first integrated powder Moringa plant

Cuba's first integral moringa powder plant, inaugurated in La Sierpe, Sancti Spíritus, is ready to initially produce some 20 tons. According to Prensa Latina, given the tree's protein properties, the powder will have three destinations of vital importance for the nation's development: the pharmaceutical industry, exports and as a nutritional supplement in the production of cookies.

Source: Granma

Link: <https://en.granma.cu/cuba/2023-06-07/cubas-first-integrated-powder-moringa-plant-to-produce>



Ghana goes organic to build resilient food systems

As the Ministry of Food and Agriculture takes steps to promote organic fertilizer production and uptake among farmers, the UN has helped secure US\$250,000 and another US\$60,000 for sustainable and transformative food systems solutions.

Source: Africa Renewal

Link: <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/may-2023/ghana-goes-organic-build-resilient-food-systems>

Interpol warns of 'global trafficking crisis' involving job scam victims

Interpol has issued a global warning on the growing trend of large-scale human trafficking, as it held a three-day conference with police chiefs from around the world in Singapore. The victims were lured through fake job ads to online scam centres, and were then kidnapped and forced to commit financial crimes.

Source: Today

Link: <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/interpol-warns-global-trafficking-crisis-involving-job-scam-victims-international-conference-kicks-spore-first-time-2187956>



Mutually reinforcing crises have worsened the global employment divide

Mutually reinforcing crises, including rising debt levels, are disproportionately affecting developing countries, worsening the global employment divide

between high-income and low-income countries and widening existing inequalities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. International cooperation aimed at bolstering jobs and social protection can help tackle growing disparities between high and low-income countries, according to the new ILO Monitor on the World of Work.

Link to download Report:

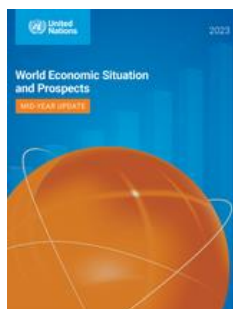
https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_883341/lang--en/index.htm

Expert Report Calls for Debt Relief for a Green and Inclusive Recovery

A debt crisis is emerging in the Global South at the precise moment when substantial investment is needed to meet shared climate and development goals. Yet, the G20 Common Framework has been unable to engage all creditor classes or link debt relief to climate and development. How can emerging market and developing economies (EMDEs) find financial and fiscal stability while making the investments necessary to transition to sustainable and low-carbon economies? How does climate vulnerability impact a country's debt sustainability? What level of restructuring is required across creditor classes for debt distressed EMDEs to achieve debt sustainability? A new report 'Debt Relief for a Green and Inclusive Recovery analyzes new data on the level and composition of public and private external sovereign debt for EMDEs and finds that while EMDEs' sovereign debt is increasing overall, climate vulnerable countries are experiencing some of the worst debt distress.



Link to download Report: https://drgr.org/files/2023/05/DRGR_Report_2023.pdf



New UN report: Risk of prolonged period of low growth looms large amid multiple global crises

Growing financing gaps, anemic investment and mounting debt vulnerabilities threaten to derail global progress on sustainable development. Instead, the world economy faces the risk of a prolonged period of low growth as the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ever-worsening impact

of climate change and macroeconomic structural challenges remain unaddressed, according to the *World Economic Situation and Prospects as of mid-2023* released on 16 May 2023.

Link to read report: <https://desapublications.un.org/publications/world-economic-situation-and-prospects-mid-2023>

Tourism's Potential for Mountain Ecosystems and Communities Outlined in New Report

While mountain tourism has become an increasingly relevant motivation for travel, data on its size and impact remains scarce, a new report from the UN agencies the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the Mountain Partnership (MP) makes clear. Mountain tourism represents between 9 and 16% of international tourist arrivals worldwide, translating into 195 to 375 million tourists for 2019 alone. However, the scarcity of domestic mountain tourism-related data make it difficult or even impossible to assess the economic, social and environmental impacts of this important segment. This new report aims to address this data gap.



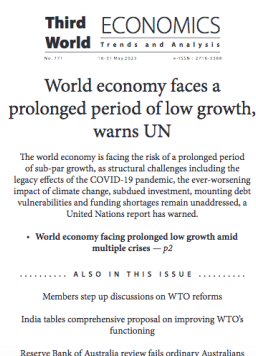
Download report: <https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/epdf/10.18111/9789284424023>

Turning off the Tap: How the world can end plastic pollution and create a circular economy

The world can save trillions of dollars and cut contamination by 80 per cent using existing technology, but the effort needs big policy moves, says a report released ahead of another round of talks for a legally-binding plastic treaty.

Link to download report:

https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/42277/Plastic_pollution.pdf?sequence=4



Third World Economics

Published by the Malaysia-based Third World Network, this bi-monthly publication is into its Issue No: 771, and is one of the longest surviving economics briefs for the developing countries from a Global South perspective.

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