

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OBSERVER

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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OBSERVER ISSUE 9 MAY 2022

ACHIEVING SDGs BY 2030 IN PERIL



Papua New Guinea (top), Egypt (above) and India (right).
Picture Credits: Kalinga Seneviratne

We are what our thoughts have made us; so take care about what you think. Words are secondary. Thoughts live; they travel far – Swami Vivekananda

FROM THE EDITOR

After two issues focusing mainly on the impact of the Ukraine-Russia war on the achievement of SDGs, this month we wanted to shift the focus, but, it was not that easy as reflected in the articles published here.

The United Nations has revised its global growth estimates due to the war, and the Security Council holds emergency session on food security, while Southern Africa feels the pinch of the war because of its widespread economic relations with Russia and food imports from Ukraine. Meanwhile global leaders keep on talking about loss of lives and livelihood but impotent to do anything about it.

We also focus attention on the global environment problems with a new IPCC report reflecting bad news for the small Pacific Island nations that are facing the impact of climatic change due to “development” policies of richer countries elsewhere over many generations. We reflect on the security concerns associated with environmental crisis, while we also raise concerns about the gender inequality that continues due to lack of adequate funding for girls’ education and women’s health.

We would like to alert you to a book on late Dr Martin Khor, the Malaysian development economist and activist who for over 3 decades worked tirelessly to bring the voice of the South to global international economic forums. We also raise your attention to the monthly magazine ‘Third World Resurgence’ published by the Third World Network based in Penang, Malaysia – Dr Khor was instrumental in launching this project in the early 1990s and now it is into its 350th issue. It gives a real South perspective on global affairs – especially on the economic order.

Finally we have two contrasting articles on democracy – one on the Philippines that reflects the weaknesses of the democratic process which is unable to keep the corrupt out of politics for ever; while the other from Fiji shows how governments through affirmative action and sincerity could make a minority – who were initially brought to the country, perhaps without their consent, by the British during the colonial era- to feel that they are now a part of the country’ history and belonging.

Dr Kalinga Seneviratne - Editor

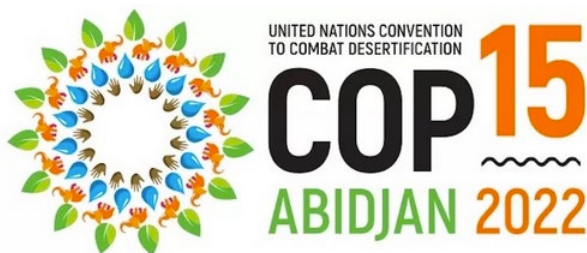
“Each generation faces this thorny question of how to meet the production needs of our societies without destroying our forests and lands and thus condemning the future of those on whose behalf we endeavour” - Patrick Achi, Prime Minister of Côte d’Ivoire, speaking at the closing ceremony of UNCCD COP15,

Issue 9 – May 2022

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Relevant To Achieving The SDGs
in The Post-COVID Era

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Global Leaders Call for Urgent Action to Stem the Loss of Lives and Livelihoods

By Devendra Kamarajan

ABIDJAN, Côte d'Ivoire — Government leaders meeting at the United Nations global conference on land have called on the international community to take

urgent action to stem the loss of life and livelihoods that communities all over the world are experiencing due to the increasing and devastating impacts of desertification, land degradation and drought.

They were meeting at the Heads of State Summit convened ahead of the opening of the 15th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP15) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). The UNCCD COP15 is taking place from May 9-20 in Abidjan. It is expected to adopt a set of decisions on these issues by the time it closes.

Over 2000 participants, including a dozen Heads of State and Government, some 50 ministers and high-level delegates were expected at UNCCD COP15.

UNCCD COP15 is convening under the theme, '*Land. Life. Legacy: From scarcity to prosperity*', a call to action to ensure land, which is the lifeline on this planet, will also benefit present and future generations.

UNCCD COP15 is the first of the three Rio Conventions meetings to be held in 2022. It will be followed by Biodiversity COP15 and Climate change COP27 convening later on in Kunming, China and Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, respectively.

Addressing the Heads of State Summit, Alassane Ouattara, President of Côte d'Ivoire, declared: "Our Summit must be one of hope, of the collective mobilization of States and development partners, in favour of land and forest restoration initiatives of our countries. We must use all the resources of our Conventions to meet the ever-increasing food needs and cope with the ever-increasing water stress of an ever-growing world population."

UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed said: "As we approach the halfway point of the Sustainable Development Goals, they remain our best hope to build a sustainable and inclusive future. The ground beneath our feet is the perfect foundation on which to build that future."

President of the UN General Assembly President Abdulla Shahid emphasized: "Productive land is critical to global food security and healthy ecosystems, as well as to the maintenance of stable livelihoods. It is a precondition for the success of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; for progress on the Rio Conventions on biodiversity and climate change; and for tackling pollution on land and at sea."

UNCCD Executive Secretary Ibrahim Thiaw said: "Now is the time for action. There is no future for our children or the planet if we continue with 'business as usual' when it comes to managing our land. COP15 is our moment in history, as the international community, to put people and the planet on a new course; on the path to life, to COVID-19 recovery and to prosperity."

He added: "The decisions countries take at COP15 must be transformational, not incremental, to achieve land restoration and drought resilience the world longs for."

The Summit concluded with the adoption of *Abidjan Call*, which urges giving the highest priority to the issue of drought and reinforces the commitment toward achieving land degradation neutrality by 2030.

The leaders' call to action comes in response to a stark warning by the UNCCD that up to 40 per cent of all ice-free land is already degraded, with dire consequences for climate, biodiversity and livelihoods.

Business as usual will, by 2050, result in the degradation of 16 million square kilometres (almost the size of South America), with 69 gigatonnes of carbon emitted into the atmosphere. But land restoration would help reduce the estimated 700 million people at risk of being displaced by drought by 2030.

At the top of the COP15 agenda are the restoration of one billion hectares of degraded land between now and 2030, and future-proofing people, their homes and lands against the impacts of disaster risks linked to climate change, such as droughts, and sand and dust storms.

During the Gender Caucus convened alongside the Heads of State Summit, the First Lady of Côte d'Ivoire Dominique Ouattara and the UN Deputy Secretary-General Mohammed launched a new study on the differentiated impacts of desertification, land degradation and drought on men and women.

The study throws the spotlight on the disproportionate impacts women and girls are facing when land is degraded and how, if given the agency, they can be at the forefront of global land restoration efforts.

Côte d'Ivoire's First Lady stressed: "Women are the backbone of the rural economy, especially in developing countries. They represent almost half of the world's farmers. We must at all costs win together in our quest to empower women farmers through various measures including land tenure security and access to rural finance."

Ms Mohammed added: "Women and girls are central to building a land restoration economy. But they continue to be marginalized, and to pay the heaviest price when it comes to land loss, climate change, COVID and conflict." [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews – 09 May 2022]

A United Call To Act – UNCCD’s Final Declaration
Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire, 20 May 2022 – A united global pledge to boost drought resilience and invest in land restoration for future prosperity was adopted at the conclusion of the 15th Conference of Parties (COP15) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), held in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire. The declaration adopted 38 decisions, including on tenure, migration and gender, that highlight the role of land in addressing multiple crises.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">* Robust monitoring and data to track progress against land restoration commitments* New political and financial impetus to help nations deal with devastating impacts of drought and build resilience* US \$2.5 billion Abidjan Legacy Programme will help future-proof supply chains while tackling deforestation and climate change* Regional initiatives launched in support of the Africa-led Great Green Wall* Nearly 7,000 participants at two-week meeting included delegations from 196 countries and the European Union* Future UNCCD meetings to be held in Saudi Arabia, Mongolia, Uzbekistan
Source: UNCCD Media Release - https://www.unccd.int/news-stories/press-releases/united-global-call-act-land-degradation-and-drought-concludes-major-un

Ukraine War Constraints UN To Revise Global Growth Estimates

By J Nastranis

NEW YORK - The latest United Nations forecast warns that growth prospects have weakened significantly amid the war in Ukraine, upending the fragile economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, triggering a devastating humanitarian crisis in Europe, increasing food and commodity prices and exacerbating inflationary pressures worldwide.



The World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP) as of mid-2022, released on May 28, expects the global economy to grow by only 3.1 per cent in 2022, down from the 4.0 per cent growth forecast released in January 2022. At the same time, global inflation is projected to increase to 6.7 per cent in 2022, twice the average of 2.9 per cent during 2010–2020, with sharp rises in food and energy prices.

WESP points out that downgrades in growth prospects are broad-based, including the world's largest economies - the United States, China and the European Union - and the majority of other developed and developing economies. The growth prospects, it adds, are waning particularly in commodity-importing developing economies, driven by higher energy and food prices, worsening food insecurity, especially in Africa.

“The war in Ukraine - in all its dimensions - is setting in motion a crisis that is also devastating global energy markets, disrupting financial systems and exacerbating extreme vulnerabilities for the developing world,” said UN Secretary-General António Guterres.

He added, “We need quick and decisive action to ensure a steady flow of food and energy in open markets, by lifting export restrictions, allocating surpluses and reserves to those who need them, and addressing food price increases to calm market volatility.”

Negative prospects for the EU

In addition to the tragic loss of many human lives and the unfolding humanitarian crisis, the war is exacting heavy tolls not only on the economies of the Russian Federation and Ukraine, but also on the neighbouring economies in Central Asia and Europe, including the European Union.

The sharp increase in energy prices represents a large negative terms-of-trade shock for the European Union, which in 2020 imported 57.5 per cent of its total energy consumption. The growth prospects for the European Union economy weakened significantly, with its GDP forecasted to grow by only 2.7 per cent in 2022, instead of the 3.9 per cent projected earlier in January.

As imports from the Russian Federation accounted for almost 25 per cent of Europe's energy consumption in 2020, a sudden halt in oil and natural gas flows from the Russian Federation would likely further increase energy prices and exacerbate inflationary pressures. EU member states from Eastern Europe and the Baltic region are severely impacted as they are already experiencing inflation rates well above the EU average.

Developing and Least Developed Countries Hard Hit

WESP accentuates that high inflation is reducing the real income of households, particularly in developing countries, where poverty is more prevalent, wage growth remains constrained, and fiscal support to alleviate the impact of higher oil and food prices remains limited.

The surge in food and energy prices are having knock-on effects on the rest of the economy and are posing an additional challenge to an inclusive recovery as it disproportionately affects low-income households that spend a much larger share of their income on food items.

The monetary tightening in the United States is also set to raise borrowing costs and worsen financing gaps in developing countries, including the least developed countries. Tighter external financial conditions will adversely affect growth prospects, especially for the countries with high exposure to global capital markets facing debt distress or risks of debt default.

“The developing countries will need to brace for the impact of the aggressive monetary tightening by the Fed and put in place appropriate macroprudential measures to stem sudden outflows and stimulate productive investments,” said Hamid Rashid, Chief of the Global Economic Monitoring Branch in the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), and the lead author of the report.

Impact on Climate actions

Casting a close look at the impact of the war in Ukraine on climate, WESP says that the war is unfolding at a time when global CO₂ emissions are at a record high. By driving up energy prices, the conflict will significantly impact global efforts to deal with the climate emergency, notes the UN forecast.

WESP further points out that as countries are looking to expand energy supplies amid high oil and gas prices, fossil fuel production is likely to increase in the short term. Also, high prices of nickel and other metals are likely to adversely affect the production of electric vehicles, while rising food prices may limit the use of biofuels.

“However, countries can also address their energy and food security concerns—brought to the fore due to the crisis—by accelerating the adoption of renewables and increasing efficiencies, thus strengthening the fight against climate change,” emphasized Shantanu Mukherjee, UN DESA Director of Economic Policy and Analysis. [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews – 18 May 2022]

World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP) as of mid-2022 could be downloaded from - <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/world-economic-situation-and-prospects-as-of-mid-2022/>



Image source: Tvlaz

Security Council to Hold Emergency Session on World Food Security

By Thalif Deen

UNITED NATIONS - The United States, which is holding the rotating presidency of the UN Security Council this month, has summoned an “emergency session” of the Council on May 19 to focus largely on world food security in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

US Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken told reporters May 15 the United States and Western allies are coming together to address “some of the broader consequences that are flowing from Russia’s aggression, primarily the global food shortages and rising food prices”.

“Ukraine supplies a great deal of the world’s corn, its wheat, its oil seeds for cooking oil. Russia is blocking Ukraine’s ports; it is destroying its farmland, warehouses, roads, equipment,” he pointed out. “That’s not only striking a major blow to Ukraine’s economy, but it’s also designed to inflict pain on the rest of the world to weaken support to the Ukrainian people,” he added.

The US is expecting several foreign ministers to address the meeting “on the steps that we can take together to address the immediate challenges for food and food insecurity, as well as to look at some of the medium-term and longer-term answers to food insecurity”.

According to an analysis by the Rome-based World Food Programme (WFP), an estimated 276 million people worldwide were already facing acute hunger at the start of 2022. That number is expected to rise by 44 million people if the conflict in Ukraine continues, with the steepest rises in sub-Saharan Africa.

WFP’s Executive Director David Beasley said last week “Right now, Ukraine’s grain silos are full,” while “44 million people around the world are marching towards starvation”. Population-wise, that amounts to the entirety of Argentina.

Beasley warned that unless the ports are reopened, Ukrainian farmers will have nowhere to store the next harvest in July/August. The result will be mountains of grain going to waste while WFP and the world struggle to deal with an already catastrophic global hunger crisis.

Meanwhile, Blinken told reporters that the 30 allies of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) remain fully engaged, aligned, committed to supporting a democratic, independent, and sovereign Ukraine. The world has seen the strength and resilience of the Ukrainian people these past three months. It’s seen the unity at the heart of NATO. “President Putin launched this brutal and unprovoked war thinking he could eliminate Ukraine as an independent country and divide NATO.” Instead, he’s only reinforced Ukraine’s sovereignty and independence as Ukraine has chased the Russian army away from Kyiv. “NATO is stronger, more capable, more unified than ever,” he noted.

“Every member of the Alliance wants to bring this war to an end as soon as possible, but we’re equally determined to maintain our security assistance to Ukraine, to continue our sanctions, export controls, and diplomatic pressure on Russia for as long as it’s necessary.”

“The United States and our allies and partners are focused on giving Ukraine as strong a hand as possible on the battlefield, and at any negotiating table, so that it can repel Russian aggression and fully defend its independence and sovereignty,” he declared.

He also said he was hoping the US Congress will move quickly to pass the \$40 billion supplemental funding bill “to ensure that our ability to provide assistance to Ukraine is not interrupted”. [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews – 16 May 2022]

Southern Africa Feels the Pinch of Russia-Ukraine War

By Jeffrey Moyo

HARARE, Zimbabwe - Life is no longer the same for Zimbabwe’s shop owner, 34-year-old Richwell Mhasi in the capital Harare who has had to park his car at home, switching to his bicycle, cycling to and from work amid the rising prices of fuel since the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine war this year.

In South Africa’s Musina town closer to the border with Zimbabwe, widowed 43-year-old Laziwe Muleya living in a shack with her three children, has now turned to wood fire as she can no longer afford the price of gas for cooking.



Africa braces for food price inflation as the Russia-Ukraine war continues. Photo Credit: Anatolii STEPANOV / FAO/AFP

South African parliamentarian, William Madisha has gone on record saying, “this conflict will lead to more unemployment and lower our 2021/2022 gross domestic product (GDP) than previously projected.”. Already, R77 billion (about \$4.8 billion) worth of South African businesses domiciled in Russia have been affected by the latter’s war on Ukraine. Zimbabwe’s Mhasi and South Africa’s Muleya, could just be the tip of an iceberg.

Petrol in Zimbabwe which used to sell at around \$1.32 per litre before the Russia-Ukraine war, shot to 1.64 while diesel which previously sold at \$1.29 has become even more expensive, selling at \$1.71 per litre.

In fact, John Mangudya Zimbabwe’s central bank chief had forewarned that the ongoing armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine would have a knock-on effect on the prices of goods and services here. Dingizulu Zwane, a South African independent economic expert said many Africans should brace for more hard times.

“Our countries in the Southern African region have depended so much on imports from Russia and Ukraine, with production of the imports obviously going down owing to the war and prices are shooting up,” Zwane told IDN.

To this, in Zimbabwe, Claris Madhuku who heads a civil society organization called the Platform for Youth and Community Development (PYCD), quipped: “the elephants are fighting and the grass is suffering”.

With Russia and Ukraine exporting about a quarter of the world’s wheat, wheat prices have been shooting up globally since the start of the war, in Zimbabwe climbing up by nearly 15 per cent in early March from US\$595 to about US\$682 per metric ton. Zimbabwe gets at least half of its wheat from Russia.

It is even worse for Mozambique, a country pounded by Cyclone Gombe earlier in March - almost at the same time the Russia-Ukraine war started. This means Mozambicans have had to struggle with the twin hurdles at one go. “Cooking oil is now very expensive in shops here because we are told some of the raw materials used to produce it were being imported from Ukraine and the war has disturbed the movement of those imports,” Mozambique’s 32-year-old vendor in the country’s Tete Province, Ms. Elna Sinoa, told IDN.

Now, as Mozambique is still nursing wounds from Cyclone Gombe, Christine Beasley, the CARE boss there has bemoaned shortages that have crept into the poor African nation, thanks to the Russia-Ukraine war. She (Beasley) went on record saying: “Commonly used relief supplies, including tarps and tents, are now difficult to find.” These, she said, “are being channelled to Ukraine and Poland to meet the massive needs of refugees”.

CARE is a major international humanitarian agency delivering emergency relief and long-term international development projects.

With motorists like Mhasi opting to park their cars now, in Zambia and Zimbabwe, where prior to the Russia-Ukraine war, the economies were already fragile, fuel prices have now increased by 7 per cent and 13 per cent respectively. Zimbabwe’s independent economist, Denis Munjanja said “our country depends on lots of imports from Russia and Ukraine and automatically it has to suffer as the two elephants fight.” As it focuses on its war in Ukraine, Russia’s humanitarian activities in Zimbabwe have also stalled.

Just after the war began in Ukraine, Russia in March had made a donation of US\$1.5 million to the WFP to help more than 100,000 people in Zimbabwe’s hunger-stricken areas such as Hwange, Nkayi and Zvishavane districts which are among the worst affected by severe drought and food insecurity.

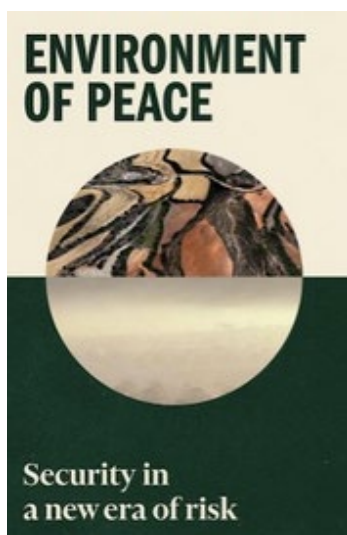
Malawi has also not been spared from bread price hikes, with Amos Zaindi, who is CARE Malawi Country Director going on record in the media saying, “slightly over 20 percent of the country’s wheat dependency is on imports from Russia”. Zaindi said, “these hikes and potential job losses are of particular concern to CARE as it risks more people sliding into poverty”.

Namibia also faces a more precarious situation amid galloping bread and fuel prices. Namibia’s central bank chief Ebson Uanguta has said: “Certainly, some of these key products, like oil and wheat in our case, have a direct bearing on the livelihoods of our people.”

Just north of Zimbabwe, heavily dependent on fuel imports much as it does for its own fertilizer, machinery and other inputs for production, Zambia has not been spared either by the Russia-Ukraine war. Petrol in Zambia now sells at \$1.55 up from \$1.29 while diesel now trades at \$1.53 up from \$1.12.

As Russia and Ukraine fight, other Southern African nations like Angola have also had to catch a cold. In fact, Angola relies entirely on imported wheat, according to a Global Agricultural Information Network report from the Foreign Agricultural Service of the US Department of Agriculture (USDA).

As such, last year alone, Russia and Ukraine accounted for about 30 per cent of Angola’s wheat imports, which is not anymore. [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews – 20 May 2022]



New Report Focuses on Security Risks of Environment Crisis

By Thalif Deen

UNITED NATIONS - The world’s growing environmental crisis - including climate change, which has resulted in widespread droughts, floods and heatwaves threatening major food crops - is escalating security risks worldwide.

A new policy report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), titled *Environment of Peace: Security in a New Era of Risk,* points out that between 2010 and 2020 the number of state-based armed conflicts roughly doubled (to 56), as did the number of conflict deaths. At the same time, the number of refugees and other forcibly displaced people also doubled, to 82.4 million.

A dedicated website, where the report is available for free download, has gone live on 23 May 2022 at www.environmentofpeace.org

In 2020, the number of operationally deployed nuclear warheads increased after years of reductions, and in 2021, military spending surpassed \$2 trillion for the first time ever.

The last decade has been marked by increasingly tense geopolitics, with disputes simmering and sometimes erupting between major states and blocs, and populism on the rise. The report argues that cooperation is essential for managing the environmental and security crises, along with the risks they create.

The report illustrates some of the complex ways these crises are starting to interact around the world:

- In Somalia, where prolonged drought and other climate change impacts, combined with poverty, lack of preparedness and weak government, have driven people into the arms of the extremist group al-Shabab.

- Across the Sahel, where drought and the expansion of farmland to feed a growing population are pushing farmers and nomadic herders into competition over access to resources such as land and water, and this competition often turns violent.
- In Central America, where the impact of climate change on crops combined with violence and corruption increased the number of people attempting to migrate to the securitized US border
- And in the Middle East and North Africa, where in the early 2010s, the failure of the Russian grain harvest due to a climate change-linked heatwave combined with the impacts of a US biofuels policy to raise the price of bread, exacerbating tensions that led to the Arab Spring series of uprisings across the Middle East and North Africa.

“These examples show clearly that it’s much more complex than environmental degradation leading to conflict,” said Environment of Peace expert panellist Chibeze Ezekiel, Coordinator of the Strategic Youth Network for Development in Ghana. “At the start of the Arab Spring in 2011, a climate change impact in one continent and a well-intentioned renewable energy policy in another combined with existing unrest in a third to increase the risks of conflict—nobody had seen that combination coming.”

“Our new report for policymakers goes beyond simply showing that environmental change can increase risks to peace and security. That’s established,” said SIPRI Director and Environment of Peace author Dan Smith. “What our research reveals is the complexity and breadth of that relationship, the many forms it can take. And most of all, we show what can be done about it; how we can deliver peace and security in a new era of risk.”

More than 30 researchers from SIPRI and other institutions contributed to the report, guided by a panel of international experts on environment and security led by Margot Wallström, the former Swedish Foreign Minister and European Commissioner for the Environment.

Asked if the UN can play a role to help resolve these ongoing crises, Smith, one of the main authors of the report, told IDN environmental, health and security crises intersect at multiple local, national, regional and global levels. “None of the issues can be addressed by any actor going it alone,” he said.

Working together, communities, states and regional organizations can all do something to address these linked crises if they develop the knowledge and the instruments and resource the work properly, he pointed out. “To tie it all together and get cooperation going at full speed, there is no alternative to a well function United Nations. Achieving that is a top priority,” added Smith.

Jen Maman, Senior Peace Adviser at Greenpeace International told IDN this is a timely report that serves as a striking reminder of the fact that there can be no peace without green. The intimate, symbiotic relationships, illustrated in the report, between peace and the environment must be cherished and acted upon.

“We must choose equity and sustainability over greed, human dignity and courage over exploitation. A healthy environment is key to human security. Caring for the environment is a necessity not a luxury. Our fates and that of the natural world are intimately connected. We humans cannot survive, nor live peacefully, without a healthy, functioning environment,” she added.

She pointed out the report is coming out at a critical point in human history, when it is clearer than ever - that fossil fuel companies are fuelling the climate crisis and wars around the world at the cost and suffering of the most vulnerable. All around the world, fossil fuels are at the root of climate change, toxic pollution, corruption, and conflict. “The war in Ukraine is another jarring reminder of how critical it is that world leaders get serious about breaking our ties to fossil fuels and build a safe, secure renewable energy system for all” added Maman.

[Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews – 24 May 2022]

Economic Gender Equality Falls Short— Despite Investments in Girls' Education

By Thalif Deen

UNITED NATIONS - A new study concludes that investments in girls' education have failed to deliver economic equality for women.

The researchers found that while such investments have delivered many other benefits - including better health outcomes for women and their families - the economic returns are often disappointing.

The study, released May 12 and authored by researchers at the Washington and London-based think tank, the Center for Global Development, found that the huge increases to the number of girls who are going to school in the world's poorest countries are not translating into equal employment or economic gender equity.

"Investing in girls' education makes sense, there's no doubt about that. But just getting girls into school is not enough to give them equal opportunities later in life," said Shelby Carvalho, Senior Policy Analyst at the Center for Global Development, and one of the report's lead authors.

An analysis of 126 countries revealed that when it comes to women working, little has changed over the past 30 years, despite a dramatic increase in the level of education girls are accessing. In fact, women remain twice as likely as men not to be in employment or education.

The study, titled "Girls' Education and Women's Equality: How to Get More out of the World's Most Promising Investment", also revealed:

- On average, higher rates of girls' participation in school have not consistently resulted in more women working, and where they do work, there are huge pay and seniority gaps.
- Globally, the majority of unemployed youth (aged between 15-24) are women.
- In India, the number of women working has not increased since the 1980s, despite massive increases in the number of girls who go to school.
- Evidence from Ethiopia, Malawi, Pakistan, and Uganda shows that improvements to girls' education had no impact at all on labour market equity.
- In Latin America, the number of women joining the workforce is slowing down, even though girls are achieving more in school.

Asked whether the new findings will undermine the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly relating to gender empowerment and women's education, Carvalho told IDN: "These restrictions affect at least three of the SDGs".

SDG 5, she pointed out, calls for the achievement of gender equality and empowerment for all women and girls. Education for girls is a key instrument for achieving gender equality, and countries should absolutely invest in a quality education for all girls." But without a level playing field in the world of work, she argued, women can't reap many of the benefits of that education.



Women in Bangladesh harvest vegetables as part of a livelihood programme to ensure their family's food security. Photo Credit: WFP/Sayed Asif Mahmud.

“SDG 10 calls for reduced inequality within and between countries. Gender inequality is a major source of within-country inequality, and a lack of women’s representation – from political leadership to teachers in science classrooms – slows progress,” she noted.

SDG 4 calls for inclusive and equitable quality education for all. “When only 5 per cent of girls are finishing high school - as is the case in Benin and Guinea Bissau - and less than 1 in 5 girls are completing high school in Papua New Guinea and Haiti, we are far from achieving the fourth goal,” she added.

Right now, more than a third of countries restrict women from working in the same industries as men. Often, industries dominated by men are also better paying. There are many other examples: restrictions to access to credit, restrictions to hours, etc. The only way for girls’ education to pay off is if women have equal opportunities in the job market.

Carvalho also said, “for women and girls around the world, just because you have the same level of education as your male peer, doesn’t guarantee that you won’t be paid a fraction of what he is earning, or be unable to work because you spend so much of your time doing unpaid household labour or childcare”.

“It doesn’t guarantee you won’t be more likely to experience violence by men. It doesn’t guarantee you’ll have the same chance at prosperity, or that the society your children grow up in will be more equal,” said Carvalho.

Meanwhile, the researchers also recommend that education systems do more to support gender equality by making sure schools are safe for girls, rooting out discrimination, and supporting girls in the school-to-work transition.

“We know a lot about how to get girls into school and how to help them learn,” said David Evans, Senior Fellow at the Center for Global Development and the report’s other lead author. “But we still have a lot to learn about how to ensure schools are safe places for every girl.” [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews – 15 May 2022]



PhotoCredit: UNICEF

Rock Bottom Spending on Women's Health in Sierra Leone

By Lisa Vives, Global Information Network

NEW YORK - On its web page titled U.S. Relations with Sierra Leone, the US State Department gushes with warmth and affection for the African country - once called the 'Province of Freedom' - which remains among the world's poorest countries, ranked 180th out of 187 countries in the United Nations' Human Development Index in 2011.

This embrace by the richest nation in the world of one of the poorest cannot hide the sad fact that the West African nation's rock bottom spending on health - at \$46 per person yearly - is among the lowest in the world. In 2018, government expenditure on health per capita for Sierra Leone was US \$8.

Inadequate spending and funds lost to corruption pose the greatest threat to women, according to the United Nations. One in 20 women in Sierra Leone die as a result of pregnancy or childbirth, most often from losing blood. The West African country consistently ranks as one of the deadliest places on Earth to have a baby. Only South Sudan and Chad count higher mortality rates.

A Transparency International survey in 2015 reported an astonishing 84 per cent of Sierra Leoneans had paid a bribe for government services, according to a Gates Foundation thinktank based in Senegal.

A country of 8.3 million, Sierra Leone remains at the extreme end of a regional trend. Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for 66 per cent of all maternal deaths in the world. Researchers point to the fact that fewer women give birth in a health facility in West and Central Africa than anywhere else, at 60 per cent, well below the global average of 83 per cent.

Showing up doesn't always mean getting help: Sierra Leone has reported a persistent dearth of health workers, and access to blood is widely unreliable. Abortion is illegal and frequently performed without medical supervision. Health officials estimate that unsafe abortions cause between three and four percent of the nation's maternal deaths.

Because cost was one of the top obstacles deterring pregnant women from medical professionals, the country removed fees for their doctor visits and drugs under the Free Health Care Initiative.

The new program drove major progress. The share of women giving birth at a health facility in Sierra Leone jumped from 25 per cent in 2008 to 54 per cent in 2013 to 83 percent in 2019, national statistics show.

Then came the COVID-19 pandemic. Foreign aid worldwide shifted from old emergencies to new. Britain, the key backer of Free Health Care for years, told Sierra Leone's Health Ministry the support had to end.

"Whenever we cannot give a pregnant woman what she needs, it's a tragedy," said Isata Dumbuya, at Partners in Health in Sierra Leone.

"There are lucky weeks. There are lucky months," said Frances Wurie-Sesay, an obstetrician at the King Harmon Maternity and Child Health Hospital in the capital, Freetown. "And there are times when the only free thing I can offer a patient is a consultation."

"There is never a guarantee that we will have the blood to save a life."

[Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews - 09 May 2022]



Pacific Island resorts building walls to protect itself from rising sea waters, Beachcomber Island, Fiji. Photo Credit: Kalinga Seneviratne

The Latest IPCC Report: No Good News for Pacific Islands Countries

Viewpoint By Volker Boege

Brisbane - The latest IPCC report on Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability shows that the effects of climate change are more severe than previously thought, that the situation will deteriorate globally faster than expected if no decisive action is taken now, and it highlights that low-lying island nations and islands will be hardest hit and be faced with truly existential threats. This is bad news, particularly for the Pacific Island

Countries (PICs).

Samoa's Minister for Natural Resources and the Environment Toeolesulusulu Cedric Schuster in his keynote address to a webinar about the relevance of the IPCC report for PICs, organised by the Pacific Centre for Climate Change (PCCC) in Samoa, said that global heating above 1.5 degrees will be "catastrophic" for Pacific Islanders. And with current global policies and commitments, it will not be possible to keep global warming below 1.5 degrees.

The IPCC report's chapter on Small Islands details what these catastrophic effects of climate change are for PICs, and the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) and the Australian National University (ANU) have elaborated several fact sheets which summarise the findings. They show that today PICs are already suffering from the negative impacts of climate change and that these impacts will become increasingly devastating with temperatures heading above 1.5 degrees.

This applies to water and sanitation (e.g., with an increase of saltwater intrusion and freshwater shortages due to sea-level rise and increasing risk of flooding, putting water security under threat), settlements and infrastructure (threatened by cyclones, floods, inundation), marine ecosystems and fisheries (with loss of coral and reef structure, ocean temperature rise and acidification, leading to loss of habitat and coastal protection, and decline in fish stocks), health and wellbeing (e.g. through water contamination, heat-related stress and mortality).

The challenges to food security are of particular concern: warming temperatures, floods and droughts, cyclones, saltwater intrusion, damage to food gardens, loss of fish stocks will all put food security and thus livelihood security under pressure.

There are adaptation and response options: planting of mangroves, reforestation, desalination, building seawalls, raising of dwellings and infrastructure, diversification of food crops, harvesting rainwater etc. These response options, however, depend on adequate financing, and the IPCC report identifies serious challenges for small island states in this regard.

Moreover, climate change will lead to the "reduced habitability of small islands" As a consequence, "climate-related migration is expected to increase" because in-situ adaptation may not be adequate and relocation (managed retreat) can be an adaptation response (...) However, relocation can be culturally, socially, financially, politically and geographically constrained due to the importance of cultural relationships with traditional, customary or ancestral land. (...) the prospect of migration raises concerns about the loss of cultural identity and local knowledge and practices, which can impact emotional well-being.

This is of particular concern for people in countries which might disappear entirely. Both Toeolesulusulu and SPREP's Director General Kosi Latu, during the above mentioned seminar, even stated that climate change could "lead to the loss of entire countries."

In this context, it is remarkable that the IPCC report gives prominence to the mental health impacts of climate change. In fact, "evidence is growing that resettlement can have impacts on sense of place, identity and social fabric of an individual and their community." For Pacific Islanders, whose identity revolves around a strong connection to their lands, relocation therefore poses not only economic, political, social and legal challenges, but also, and perhaps more importantly, cultural, mental and spiritual challenges.

One can argue that their place-based ontological security is under threat. This fundamental threat to ontological security deserves particular attention when the PIC-related findings of the IPCC report are assessed from a peace research perspective; and so do the conflict-prone aspects of migration, relocation and displacement.

One has to keep in mind that, for example, relocation of climate change affected communities to the lands of other communities (or overseas) can lead to violent conflict between relocatees and recipient communities if not properly managed.

Hence a conclusion which should be drawn from the IPCC report is to pay more attention to the conflictual dimension of impacts, adaptation and vulnerabilities, and plan for conflict-sensitive and peace-supporting adaptation, particularly in view of climate-related relocation in the Pacific region.

Another conclusion that should be drawn is that access to climate finance for PICs has to be given priority. In this context, it has to be remembered that the issue of loss and damage is a core concern for PICs. At the last COP in Glasgow, representatives of PICS were deeply disappointed because no substantial progress was made on the issue.

The IPCC report now states that "the methods and mechanisms to assess climate-induced loss and damage remain largely underdeveloped for small islands". Accordingly, tasks ahead are: to develop "robust methodologies to infer attribution" so as to be able to assess the economic costs of loss and damage, to establish a loss and damage facility, and to open avenues for compensation.

To conclude: The latest IPCC report is without doubt very useful for the public and policymakers in PICs. But there is definitely one point which needs to be addressed in the future: the directly affected people in the PICs hardly have a voice in the report.

At the PCCC webinar mentioned at the beginning of this article, Mark Howden from the Australian National University, a Vice-Chair of IPCC, had to acknowledge that the Pacific was clearly "under-represented" in the authorship of the IPCC report.

This fits with the general observation that indigenous voices are still sidelined in the mainstream climate change discourse. Indigenous people rightly state: "We are the first to be impacted and the last to be heard." The mainstream discourse is still narrowly framed by Western scientific approaches.

** Volker Boege is Toda Peace Institute's Senior Research Fellow for Climate Change and Conflict. Dr. Boege has worked extensively in the areas of peacebuilding and resilience in the Pacific region*

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End Endless Wars

Viewpoint by Sergio Duarte*

NEW YORK - The Charter of the United Nations consolidated important norms of international law. Its Preamble affirms the decision to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind”. At the time of its adoption, the world was deeply shocked by two successive wars that directly involved Europe and other regions. In spite of the lofty purposes expressed in the Charter, several armed conflicts in many parts of the globe have marked the seventy-seven years of the United Nations’ existence.



Protestors at a February 2022 rally against Russia's invasion of Ukraine march past the statue of Tsar Alexander II in Senate Square in Helsinki. Photo Credit: CC BY 2.0

Since 1945 and until last February there had been no wars on European territory, except for the conflicts among former Yugoslav republics in the Balkans and military operations conducted by NATO in that region in the 1990's. Korea, Viet Nam, the Middle East, several countries and regions of Africa and even Latin America, to mention just a few cases, were not immune to the suffering brought by wars, often caused by political or economic interests of the central powers.

The list of armed conflicts worldwide in these last seventy-seven years, some of which are still going on, is extensive and tragic. A lucrative armaments industry fuels dissension and fosters combats.

Even without wider conflagrations, Europe experienced an era of tense apprehension during the decades following World War II. Two heavily armed camps politically and ideologically opposed to each other occupied geographic spaces divided by a line that extended from north to south from eastern Scandinavia to the Balkans and also encompassed Turkey and parts of the Mediterranean: to the west NATO, established in 1949 under the leadership of the United States and on the other side the Warsaw Pact, led by the Soviet Union.

In spite of some crises, the two military alliances never faced each other in open warfare and kept a delicate balance of forces. This period became known as the “Cold War” and lasted until the dismemberment of the Soviet Union. Its ideological components were gradually replaced by a search for power and influence in the international order. The Cold War did not disappear—it just changed.

After the collapse of the USSR, the Warsaw Pact was terminated in 1991. In the course of three decades the majority of its former parties gravitated toward NATO, adopted forms of political and economic organization based on the principles dear to their Western neighbors and joined the European Union, which now comprises 27 members.

East and West are relative concepts: they depend on the location of the observer. Politically, economically and militarily the European West - whose symbolic boundary in postwar times was the Berlin wall - shifted to almost reaching the border with the Russian Federation, the successor of the Soviet Union.

In more recent times, each of the two sides - NATO and Russia- came to identify the other as its chief adversary. Both are engaged in a new arms race in search of illusory supremacy. Mutual mistrust increased, even after both presidents issued in 2021 an encouraging joint statement that “a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought”.

Russia believes that NATO's eastward progress is a serious threat to its security and is alarmed by the possibility that Ukraine, an immediate neighbor, might seek membership in the Atlantic alliance. While there may be grounds for its concerns, Russia chose the path of armed aggression to fend off that eventuality.

Whatever its reasons, this attitude flatly contradicts the Charter of the United Nations. By signing the Charter, all members of the international organization committed to settle their international disputes by peaceful means and to abstain from the use or threat or use of force against the territorial integrity of other states.

NATO's founding treaty establishes that an armed attack against one or more of its members shall be considered an attack against them all and would justify a military response. Since Ukraine is not a member of NATO, the alliance is not bound to intervene directly in the hostilities, although several members are providing growing amounts of arms to the Kiev government. At the same time, they adopted individual and collective severe sanctions against Russia, vowing to weaken it economically and militarily and hoping to provoke internal uprisings against Moscow authorities.

A negotiated solution to the conflict seems distant. The humanitarian cost of the war is very high and the situation in the battlefield remains uncertain. Over 5.5 million people have fled Ukraine and several thousand on both sides have already perished.

Russia's apparent immediate objective is to secure a land link to the Crimean Peninsula, which it annexed in 2014, and to establish control over the Ukrainian shores of the Black Sea. Ukrainian forces successfully expelled invaders in the north along the border with Belarus and keep control of the central and western parts of the country, including the capital Kiev.

Ukraine's president relies on NATO's support but has already made clear that he will not seek membership in the western alliance and does not seem inclined to renounce sovereignty over parts of the country's territory. Up to now, diplomatic contacts between the two contenders has been limited to humanitarian agreements, clearly short of what would be necessary to prevent or alleviate the plight of civilian populations.

Anxiety and tension once again grip Europe while worldwide concern with the course of the conflict and its economic and human consequences increases. The main fear is the risk of a military escalation that leads to the use of nuclear weapons. Russia and NATO arsenals boast so-called "tactical" atomic weapons, that is, arms with relatively low nuclear explosive power that have been developed for use in battlefield operations.

Even so, such weapons are many times more powerful than the ones that were used to raze Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Their use may provoke a response in kind from the enemy and trigger an escalation of unpredictable results.

A treaty concluded in 1987 eliminated nuclear intermediate-range missiles based in Europe. This decision caused relief among the population and brought détente to the relations between the two major powers. Nevertheless, the forces currently stationed in Russian territory as well as the atomic war power that can be used by NATO from aeroplanes or submarines are more than enough to ensure catastrophic damage in the case of a direct confrontation.

Moreover, Washington and Moscow possess supersonic nuclear intercontinental missiles that can elude existing defense systems and whose use may result in complete mutual destruction with irreversible consequences for the remainder of the planet. An accident or sheer carelessness may cause the extinction of the human race. The current russo-Ukrainian chapter of the ongoing confrontation between Russia and the West has depended exclusively on conventional weapons, although veiled threats of nuclear retaliation in case of more direct involvement of NATO still persist.

Durable peace in the world can only be reached through good faith understandings that take into consideration the legitimate security concerns of all parties. The negotiating instruments that remain at the disposal of the international community were created precisely to prevent the scourge of war.

The risk of recurrence of the untold human and material losses caused by past and present bloody conflicts is a warning sign that mankind may not yet have fully learned the lessons from its history. The competition for ever more destructive weapons does not lead to undisputable supremacy; rather, as it is plain to see, it is the most direct path to the perpetuation of the rivalries and mistrust that contribute to create and fuel endless wars.

There is no logical or moral justification for History to continue as a constant series of conflicts with ever more lethal and indiscriminate weapons. Humanity must understand once and for all that security for some cannot be attained at the expense of the insecurity of others. Wisdom and restraint, taking into account the lessons of the past, offer the best chance of building a future of peace and averting the threat of unprecedented devastation.

** The writer is an Ambassador, former United Nations High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, and President of Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs.*

[Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews — 10 May 2022]



Indian Republic Day Parade 1981, New Delhi. Photo Credit: Kalinga Seneviratne

"Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed" - The Preamble to the Constitution of UNESCO.

Malawian farmers turn to organic alternatives as fertilizer costs rise

After using chemical fertilizers for over 20 years, Sabawo Chikuni started using organic fertilizers on his five-acre farm two years ago - due to the rising cost of chemical fertilizers. Since he started using the organic fertilizers, Chikuni said he is happy with their impact on his crops. Coming from readily available and renewable sources, organic fertilizers have cut his cultivation costs by 80%.



Source: Devex <https://www.devex.com/news/malawian-farmers-turn-to-organic-alternatives-as-fertilizer-costs-rise>



Community reels as Indian hydropower project leaves homes, farms drowned

On April 11 in Lohari village, home to indigenous communities of Uttarakhand's Jaunsar-Bawar region, homes, farmlands and cowsheds were submerged in the waters of the reservoir built as part of the Vyasi hydropower project. Sukhpal Singh Tomar, 53, a resident of Lohari village in Uttarakhand and a teacher

by profession, narrates the incident that led to the the loss of his home. "It will be nearly a month after the submergence of the village, but the villagers could not forget what happened to them. Our village is a tribal village and it is said that our village was home to Pandavas (Hindu mythological characters). Even today, we follow Pandavas traditions."

Source: <https://www.eco-business.com/news/community-reels-as-indian-hydropower-project-leaves-homes-farms-drowned>

ADB Finances Electric Ferries in Thailand—First in Southeast Asia

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Energy Absolute Public Company Ltd. signed a 160 million Thai baht (\$4.7 million equivalent) loan agreement to finance an electric ferry fleet for mass rapid transport in Bangkok—the first such transport system in Southeast Asia. ADB led the structuring of the financing for the 600 million Thai baht project. It includes a \$3.6 million concessional loan from the Clean Technology Fund, which finances the demonstration, deployment, and transfer of low-carbon technologies with significant potential for long-term greenhouse gas emissions savings, as well as investments from the Japan International Cooperation Agency and Export-Import Bank of Thailand. The financing will be used for the E Smart Bangkok Mass Rapid Transit Electric Ferries Project. E Smart Transport Company Ltd., a wholly owned subsidiary of Energy Absolute, will operate 27 e-ferries along the Chao Phraya River in Bangkok. Each ferry can comfortably carry up to 250 passengers per trip. The project will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by an estimated 18,900 tons of carbon dioxide equivalent a year.



Source: ADB <https://seads.adb.org/solutions/adb-finances-electric-ferries-thailand-first-southeast-asia>

Challenges Of Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) In The Post-COVID Era
Recent Reports from International and Regional Organisations on SDG Issues

Annual report of FAO Subregional Office for the Pacific Islands

FAO in the Pacific: 2021 Annual Report' presents the results that FAO-led projects and programmes contributed to the timely and effective joint response by the United Nations family, governments and other partners under various thematic clusters including climate change, emergencies, fisheries and aquaculture. It also looks at longer-term gains made in forestry, livestock, and nutrition and food safety work and highlights how statistics and policy programmes supported key data, reporting, planning and decision-making, including assisting several nations to develop various national censuses.

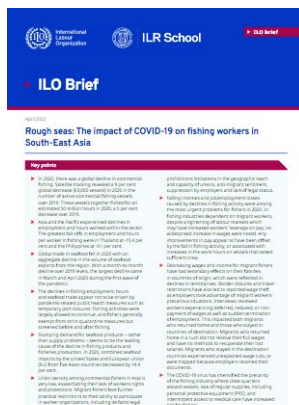


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South Center Research Paper 149: The International Discourse on the Right to Development and the Need to Reinvigorate its Implementation

The world is currently at an ebb for realizing the Right to Development (RtD). Weakening of multilateralism, de-globalization, the scars left by the COVID-19 pandemic, misinterpretation and dilution of the RtD, and inertia to reform international governance are among the multitude of reasons for this phenomenon. However, the need for a better, more inclusive and greener recovery, and the efforts necessary to attain the 2030 Agenda, have provided the international community an opportunity to reinvigorate the realization of the RtD. These efforts have shown the great relevance of RtD to promote a people-centred and fairer development process and the need for an international enabling environment in order to promote the kind of development we want. This paper reviews the history of international discourse on RtD including major milestones, main divisive issues between the global South and the North, the evolution of voting patterns on intergovernmental outcomes, existing legal and political issues currently being discussed, the various mechanisms on the RtD, and recommendations on the way forward to revitalize the implementation of RtD at the 35th anniversary of the Declaration on Right to Development.

Download Research Paper from <https://www.southcentre.int/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/RP149-The-International-Discourse-on-the-Right-to-Development-and-the-Need-to-Reinvigorate-its-Implementation-EN-1.pdf>



Rough Seas: The impact of COVID-19 on fishing workers in South-East Asia

'Rough Seas: The impact of COVID-19 on fishing workers in South-East Asia' reveals how the impact of COVID-19 on migrant fishers and seafood processors has been exacerbated through their exclusion from government relief programmes, social security protection and unemployment benefits during the crisis. It highlights how workers are made "out of sight" through policies that severely limit their freedom of movement or where their places of work – fishing vessels – are difficult to monitor.

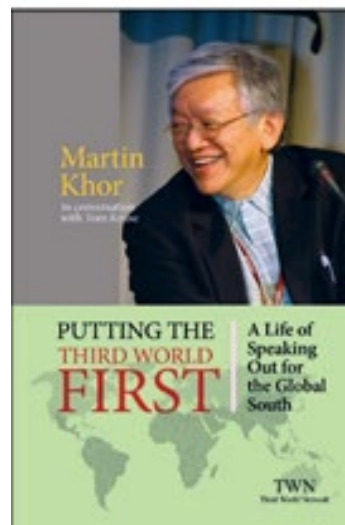
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Putting the Third World First

A Life of Speaking Out for the Global South
Martin Khor in conversation with Tom Kruse

Publisher: Third World Network

Martin Khor was one of the foremost advocates of a more equitable international order, ardently championing the cause of the developing world through activism and analysis. In this expansive, wide-ranging conversation with Tom Kruse – his final interview before his passing in 2020 – he looks back on a lifetime of commitment to advancing the interests of the world’s poorer nations and peoples.



Khor recalls his early days working with the Consumers Association of Penang – a consumer rights organization with a difference – and reflects on how he then helped build up the Third World Network to become a leading international NGO and voice of the Global South. Along the way, he shares his thoughts on a gamut of subjects from colonialism to the world trade system, and recounts his involvement in some of the major international civil society campaigns over the years. From fighting industrial pollution in a remote Malaysian fishing village to addressing government leaders at United Nations conferences, this is Khor’s account – told in his inimitably witty and down-to-earth style – of a life well lived.

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Third World Resurgence Issue 350 World Economy In Turbulent Waters

Buffeted by the coronavirus pandemic and shockwaves from the Ukraine war, an already fragile global economy faces the combined threat of inflation, recession and financial crisis.

THIRD WORLD RESURGENCE is published quarterly by the Third World Network, an independent non-profit international research and advocacy organization based in Malaysia involved in bringing about a greater articulation of the needs, aspirations and rights of the peoples in the South.

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Bongbong Marcos presidential campaign in Makati. Photo Credit: CC BY-SA 4.0

Philippines: Marcos Win Exposes Weakness of Democratic Processes

By Kalinga Seneviratne

SYDNEY - The landslide victory in the May 9 presidential polls in the Philippines by Ferdinand Marcos jr the son of the former dictator of the same name who was forced to flee the country with his family (that includes his young son) in 1986 by a “peoples’ power” revolution throws another spanner into the adage that democracy gives people a voice to choose people to serve them and the nation.

Marcos Jr was the clear winner in the presidential election on May 9th by a whopping 31,103,761 votes, or 58.74 per cent of the votes cast. Never in the political history of the Philippines has a presidential candidate garnered this big number of votes and with a lead over the next ranking candidate Leni Robredo by as much as 50 per cent in absolute numbers.

The election campaign and the results show once again that corruption and wealth thus amassed are a greater asset in a democratic campaign than principles and honesty.

Reflecting on the fact that Robredo’s campaign was backed by thousands of young volunteers who wanted change and honest leadership, Clinical Psychologists and University of the Philippines Professor Anna Cristina Tuazon lamented in a column published by the *Philippines Inquirer* a day after the election asking “what do we tell our children?”

“A large number of youths—a lot of them being first-time voters—had participated in this election wholeheartedly: attending rallies, joining civic and advocacy groups, and participating in house-to-house campaigns,” noted Prof Tuazon. “After the general listlessness and meaninglessness experienced during the pandemic, it seemed that the youth were hungry for purpose and a source of hope. They saw in the Leni campaign the hope that, yes, they can effect change in the world”.

“What our youth bitterly learned, unfortunately, is that goodness doesn’t always win, at least not in each battle,” she argues. “The wave of collective shock, disbelief, anger, despair, and hopelessness on social media was so palpable. The results gave our children very mixed messages”.

The President-elect’s father was ousted in a peaceful 1986 peoples’ revolt that restored democracy after years of brutal military rule when thousands were killed, tortured and detained without warrant by state forces. He and his family were accused of amassing huge wealth plundering the

country. It is estimated that they had up to \$13 billion stacked in overseas banks and other investments mainly in the US, Switzerland, and British Virgin Islands.

Just two days after the Marcos family fled to Hawaii, new President Corazon Aquino established the Philippines Commission on Good Governance and asked the Switzerland Federal Police for assistance to locate and freeze their bank accounts. Some \$623 million were traced and sent back to the Philippines but most of it is blocked and held at the Philippines National Bank until the Marcos family exhaust their legal proceedings that are still in progress. In July 2003, Philippines Supreme Court reaffirmed an earlier decision that over 25 billion Pesos (USD 0.47 billion) are “ill-gotten wealth”.

It is unlikely most of these funds would come back to the Philippines national coffers. And Marcos Jr’s election campaign had ample funds to utilize using a slick and extremely professional social media campaign to glorify senior Marcos rule and present the son as a leader that would bring economic stability and progress to the nation of over 100 million people.

“We can't just simply blame the return of the Marcoses to the political centre stage as simply a product of manipulation or disinformation,” sociologist Nicole Curato told Singapore’s *Channel News Asia*. She has conducted research on voter preference for Marcos Jr.

“A lot of people have been discontented with the way the Philippines celebrates democracy but doesn't really deliver the results when it comes to better employment, when it comes to poverty alleviation. So, I would really not necessarily dismiss the Marcos Jr supporters as people who are manipulated, people who are not thinking, or people who are just taking intellectual shortcuts,” argues Curato.

The Marcoses' political comeback has riled human rights groups, who fear a return of authoritarian and corrupt leadership under the son. Human rights lawyer Joel Ruiz Butuyan argues that Marcos Jr has a historic chance to carve out his own name and not go down in history as a mere caricature of his father. “This means withdrawing his family’s opposition to the government’s claims on ill-gotten wealth that are still pending in court, paying estate taxes, and apologizing for the human rights abuses”.

But he believes that this could be wishful thinking. “Marcos Jr. may also take the posture that he has been given blanket authority to do whatever he wants because of the huge votes he garnered. “He may entertain thoughts that all his family’s sins were erased by the massive mandate he received,” adds Butuyan in a commentary published by *Philippines Inquirer*.

The huge social movement, mainly of youth that was billed up by the Robredo campaign may keep the pressure on the Marcos administration to be accountable to the people and not go back to the old ways of his father. But *Manila Times’s* columnist Rigoberto Tiglao dismisses this movement as “unrepresentative voices of the Filipino people”, who are funded and supported by the Church, Americans, and the international media.

“(The votes for Marcos) mean the majority of Filipinos judging that martial law wasn't the ‘Dark Age’ the Yellows(liberals), and especially Robredo, have been shrieking against,” argues Tiglao, adding that “his personality itself, which many think make him an ideal president: articulate, knowledgeable, diplomatic and not quarrelsome politicians helped him”.

Nobel Peace laureate Maria Ressa (whose Rappler news portal supported the Robredo campaign) argues that in the Philippines social media has become a behaviour modification system and since the 2014 Presidential campaign when Marcos lost to Robredo narrowly in the Vice President race, the Marcos camp has cleverly developed a social media narrative of silencing the narrative of Marcos as a dictator and instead promoting the narrative of Marcos as the great leader.

In an interview with ‘democracy.now’, Ressa said that the information system in the Philippines—as well as elsewhere—is corrupted and blames Twitter, and Facebook in particular for helping to

spread hate speech and lies. In the Philippines she says that Rodrigo Duterte campaign used social media to good use to propel him to the presidency and now Marcos—as well as his daughter Sara Duterte who has won the vice presidency with even a bigger margin than Marcos—have shown the power of this media manipulation.

Ressa points out that Marcos Jr is the first president to be elected without answering any media question throughout his campaign because he did not give any interviews nor took part in election debates.

“If you have no facts, you can’t have truth. If you don’t have truth, you don’t have trust. If you don’t have any of these things, we have no shared reality,” argues Ressa. “Without that, there’s no rule of law and no democracy.”

Pointing out that this year there are going to be more than 30 elections all around the world. “If you don’t have integrity of facts, how can you have integrity of elections?” she asks.

[Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews – 14 May 2022]



Fiji Indians have made a significant contribution to the economy of Fiji. Pictured here are some Fiji Indian women with Prime Minister Voreqe Bainimarama. Photo Credit: Stuff, NZ

Fiji: Recognising Sufferings of Indentured Labourers

By Ravindra Singh Prasad

SUVA - Every year on May 14 Fiji’s Indian community mark the day when the first shipment of their ancestors came here as indentured labourers to work in British sugarcane plantations established in their Pacific Ocean colony.

Girmitiya is how they came to be known over time—the name derived from the term Giriti, a corruption of the English word, agreement.

This indentured system of virtual slavery began in the 19th century to meet the shortage of labour supply caused by the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1833. In the 37 years spanning 1879 to 1916, nearly 60,500 Indian labourers would be transported to Fiji Islands on 42 ships making nearly 87 trips.

The history that has now been documented by descendants of Indo-Fijians who are today well educated and dominate many professions here, especially the academia, shows that for most passengers, seeing a ship, let alone travelling on one for weeks on end, was displacing and disturbing, both to their physical and mental well-being. Oral history accounts record emigrants likening conditions on the ship to being treated like *machli*—fish packed tightly like sardines.

They had to undertake a torturous trip sometimes up to 90 days and many perished on the way due to sickness and were thrown overboard—a largely undocumented part of colonial history and the British who like to lecture others about human rights today should be hiding their heads in shame.

This year was the 143rd year since the arrival of the first ship and with an election looming in the next few months, politicians of all persuasions were present at various festivals across the Islands over the weekend to mark the occasion.

Former Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka, who led a coup in 1987 that toppled a democratically elected government that was dominated by Indo-Fijians (about 35 per cent of Fiji's population that are descendants of Indian indentured labour) speaking at a ceremony to mark "Girmit Day" went so far as to promise that if his party is elected to power, he will declare May 14 a national holiday.

Rabuka, who is trying to make a political comeback, says he knows many Fijians of Indian ancestry feel their Girmit history has been sidelined. So, the planned public holiday would help to reclaim and retrieve what has been missing and reconnect it to the current generation and to all the people of Fiji.

Ironically Rabuka's 1987 was instrumental in driving many Indo-Fijians out of Fiji to seek refuge in countries like Australia, New Zealand and Canada because they felt threatened in the country of their birth.

Since coming to power in 2006 through another military coup, the then Navy Commander Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama has moved to repair the relation between Indo-Fijian and indigenous Fijians known here as iTaukei. A new constitution his government adopted in 2013 while recognising the "ownership of iTaukei lands, their unique culture, customs, traditions and language"; it also recognised the "descendants of the indentured labourers from British India" and their culture, customs, traditions and language; and declared that "all Fijians united by common and equal citizenry".

This constitution has helped to defuse the tension between the Indo-Fijians and iTaukei community that has been simmering for generations and made worse by the 1987 military coup by Rabuka.

Speaking at the Girmit Remembrance Day ceremony in the canefarming area of Ba, Minister for Youth and Sports Parveen Kumar said that it was a plot of the White men (British) to keep the Indo-Fijians and iTaukei communities separated during the girmit era.

"The sad truth is that our girmit history, our Indian culture and tradition was never properly known to the iTaukei community because the white men wanted to divide and rule for their benefit from the booming sugarcane plantations," said Kumar.

He told the predominantly Indo-Fijian audience that the government of Prime Minister Bainimarama is doing everything possible now to bridge that gap. He added that in the coming months the Government would incorporate the historical facts of the girmit period in the school curriculum so that children of all the different ethnicities are aware of the struggle of our girmitya forefathers.

"The pain, struggle and the savagery of the girmit period was deliberately hushed by the white men with the intention that our future generations should not be aware of their ancestors' struggle," Kumar noted.

Addressing another girmit day ceremony in the capital Suva, Education Minister Premila Kumar reminded the audience that it was the 2013 constitution that provided the right for everyone born in Fiji regardless of their race, religion, or socio-economic status to call themselves Fijian. “We should not take these things for granted” she added, pointing out to the 1987 and 2000 coups that targeted the Indo-Fijian community. Interestingly the 1987 coup took place on May 14.

This year, to mark the ‘Girmit Day’ Fiji Times ran a 10-page special supplement on Sunday. Professor Bimal Prasad, National Federation Party (main political party of Indo-Fijians) leader and opposition MP in a special message pointed out that his ancestors did not come here to conquer or colonise but with a belief in a better life and a future.

“Most of the labourers did not take the option of returning to India upon completion of their indentured period (usually 5-7 years) and decided to make Fiji their home and start their livelihood” noted Prof Prasad. “They primarily continued strengthening the sugar industry to Fiji’s largest foreign exchange earner for more than 100 years until tourism and remittances from overseas took over.”

He also added that while the atrocities, trials and tribulations of the indenture system in Fiji are well documented, the decedents of grimitiyas have moved on and their third and fourth generations have integrated well into the Fijian society and lives peacefully with others. “We need to move away from the rhetoric of the past,” he argues, calling on political leaders to develop a new culture of dialogue, unity and cooperation.

“We live in a country that was shaped through hard work, through blood, sweat and tears. Tightly woven in there is the history of our girmitiya,” noted Fiji Times in an editorial on Sunday. “There would have been a sense of uncertainty, frustration maybe, fear and shock when the first lot of indentured labourers sailed away from their motherland. They were headed for a new beginning... In the end, though, they survived, and adapted to their new life.”

“We have grown as a nation and as a nation, we must be appreciative of the place of the girmitiya in our history,” added The Fiji Times. “Today we acknowledge their sacrifice, hard work, and contribution to the development of a young nation.”

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Hindu Temple in Nadi Fiji. Photo Credit: Kalinga Seneviratne

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