

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OBSERVER

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IDN-InDepthNews
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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OBSERVER ISSUE 14 OCTOBER 2022

COP 27 – ANOTHER COP OUT?



CHILDREN OF AFRICA



CHILDREN OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC

IT IS A CRISIS WE DID NOT CAUSE, BUT THE CONSEQUENCES OF WHICH WE BEAR NONETHELESS - JOSIA VOREQE BAINIMARAMA, PRIME MINISTER OF FIJI ISLANDS

FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to our 14th issue of Sustainable Development Observer, a little bit late again as I have been a digital nomad in recent months. This issue is designed to coincide with COP 27 meeting beginning in Egypt on 6th November 2022.

The two-weeks talkfest is expected to be attended by 35,000 participants and will include about 2,000 speaker. The meeting will take place in the southern Egyptian resort town of Sharm El-Sheikh. No doubt, a lot of the participants will stay at posh hotels, travel by air and road transport, eat good food with smorgasbord of western, Asian and Arabic halal food, and leaders will make grand speeches and pledge millions of dollars to mitigate climatic change – which may never come through – while poor nations will blame the rich and beg for more money.

This is the 30th anniversary of COP – Conference of Parties that signed the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – a treaty that came into force in 1994. The COP is the supreme decision-making body of the Convention. The first COP meeting was held in Berlin, Germany in March, 1995. The COP meets in Bonn, the seat of the secretariat, unless a Party offers to host the session. Just as the COP Presidency rotates among the five recognized UN regions - that is, Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Central and Eastern Europe and Western Europe and Others – there is a tendency for the venue of the COP to also shift among these groups.

Throughout the year, the COP Presidencies (current and next) will engage at ministerial, head of delegation and technical levels, as appropriate, on issues critical to the delivery of work and the success of the next COP meeting. Regular multilateral consultations at the level of heads of delegation will provide an opportunity for Parties to engage informally on specific issues and make progress in preparation for next one – in this case Sharm el-Sheikh meeting.

However, in recent years there have been a lot of skepticism of the process and the value of such meetings with critics claiming it's a venue for grandstanding and less for concrete action to save our crumbling planet. However, one hopes that this year's meeting will treat the issues with urgency because last year saw both rich and poor countries suffering the consequences of climate change with heat waves in Europe and North America, and floods across Asia, Africa and even Europe such as in Germany.

Articles chosen for this issue tries to give a diversity of viewpoints on issues that are relevant to the COP process, and which needs urgent attention such as targeted funding for food production with the current crisis exposing both the dangers of climatic change and dependency on food imports – for food security. The special feature article this month focus on an interesting issue, where the secular nature of the SDGs may be a hindrance to using spiritual or philosophical solution, especially when it comes to SDG 3 of Good Health and Well-being.

In our next issue we hope to dissect the COP 27 meeting with respect to its relevance to the SDGs.

Dr Kalinga Seneviratne - Editor

Issue 14 – October 2022
Bringing You Stories and Issues Relevant
To Achieving The SDGs in The
Post-COVID Era

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Challenges Of Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) COP 27 Heading For Another Cop Out - Stories From IDN Cast



Developing Nations Risk Missing Development Goals Long Before 2030

By Thalif Deen

UNITED NATIONS — The late Everett McKinley Dirksen, an American politician, once famously said: "A billion here, a billion there, and pretty soon you're talking real money".

Perhaps that remark may be applicable to the funding of the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), where developing nations continue their relentless search for billions of dollars - now rising to trillions - to help achieve these targets by the year 2030.

But this appeal for real money - and not just commitments - has been virtually undermined by a shortage of funds triggered by rising inflation worldwide, sharp cuts in development aid by Western donors, the after-effects of the war in Ukraine and the devastation caused by the pandemic lockdown.

"There are two main reasons why we are not on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals," said David Boyd, UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment, presenting his report to the United Nations General Assembly on October 21.

"The first is that States have misunderstood the Goals as political aspirations when in fact they have a rock-solid foundation in international human rights law. Every single Goal and over 93% of the 169 targets are directly connected to an international human rights treaty," he said.

"The second problem is grossly inadequate levels of investment in achieving the goals, with an annual gap of more than \$4 trillion," Boyd pointed out.

His report identifies seven sources of funding that could generate up to \$7 trillion annually towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals.

Anuradha Mittal, Executive Director at The Oakland Institute, a leading policy think tank based in California, told IDN the Rapporteur's recommendations around financing should be urgently applied. Taxing the wealthiest - who have grown wealthy at the expense of the poor and the environment - and ensuring redistribution of wealth is the only way forward, she pointed out. "The billionaires can jet into space for the "best day ever," not pay taxes, capture the government and thereby the policies, while billions lack access to safe drinking water and food - basic human dignity".

She said countries need public money so governments can govern and put in place institutions, policies and programs that serve the people. "Instead, so-called 'development institutions' are working for the billionaires and corporations to ensure a 'business friendly' environment so they can continue to rule the world."

Boyd, the UN Special Rapporteur, warned that with the world approaching the halfway mark towards 2030, current trends show that almost all States will miss nearly all Sustainable Development Goals and targets. "Failing to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals will condemn billions of people to misery and jeopardize the future livability of the planet for everyone," he noted. "On the other hand, meeting them would dramatically improve the quality of life for billions of people and protect the extraordinary Earth that is needed to sustain all forms of life," he noted.



The real economy is ignored – Street markets of Thailand struggling to survive without tourists. Photo Credit: Kalinga Seneviratne

Pooja Rangaprasad, Policy Director (Financing for Development) at Society for International Development, told IDN commitments on SDGs will not be met unless UN member states lead on addressing key global economic challenges such as addressing international tax dodging and unsustainable and illegitimate debts.

Hundreds of billions of dollars of public revenue are lost due to the failure to stop large-scale international tax dodging by multinational corporations and wealthy elites. "We agree that the private sector needs to contribute to the SDGs, and it starts with governments ensuring more effective taxation of private and corporate wealth." She added: "We are not short of solutions to move on this quickly."

At the UN General Assembly in September, the Group of 77 and China, along with the Africa Group, tabled resolutions calling for negotiations at the UN to address this broken international tax system. "We need leadership from the richest countries in the world to implement these resolutions and ensure there is fiscal space to implement the SDGs."

Boyd said today's global economy was based on two pillars - the exploitation of people and the exploitation of the planet - that were fundamentally unjust, unsustainable and incompatible with the full enjoyment of human rights. The SDGs aim to address these problems by transforming the economy, alleviating inequality and protecting the environment.

Examples include new taxes on wealthy individuals and pollution, debt relief for low - and middle-income States, closing tax loopholes, redirecting subsidies from environmentally destructive activities to sustainable actions and fulfilling longstanding commitments to foreign aid and climate finance. "The recent UN recognition of the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment should be a catalyst for accelerated action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals," Boyd said.

The Special Rapporteur urged States to take immediate and ambitious rights-based action to improve air quality, ensure everyone has access to safe and sufficient water, transform industrial agriculture to produce healthy and sustainable food, accelerate actions required to address the global climate and energy crises, replace fossil fuels with renewable energy, and conserve, protect and restore biodiversity.

He also called on States to ensure that a rights-based approach is at the heart of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework and detoxify people's bodies and the planet.

"Employing a human rights-based approach to each of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals is the best way to ensure effective and equitable action, prioritising vulnerable and marginalised populations and making sure that no one is left behind," Boyd said.

Frederic Mousseau, Policy Director at the Oakland Institute, told IDN that it would be chimeric to hope that the world can be on track with the SDGs when governments are forced by creditors and financial markets to focus on a single goal - economic growth.

He said the belief that growth will trigger human development ignores the fact that the trickledown effect doesn't work. Instead, it perpetuates inequity where the rich get richer, and the poor and the environment get poorer.

"The economic model that is upheld as the engine to drive the SDGs, is driven by vested interests whose priority is self-interest and profits. The Rapporteur makes the right diagnosis and very sensible recommendations," he noted.

Mousseau also said phasing out industrial agriculture is one of the sensible recommendations that exemplifies the problem. Communities are displaced, livelihoods are destroyed, water sources are polluted, and forests are devastated so that plantations for oil palm, agrofuels, and animal feed can be established and goods exported by corporations.

He argued that the "extractive agriculture model is dressed in promises of economic development when the reality is tattered communities, farmers turned into plantation workers, rich biodiversity of the South converted into cash crop basket for the rich, and pillaged and colonized economies of the South". [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews — 24 October 2022]



Flood damage in South Africa. Photo Credit: Theo Jephtha/African News Agency

UN Climate Conference Must Make Funds for Poor Nations A Priority

By Lisa Vives, Global Information Network

NEW YORK — Water stress, withering droughts and devastating floods are hitting African communities, economies and ecosystems hard. Rainfall patterns are disrupted, glaciers are disappearing and key lakes are shrinking.

In South Africa, the extreme rainfall that triggered one of the country's deadliest disasters of this century was made more intense and more likely because of climate change.

More than 400 people died as a result of the floods, which also destroyed more than 12,000 houses and forced an estimated 40,000 people from their homes.

So, at a time when the impacts of climate change are breaking records around the world, Africans must fight for their survival, although they are hardly responsible for the pollution.

This year, finance for the urgent climate change needs of Africa and other developing areas will top the agenda of the UN Climate Change Conference—also known as COP27, to be held in the resort town of Sharm el Shaikh, Egypt, from November 6 to 18.

Many frontline communities are already engaged in adapting to climate change and finding solutions - including Egyptians



Floods turn paddy fields into lakes in Ayuthaya, Thailand. Photo Credit: Kalinga Seneviratne

preserving their traditional villages by the solarization of their electricity and farmers in Algeria learning new techniques to reduce the encroachment of sand and desertification. They offer hope that, with help, people can successfully lessen the impact of climate disaster.

However, these heroic efforts are often undermined by a system that prioritizes profit over people and the planet, a system rooted in racism, patriarchy, extractivism, consumerism, exploitation, and disempowerment. Rich countries have squeezed huge profits out of the fossil fuel economy while setting the globe on a path of dependence on fossil fuels.

Rich countries must meet and expand climate pledges, and poor countries should be able to develop economically while receiving more funds to adapt to the impact of climate change.

A communique released after a three-day forum for finance, economy and environment ministers said Africa benefited from less than 5.5% of global climate financing despite having a low carbon footprint and suffering disproportionately from climate change.

It urged rich countries to meet and expand climate pledges and said poor countries should be able to develop economically while receiving more funds to adapt to the impact of climate change.

Kevin Chika Urama, chief economist at the African Development Bank, said Africa faced a climate financing gap of about \$108 billion each year.

The "climate finance structure today is actually biased against climate-vulnerable countries," he said. "The more vulnerable you are the less climate finance you receive." [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews — 31 October 2022]

Despite the Recession Threat, 100 million Can Still Be Lifted Out of Poverty

By UN News



Half of Zimbabweans fell into extreme poverty during the COVID-19 pandemic. Photo Credit: UNDP Zimbabwe

NEW YORK — A flagship UN poverty study released on October 17, the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, finds that significant poverty reduction is possible, and new ways of calculating the problem can help humanitarians and governments better target aid.

The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), a joint analysis from the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) at the University of Oxford, goes beyond measuring poverty as a measurement of poverty and looks at other indicators, from access to education and health to living standards such as housing, drinking water, sanitation and electricity.

Using this way of calculating the issue, the study shows that, even before the COVID-19 pandemic and the current cost-of-living crisis are accounted for, some 1.2 billion people in 111 developing countries are living in acute multidimensional poverty - nearly double the number who are seen as poor when poverty is defined as living on less than \$1.90 per day.

Because there are different aspects of poverty in different regions, the study calls for the development of strategies that tackle the issue to be tailored to specific countries and regions.

It also identifies recurring patterns of poverty (“deprivation bundles”) that commonly affect those at risk. For example, more than half of those living in poverty lack both electricity and clean cooking fuel, whilst a third are deprived of nutrition, cooking fuel, sanitation and housing at the same time.

The experience of families in Lao PDR, for example, shows the interconnected nature of living in poverty and the complexity of reducing it. Children are sent to collect firewood because of a lack of cooking fuel, so they can’t go to school. Simply providing funds to build a school would, therefore, make no sense, without first fixing the fuel problem.

Despite the scale of the challenge, significant improvements have been made in reducing poverty.

In India, some 415 million people left multidimensional poverty in a 15-year period - a historic change - and data gathered before the COVID-19 pandemic show that 72 countries had significantly reduced poverty over recent years.

The report showcases success stories from countries that have used integrated poverty reduction strategies: Nepal’s investment in sanitation, for example, has improved access to drinking water, child nutrition, and, through a reduction in diarrhoea and child mortality.

Reacting to the findings, Achim Steiner, the head of UNDP, said that, at a time when government budgets are being squeezed, cutting-edge data and analytics can pinpoint the areas where spending will have the most impact.

For example, the report shows, he said, “that decarbonization and expanding access to clean energies will advance climate action, and is also critical for nearly 600 million multidimensionally poor people who still lack access to electricity and clean cooking fuel.”

The study, he continued, will be “vital to inform UNDP’s efforts across the globe as we work with our partners from the United Nations and beyond to reach our bold objective of helping lift 100 million people out of multidimensional poverty by the year 2025”.

In his message marking the Day, the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, warned that the goal of eradicating poverty is being undermined, and “the world is moving backwards”.

The UN chief declared that the COVID-19 pandemic set back more than four years of progress and also cited widening inequality, the “gathering shadow” of a global recession, and the climate crisis as reasons for the faltering efforts.

Mr Guterres said that the theme for this year’s Day - “Dignity for all in practice” - must be a rallying cry for urgent global action to finally “consign poverty to the pages of history”.
[Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews — 18 October 2022]



These farmers need help. Photo credit: Horn Observer

Africa: Let Us Not Leave Rising Hunger as Our Legacy

by Abebe Haile-Gabriel

ACCRA — More than a billion Africans cannot afford a healthy diet. Africa is moving backwards in its efforts to end hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition. This situation is not sustainable.

The latest report on The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World, co-authored by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), shows that Africa is bearing the heaviest hunger burden compared to other regions. About 278 million people in Africa faced hunger in 2021. This is an increase of 46 million people compared to pre-COVID in 2019.

On top of COVID-19, we are facing multiple and overlapping shocks and protracted crises in Africa that are driving up hunger.

Climate extremes continue to severely impact economies and livelihoods, such as the drought in the Horn of Africa and in the Sahel. Conflicts and wars continue to wreak havoc on the lives and livelihoods of millions of people and national economies. The cost of living is rising.

We are now only eight years away from the 2030 deadline to achieve Sustainable Development Goals. Or just eight annual harvests.

According to FAO projections, more than 670 million people will be hungry globally by 2030. This is the same prevalence as when the 2030 Agenda was launched in 2015. Then 310 million people of the total will be in Africa.

We cannot let that be our legacy. We must do more now to reverse the trend of hunger. The good news is that we have solutions that work.

One solution is underway in northeast Nigeria, which I had the opportunity to visit earlier this month and where multiple and overlapping crises have hit food security and livelihoods. There, FAO collaborates with vulnerable communities, government and partners to protect and promote agriculture-based livelihoods.

Evidence shows that a support package of seeds and fertilizer costing USD 88 on less than 1 hectare of land (0.8ha) yielded 918 kgs of cowpea and maize, which is enough to feed an average household of seven people for up to six months. This is an astounding return on investment.

Similar kits are being provided for vegetable production and livestock. These kits are also used in other countries such as South Sudan. They are not hand-outs; they are investments that actually pay off in terms of better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life, leaving no one behind. These Four Betters are the core principles of FAO's work.

It is not possible to end hunger alone. We must work together to bring to scale innovative agriculture-based livelihoods and life-saving solutions.

Indeed, Africa could be a global leader in agriculture and agribusiness. According to data from FAO's Africa Open Data on Environment, Agriculture and Land (D.E.A.L) project, Africa has more than double the area of cultivated land compared to the European Union. We also have an enormous wealth of potential in our young people who can become the next agribusiness entrepreneurs and leaders if provided with the right opportunities.

FAO recommends a number of steps to be taken now to address rising hunger in Africa, such as repurposing resources to incentivize sustainable production and consumption of nutritious foods; increasing efficiencies in the use of agricultural inputs, including fertilizer; and reducing food loss and waste along the food supply chain.

African countries need to use the African Continental Free Trade Area to enhance production capacity and trade and to embrace science and innovation to drive agrifood systems transformation, including being more intentional in improving business models, financing mechanisms and partnerships.

Time is running out, and we must move towards accelerated action. We cannot allow Africa to slip further into hunger under our watch.

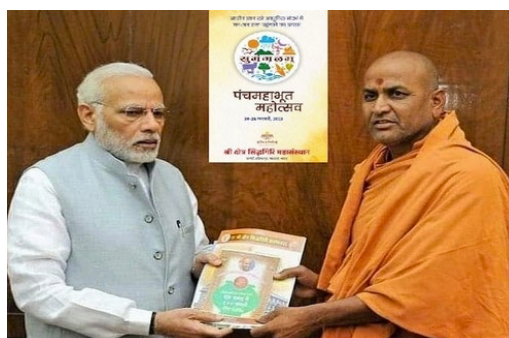
** The writer is the Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for Africa of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). It was published in Horn Observer on October 13, ahead of World Food Day on October 16. [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews — 17 October 2022]*

Panch Mahabhoot, Climate Change and UN SDGs

by Manish Uprety

NEW DELHI — Bad news first. The world is almost on the edge of an irreversible climate breakdown notes the UNEP's Emissions Gap Report 2022.

Besides emphasizing on cutting greenhouse gas emissions, the report also calls for rapid transformation of societies and an urgent system-wide transformation to avoid climate disaster.



H.H. Param Pujya Swami Adrishya Kadsiddeshwar Ji of Kaneri Math (right) and Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India. Photo Credit: Provided by author.

The gloomy scenario reiterates the dark assessment by the UN Secretary-General António Guterres of global affairs that he made at the 77th United Nations General Assembly.

Guterres proclaimed that “our world is in peril and paralyzed,” and that “we are gridlocked in colossal global dysfunction,” while also stating that the international community “is not ready or willing to tackle” the challenges it faces - including climate change, poverty and war.

Is the situation really that sombre or there is some hope. The good news is that solutions exist to the problems that afflict the humankind and ingenuity is one of them. A realization that one needs to tackle the root cause not the effect is the first step of a thousand-mile-long journey.

On April 3, 2022, leading intellectuals, scholars, scientists, academics, social workers, political and religious leaders from all over India gathered at the Pusa Institute in New Delhi and unanimously agreed to take the recourse of the Panch Mahabhoot philosophy once again for a better understanding of the country and the world, especially in the context of climate change.

According to the Indian knowledge traditions, entire universe is made of five elements i.e. Space, Air, Fire, Water, and Earth. Collectively these five elements are called the Panch Mahabhoot. If

these elements are in balance and exist in their pure form then our life becomes blissful, meaningful and fulfilling.

While Sky which is expressed through the voice and felt by the ear is the first element of the universe which is also called void or space; Air is the second element of the universe which originated from the sky and is expressed through touch and felt through our skin.

Fire is the third element of the universe, which originated from the air and is expressed through the form and felt through the eyes, while Water is the fourth which originated from fire and is expressed in *Rasa* and felt by the tongue.

The fifth element is Earth which originated from water and is expressed through smell and felt by the nose.

The conceptual framework of Panch Mahabhoot had been common to and accepted by all the civilizations of the ancient world. One can also call it the key by which all the secrets of the world were explored, comprehended and explained.

On the one hand, Maharishi Charaka explained the principles of Ayurveda through this concept, while on the other Japanese Samurai Miyamoto Musashi taught the techniques of sword fighting using the philosophy of Panch Mahabhoot.

Shri Kshetra Siddhagiri Math of Kaneri has been an integral part of the Panch Mahabhoot campaign. The history of the Math goes back to the 7th century CE when the Chalukyas in the south and the great King Harshavardhana in the north were dominating the political landscape of India.

During the time, a great saint Param Pujya Adi Kadasiddheshwara Swamiji laid the foundation of the Shri Kshetra Siddhagiri Matha. Basically affiliated to the Lingayat sect, the Matha underwent many phases of evolution in its unbroken tradition of nearly one thousand five hundred years.

Its modern phase started in 1922 when Param Pujya Muppin Swamiji became its 48th Mathadhipati and the Matha has now become synonymous with the selfless service of the humankind.

The 49th Mathadhipati of Siddhagiri is Param Pujya Swami Adrishya Kadsiddeshwar Ji who carried forward the tradition of social service with great elan. He successfully started many new projects of the Matha including Gaushala, Hospital, Gurukul, School, College, Natural Farming, and many other initiatives in the sector of cottage Industries.

Swamiji has also built an open-air museum on an area of seven acres depicting the traditional rural life of India. A few years ago, a Krishi Vigyan Kendra was also established by the Government of India on the huge premises of the Matha.

Shri Kshetra Siddhagiri Matha will be organizing a huge festival, Sumangalam Panch Mahabhoot Mahotsav, on its premises from February 20 to 26, 2023.

Besides motivating a common man to be conscious of the concept of Panch Mahabhoot and also be active in the adherence and practice of the concept, the Mahotsav also wants to achieve the following:

(1) Extensive Research and Documentation of the traditions and practices of India (especially of Rural India) in all possible media formats including books, magazines, albums, paintings, drawings, films, and three-dimensional models;

(2) To acquaint the modern youth with the traditional knowledge systems of India;

(3) To make the traditional (rural) society aware of the scientific thinking and relevant contemporary modern technologies.

In fact, the pursuit of tradition and to put it in practice is increasingly being re-explored by the international development community especially in the context of challenges faced by the humankind and to secure the UN SDGs. The importance of traditions and cultures is underlined when the FAO observes that traditional agricultural practices and foods are resilient to climate change, while conserving and restoring forests and natural resources.

Whether it is the contribution of the indigenous peoples towards the nature they protect, or the recognition that traditions and culture can play an important role in the prevention and reduction of poverty and social inclusion, it is high time that communities learn to benefit from localized traditional resources that have a global relevance.

Sumangalam Panch Mahabhoot Mahotsav will have a participation of over 2.5 million people both from India and abroad. Major social, cultural, religious, and educational institutions are being invited from every district of the country.

The Mahotsav will be spread over an approximate area of 500 acres around the Matha and a total of six galleries will be created covering five elements of the Panch Mahabhoot, and one special gallery of Ayurveda in an approximate area of 2.5 Lakh square feet.

In addition to galleries, a special exhibition and retail outlet titled Gram Vatika will be built along with 1000 stalls in the area where people will get an opportunity to get acquainted with the skills of the rural and traditional societies, indigenous seeds, organic farming, cottage industries, handicrafts, small agricultural implements, etc.

Such traditional congregations and celebrations of people have tremendous social, cultural and economic benefits. It's no wonder that in 2017, India's Kumbh Mela was added to the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

So when Inger Andersen, the executive director of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), said: "We had our chance to make incremental changes, but that time is over. Only a root-and-branch transformation of our economies and societies can save us from accelerating climate disaster," one must point out that all is not lost and there is hope.

One must realize the important role societies can play in a positive transformation for a better world. Culture and traditions have always served as the inspiration and matrix for all transformations within human societies.

As the world's only continuous civilization, India and its traditions underline the fact that the proper use of science is not to conquer nature but to live in it in harmony and balance. The country is the light of Asia and hope for the world.

Whether it was harnessing solar energy, our nature's gift, for the benefit of the humankind and establishing the International Solar Alliance (ISA) along with France or investing record amounts in renewables, from solar to hydrogen, last year; India has changed the landscape for green power not only in the country but across the world.

This is despite when for its planet policy think tanks like the Brookings maintain that it is unfair to push poor countries to reach zero carbon emissions too early.

Even the International Energy Agency (IEA) recognizes that India's clean energy transition is rapidly underway, and benefiting the entire world. The approach allays the concerns of Inger Andersen who said that "every fraction of a degree matters: to vulnerable communities, to ecosystems, and to every one of us."

Sumangalam Panch Mahabhoot Mahotsav which is gaining support from across the world is a celebration of the fact that our traditions and culture, given their rich diversity, are part of the solution for sustainable and more equitable development.

Such celebrations not only help secure one of the first conditions of happiness which is that the link between man and nature shall not be broken but also provide food for thought to rethink our approaches to development if we want to ensure a sustainable future for the coming generations.

For sure Sumangalam Panch Mahabhoot Mahotsav will help move local traditions and culture to the forefront of our thinking on models for development and for international cooperation. After all, it's the Earth and environment we all have in common, where we all have a mutual interest; and it is the one thing all of us share. [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews – 02 November 2022]

** The writer is an ex-diplomat and Special Adviser for Asia & Africa of ALCAP, the Latin American Parliamentary Association of Audio-Visual Communication.*



Classroom discussion. Photo Credit: Population Media Centre

Dismissal of “Population Alarmism” is Rooted in Pronatalist Ideology

by Nandita Bajaj

ST PAUL Minnesota — As global population fast approaches 8 billion, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Executive Director Dr. Natalia Kanem wants us to avoid what she calls “population alarmism.” A fearless advocate for reproductive rights, Dr Kanem has rightfully noted that reproductive coercion, whether in an effort to

limit births or to promote them, is an egregious violation of individual rights.

But in her effort to dampen alarm about population growth, Dr. Kanem dismisses the mounting environmental harm resulting from that growth. She also dismisses the pronatalism that drives it, and its dire consequences for human rights. Although she notes the existence of policies designed to accelerate population growth, Dr. Kanem fails to acknowledge the pronatalist ideology at their heart, and how it undermines reproductive choice.

Pronatalism is the social bias towards having children, which results in unrelenting pressures experienced primarily by women. In fact, it is a globally pervasive form of reproductive coercion, reducing people to reproductive vessels for external agendas. In addition to being a source of reproductive injustice, it fuels population growth and has propelled the global population toward the 8 billion milestone.

Pronatalist pressures, overt and subtle, are driven by social, cultural, political, economic, religious, and nationalistic agendas.

Some of the most intense pressures to bear children come from family, where if a woman is unable or unwilling to bear children, she can be disowned, victimized by domestic violence, divorced, socially stigmatized, and economically marginalized.

Religious pronatalism is imposed through scriptural commandments to “be fruitful and multiply,” through stigmatizing childfree and childless people, and through restricting and spreading misinformation about contraception, abortion, and family planning services.

Political pronatalist pressure is related to wanting more taxpayers, or to grow the military, or to pursue nationalistic, ethnocentric, or xenophobic ends. These political motives result in abortion and contraceptive bans, baby bonuses and incentives for large families, and stigmatizing non-traditional life choices.

Economic pronatalist pressures show up in baby-bust alarmist narratives like the “aging crisis” myth propagated by business elites like Elon Musk, economists, pundits, politicians, and even UNFPA.

In fact, pronatalism is integral to our current growth-based economic system, which relies on constant population growth to continually supply new consumers. Nobel laureate Steven Chu appropriately called it a “pyramid scheme.”

This scheme is driving cascading ecological crises and mounting human suffering that will only increase as climate change and biodiversity loss accelerate. Due to the climate crisis, children born today and in the future will live “an unprecedented life” facing many times more extreme climate-related events than previous generations.

According to the most recent report from UNICEF, almost half the world’s 2.2 billion children are already at “extremely high risk” from pollution and the impacts of climate change, which include massive food insecurity and loss of land area to flooding and sea level rise.

Family, religious, political, and economic pronatalist pressures have become so internalized and normalized in the policy sphere that the reproductive “choice” UNFPA champions today barely has any meaning for most people around the world. Billions have little choice but to keep having more children.

In fact, social and institutional pressures that would force more childbearing are far stronger today than any impetus for family planning or concerns about population growth. Pronatalism is at the heart of unchecked population growth, which is occurring on the backs of those with the least personal or reproductive autonomy, who are most vulnerable to coercion.

In the past, reprehensible abuses such as forced sterilizations and other human rights violations were committed in the name of population control. But today, coercive pronatalism is the analogous threat. It’s a more prevalent, pervasive, and equally egregious form of population and reproductive control. It’s just being used toward the opposite end.

At their heart, arguments that population growth need not be feared are stemming from a place of paternalism, and ultimately of human supremacy. They ignore the anthropogenic mass extinction event unfolding today, and destruction of planetary systems from human expansionism.

As we approach the milestone of 8 billion human beings on the planet, more than 70% of the Earth’s land surface has been altered by human activity. At least one million species are facing extinction, and of the animal biomass on Earth today, 96% is composed of humans and the livestock we keep.

This hardly seems the appropriate time to dismiss “population alarmism.” On the contrary, it’s time to confront the pernicious influence of pronatalism on population growth, human rights, and the planet.

That’s why the upcoming International Conference on Family Planning in Thailand will shine a light on pronatalism and its impacts on population growth and social, reproductive, and ecological justice. Let’s hope Dr. Kanem, Elon Musk and pronatalist exponents everywhere tune in. [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews – 03 November 2022]

**Nandita Bajaj is the Executive Director of Population Balance. She co-hosts The Overpopulation Podcast, teaches the first-ever graduate course on Pronatalism and Overpopulation at Antioch University, and will speak about pronatalism at the International Conference on Family Planning 2022 in Thailand on November 16th 2022.*

Challenges Of Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) In The Post-COVID Era Snippets Of News Items from Non-IDN Sources

How Providing Sustainable Finance to More Women Helps Fight Climate Change



Women's contributions to climate action are severely limited by systems that downplay women's roles, capacity, and potential. Greater access to sustainable and gender-equitable green finance will help women be frontrunners in global efforts to address climate change.

Source: Asian Development Blog (ADB)

Link to article: [https://blogs.adb.org/blog/how-providing-sustainable-finance-more-women-helps-](https://blogs.adb.org/blog/how-providing-sustainable-finance-more-women-helps-fight-climate-change?)

[fight-climate-change?](https://blogs.adb.org/blog/how-providing-sustainable-finance-more-women-helps-fight-climate-change?)

Do rich countries have a 'moral responsibility' to pay for the cost of climate change?

If rich countries contribute the most to climate change, do they owe a debt to poorer ones who are least responsible - yet suffer the most?

Source: Channel News Asia (Singapore)

Link to story:

[https://www.channelnewsasia.com/sustainability/climate-change-compensation-developed-rich-countries-reparations-developing-poor-loss-damage-pakistan-floods-cop27-3043596?](https://www.channelnewsasia.com/sustainability/climate-change-compensation-developed-rich-countries-reparations-developing-poor-loss-damage-pakistan-floods-cop27-3043596)



Fiji academic warns over media 'climate injustice' in open access webinar

A Fiji-based academic challenged the Pacific region's media and policymakers today over climate crisis coverage, asking whether the discriminatory style of reporting was a case of climate injustice. Associate Professor Shailendra Singh, head of the journalism programme at the University of the South Pacific, said climate press conferences and meetings were too focused on providing coverage of "privileged elite viewpoints".

Source: Asia Pacific Report

Link to story: <https://asiapacificreport.nz/2022/10/26/fiji-academic-warns-over-media-climate-injustice-in-open-access-webinar/>



G20 still paying billions in fossil fuel subsidies

The G20 group of nations provided nearly US\$200 billion in support of fossil fuels in 2021, despite the worsening impacts of the climate crisis and their pledge in 2009 to phase out "inefficient" subsidies. Subsidies to the sector had fallen to \$147bn in 2020 as the impacts of travel restrictions due to Covid-19 weakened demand, but they rebounded in 2021, rising by 29 per cent to \$190bn.

Source: Eco-Business

Link to story: <https://www.eco-business.com/news/g20-still-paying-billions-in-fossil-fuel-subsidies/>

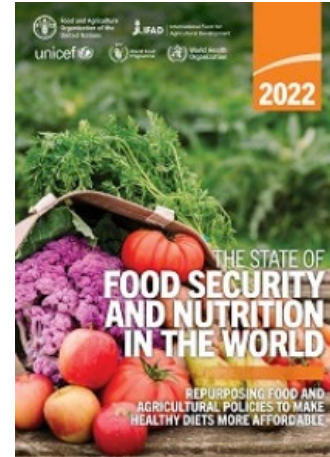
Collapsing currencies are exacerbating food crisis, World Bank warns

Low-income countries seeing the value of their currencies plunge are facing the prospect of a worsening food crisis, the World Bank warns. "This could prolong the food and energy crises already affecting many developing economies," the World Bank warned in a new analysis. More than 200 million people are facing acute food insecurity.

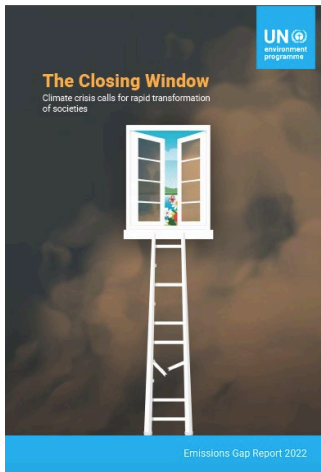
Source: Devex - Link to article; <https://www.devex.com/news/collapsing-currencies-are-exacerbating-food-crisis-world-bank-warns-104306?>

The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022

This year's report should dispel any lingering doubts that the world is moving backwards in its efforts to end hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms. We are now only eight years away from 2030, but the distance to reach many of the SDG 2 targets is growing wider each year. There are indeed efforts to make progress towards SDG 2, yet they are proving insufficient in the face of a more challenging and uncertain context. The intensification of the major drivers behind recent food insecurity and malnutrition trends (i.e. conflict, climate extremes and economic shocks) combined with the high cost of nutritious foods and growing inequalities will continue to challenge food security and nutrition. This will be the case until agrifood systems are transformed, become more resilient and are delivering lower cost nutritious foods and affordable healthy diets for all, sustainably and inclusively.



Download from: <https://www.fao.org/publications/sofi/2022/en/>



Emissions Gap Report 2022

As growing climate change impacts are experienced across the globe, the message that greenhouse gas emissions must fall is unambiguous. Yet the Emissions Gap Report 2022: The Closing Window – Climate crisis calls for rapid transformation of societies finds that the international community is falling far short of the Paris goals, with no credible pathway to 1.5°C in place. Only an urgent system-wide transformation can avoid climate disaster.

Download from: <https://www.unep.org/resources/emissions-gap-report-2022>

Climate and Health Linkages Come to the Fore Ahead of COP 27

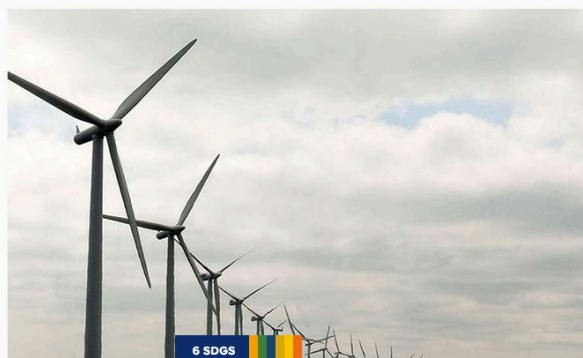
A number of Reports have been launched to coincide with the COP 27 meeting beginning in Egypt on 6 November 2022. These include the linkages between health and climatic change; forest restoration; transformational change, etc To log onto the reports and download go to SDG Knowledge Hub - <https://sdg.iisd.org/news/climate-and-health-linkages-come-to-the-fore-ahead-of-cop-27/>



7 SDGS
"Dramatic Acceleration" Needed to Achieve 2030 Climate Goals: NGO Report
2 November 2022 |



CLIMATE ACTION
UNFCCC Reports Warn About 2.5°C Warming Amid "Glimmers of Hope"
26 October 2022 |



6 SDGS
UNEP Report Calls for "Urgent Transformation" to Avoid 2.8°C Hike by 2030
2 November 2022 |

Thailand: Secularism Hinders Buddhists to Address Mental Health Crisis

By Kalinga Seneviratne



A standard morning "merit-making" ritual across Thailand where people give food to monks. Photo credit: Kalinga Seneviratne.

BANGKOK (IDN) — While the massacre of 37 people that included 26 preschool children in a remote north-eastern township of Thailand on October 7 has shocked the nation and exposed the inadequacy of the public mental health system, it is yet to trigger a debate about whether Buddhism could step in to help solve a major social crisis in the majority Buddhist country.

Good Health and Well-Being are a major Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), but the secular nature of the SDGs may hinder spiritual wisdom contributing to achieving this goal. The current situation in Thailand is a good example. SDG 17 that calls for "partnerships for the goals" may be utilized to incorporate the country's traditional Buddhist wisdom to address a major mental health crisis in the kingdom.

Buddhism has become popular at an unprecedented global level in recent years due to its message of calming the mind to achieve peaceful living through the practice of meditation and especially mindfulness meditation, which has become a fad in the West.

In a country that has had a tradition of such mindfulness practices for centuries and which has over a hundred specialized mindful (Vipassana) meditation centres across the country today, which attracts thousands of spiritual tourists each year, especially from the West, Thais are afraid to introduce it to the public health system to address a contemporary mental health crisis.

The massacre has focused attention on a serious social crisis in Thailand that includes drug abuse, gun violence, and police corruption. Added to this is another looming mental health crisis, with the country's rapidly ageing population having to cope with old-age depression.

The perpetrator of the massacre was a 34-year-old former police officer, Panya Kamrap, who was dismissed from the service in June for possessing methamphetamine. Yet, he was a model village boy, who went to university in Bangkok, and joined the police force. He is now being diagnosed as suffering from a mental health problem that could have been addressed a long time ago.

In the aftermath of the massacre, the Thai media focused on monks conducting merit-making rituals for the dead across the country, even members of the royal family taking part in some ceremonies. Both Buddhist monks and the media have been silent on how Buddhism could be incorporated into the process of treating mental stress and addressing the crisis of gun violence.

"Thai journalists adhere to nonpartisanship concept and by detaching themselves from religious practice (as in this case, a possible solution) in a way they are showing that they are not favouring one religion over other religions," Pipope Panitchpakdi, former Deputy Director of Thai PBS network and a community media specialist told IDN.

"It is perhaps considered old fashion to provide a religious solution which can be viewed as a kind of cop-out of the solving the problems instead of relying on modern (western) science like psychology to fix the problem," he added.

Thailand has just 7.29 mental health workers for every 100,000 people, according to WHO statistics. There was no psychiatrist available in Panya's village Nong Bua Lam Phu, and if needed, he would have had to travel more than 100 km to reach one. But, thousands of monks

and temples are well equipped to handle mental health issues, and only if the people are guided to recognize it by the media and the medical profession, say some critics.

Thailand has over 200,000 Buddhist monks, and fewer than 1000 psychiatrists point out Dr Mano Laohavanich, a Thai social activist who is campaigning for the reformation of Thai Buddhism. "Thailand is known to have thousands of meditation centres. Sadly, all the centres focus on self-development and spiritual awakening. None of them has community awareness (outreach)," he argues.

In an interview with IDN, Dr Laohavanich noted that a weakness of Thai Buddhism is that it focuses on themselves (spiritual development) and not on the concerns and problems of society. "In this regard, in Thailand, Buddhism is a part of social problems, not their solution", he notes.

"There is a problem in Thailand because fewer of the monks come out of the temple to engage with the community (as healers). Less of that is happening, and that's why we have these (social) problems," admits Phra Maha Pranom Dhammalangkaro, Abbot of Wat Chak Daeng in Bangkok.

"Temples will have to encourage more of the monks to be more active in teaching Buddha dhamma(teachings) to the public. As well as leading meditation for the public, and that will help."

Fra Anil Sakya, a senior monk at the Wat Bovornniwet Vihara and the Rector of the Bangkok-based World Buddhist University, in an interview with IDN, argued that it is wrong to blame Buddhism for a severe social problem in the kingdom. "It has nothing to do with Buddhists or non-Buddhists; it's a normal social problem... when we talk about social problems, it is rooted in economics, politics (and) it has developed (because) the moral ethics of the old value of family has been lost."

"In the upbringing of society at the moment, religion is less involved in bearing up the child ... people try to avoid the word religion" he added. He explained that in Thai culture, there is a term called 'Boworn' that involves the home, the school, the village, and the government. "In traditional Thai society, villages, temples and schools are involved together to hold society in a harmonious way."



Cannabis product shop in Bangkok after the sale of it was legalized in Thailand recently. Photo Credit: Kalinga Seneviratne

Sakya argues that psychological counsellor is a new western word, and Buddhist monks have played this role since the time of the Buddha. He explained that the Buddhist approach to psychological counselling is to have the empathy of the mind with the people, and you need to understand what suffering is to address its causes. "2500 years ago, this was the main task of a Buddhist monk," he notes.

Referring to the modern mental health system, Sakya says, "once you are hospitalized as a mental patient, it is secularized, and they will look after you through modern medicine... that is the problem". He explains that Buddhist psychology is about "cleansing your mind from all the defilements, that is, greed, hatred, and ignorance".

In addition to problems with drug abuse and gun violence, Thailand's rapidly ageing population is facing an acute depression problem among the elderly, which health authorities are yet to come to grips with. According to the Thai mental health department, about 14 per cent of 12 million senior citizens in the country are at risk of suffering from depression, and the problem is expected to worsen.

Sakya believes that this issue could be tackled if the mental health authorities recognize the values of the traditional Buddhist societies in a predominantly Buddhist country.

Neurotologist Dr Nattawan Utoomprurkporn of King Chulalongkorn Memorial Hospital in Bangkok told IDN that when she worked in London, the hospital there had a mindfulness course using Buddhist beliefs, but at her hospital in Bangkok, they are careful that activities to stimulate their (patient's) mind and mental activity are not related to religion. "In Thailand, we want to be very inclusive. Most of the activities we have here are secular ... like rehabilitation, we try to be very inclusive."

Development economist Dr Nitinant Wisaweisuan of Thammasat University believes that Buddhist teachings on mind development could be combined with health sciences in community development if Buddhism is not seen merely as a ceremony. "Buddhism can teach self-development that should extend benefits to society ... this should be a key element to achieving SDGs."

She explained to IDN how the Thammasat University Foundation works with cancer patients using Buddhist philosophy and meditation to help them to die "with values without despair, sorrow or pain. Buddhism in the health sector can help to improve their mental energy".

Sakya argues that young people and health professionals do not see Buddhist practices and philosophy as a modern path to healing mental stress because the Thai government a long time ago stopped teaching Buddhist morality and ethics in schools. He says that monks are now trying to reintroduce it into schools with two leading Buddhist universities in Thailand—Mahamakut and MahaChulalongkorn—training monks for the task ahead.

"It is an extra-curriculum activity (in the school system); we can't force it; the school has to decide if they want it. We don't call Buddhism; it's called 'sila dhamma' (morality teachings)," explained Sakya, while also pointing out the fact that many temples in the villages have elderly homes and the elderly spent most of the day in temple activities, which is a form of mental therapy.

"That is how Buddhists have been living (now); you secularize (and you) take all those out of the social setting, and you say it is a problem of religion," points out Sakya, who is an influential monk in Thailand advising many provincial governors in the kingdom.

[Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews – 04 November 2022]



Thai monks chanting in temple. Photo credit: Kalinga Seneviratne