



2025 JOINT MEDIA PROJET REPORT



CREDITS

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Cover: Towns in Tarai are parched for drinking water, there is no water for irrigation. They have to dig deeper for water and even then, new borewells have dried up. Photo: UNNATI CHAUDHARI.

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PREFACE

*By Katsuhiro Asagiri,
President, International Press Syndicate Japan*



This report represents the latest installment of the Joint Media Project conducted by International Press Syndicate Japan (INPS Japan) in partnership with Soka Gakkai International (SGI), a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

Covering the period from April 2024 to March 2025, this marks the ninth year of the SDGs for All project. This compilation features 32 in-depth and independent articles that examine both the efforts and challenges in building a sustainable, peaceful, and inclusive world.

These articles are based on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their 169 targets, analyzing developments at intergovernmental, governmental, and civil society levels. They embody our shared commitment to raising awareness of and encouraging action on the SDGs.

The articles included in this compilation were either written and produced by INPS Japan's overseas media partners—such as Inter Press Service North America, the London Post, and the Nepali Times—or carefully selected based on their strong relevance to the project and republished with

permission.

All of these articles were first published on the dedicated website “SDGs for All” (<https://sdgs-for-all.net/>), launched by INPS Japan in 2015. The website serves both as a knowledge database and as an advocacy tool to encourage reflection and action on the Sustainable Development Goals.

To expand accessibility and global reach, all articles have been translated into Japanese, and many into Arabic, Spanish, German, Turkish, Italian, Hindi, Indonesian, Portuguese, Swahili, Thai, Chinese, Korean, and Russian.

The SDGs—adopted at a historic UN Summit in September 2015 and in force since January 2016—are unique in calling for action by all countries, regardless of income level, to achieve prosperity while protecting the planet. They emphasize that ending poverty must go hand in hand with strategies to promote inclusive growth, education, healthcare, social protection, employment, and environmental stewardship.

With the 2030 deadline fast approaching, the urgency of achieving the SDGs continues to grow. Progress is increasingly hindered by widening

inequalities, climate change, geopolitical instability, and persistent data gaps. These challenges highlight the importance of accountability, inclusive monitoring, and timely, disaggregated data.

This is precisely why the SDGs for All project is more vital than ever. By providing a common platform to learn about critical global realities, it enables readers to better understand the interconnected nature of today's challenges—and to take informed action toward a more sustainable and equitable future. Through accessible, independent journalism, this initiative helps close information gaps and fosters collective engagement with the 2030 Agenda.

We are deeply grateful to Soka Gakkai International (SGI) for their continued support of this joint project. For our journalists around the world, the interest and engagement of readers who resonate with the aims of this initiative are a powerful source of encouragement.

Among SGI members in particular, this support is grounded in one of the organization's core humanistic principles: Dōku, a Buddhist concept in Japanese meaning “shared suffering” or empathetic solidarity. It represents the spirit of responding to the pain of others by standing with them and acting together. This ethos is closely aligned with the SDGs' central pledge to “leave no one behind.” In fact, Dōku gives life to this pledge through daily action and commitment.

This principle is intimately connected to the SDGs' vision of a sustainable and inclusive society, and reflects the values shared by this project and the broader global movement for sustainable development.

Through this report, we hope to encourage greater global awareness of these issues and inspire people across all walks of life to respond with compassion and action. We believe that the understanding and efforts of each individual can become a cornerstone in the creation of a more peaceful and sustainable future.

Finally, I extend heartfelt thanks to our contributors for their invaluable work; to Mr. Masaaki Ohashi, Co-President of the Japan Civil Society Network on SDGs, for his foreword; and to Ms. Lucy Plummer, Youth Engagement Consultant at the SGI Office for UN Affairs, for her message of support.

MESSAGE

By Lucy Plummer

Youth Engagement Consultant, SGI Office for UN Affairs



Strengthening the social pillar for transformative change for the SDGs:

The SDGs are a global agenda for change, and provide an opportunity for achieving the world we want. But SDG progress reports continue to show that we are lagging behind

in the transformation for sustainability by 2030. The formulation of the SDGs in itself, however, was an unprecedented achievement that reflects the kind of energy and drive required to deliver transformative change. The SDGs are remarkable in their scope of the issues covered, and also in terms of departing from the developed-developing schism underpinning previous international development agendas. No country has achieved sustainable development and therefore all countries have work to do to implement sustainable development in the local context. However, policy change does not necessarily lead to societal change. Societal change requires transformative change, and for the SDGs this means across the three pillars of economic, social and environmental.

SDG progress reports consistently highlight gaps in meeting targets relating to the social

dimensions of sustainable development. In particular, social and gender inequalities affecting children, women and girls continue to be significantly unaddressed. The United Nations Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) emphasize the importance of social innovations in bringing about transformative change for the SDGs, stating: "... it requires change in social structures and relations, including addressing the growing economic and political power of elites and patterns of stratification related to class, gender, ethnicity, religion or location that can lock people (including future generations) into disadvantage and constrain their choices and agency. It also means changing norms and institutions, both formal and informal, that shape the behaviour of people and organizations in the social, economic, environmental and political spheres".

Transformative change through strengthening the social pillar of sustainable development

includes promoting social equity and inclusion by addressing inequalities, empowering marginalized groups, and protecting human rights. It includes fostering social cohesion and resilience by building trust and cooperation and strengthening communities and individual and collective resilience in the face of change. It requires prioritising social well-being by investing in education and healthcare, promoting healthy lifestyles and addressing social issues. Additionally, and critically important for achieving the SDGs, is including all stakeholders in policy processes shaping our world.

The UNEP Faith for the Earth coalition is one example of an initiative that is working towards environmental transformation through the inclusion of marginalized groups. Delivering on its commitment to strengthening intergenerational, interfaith, and intergender collaboration on environmental issues, it set up a youth council and an interfaith women council as a platform for strengthening youth engagement and promoting women's leadership in environmental multilateralism at the global level. The coalition is partnering on a series of joint initiatives towards this year's UNEA-7

under its theme "Advancing sustainable solutions for a resilient planet". The promise of a new era can be achieved when young people and women are empowered where they are and their voices reflected in the full range of policy initiatives.

The power of the world's ordinary citizens remains an untapped resource in the 2030 endeavour to transform our world and put us on the path of sustainability. It's time to tap into this resource and unleash the power of the world's people for the transformative change we need. It's time to deliver on our promise on "leaving no-one behind".

FORWARD

By Masaaki Ohashi

Co-president, Japan Civil Society Network on SDGs



Toward the Achievement of the SDGs by 2030:

We cannot ignore the concern that there is a significant flaw in the Sustainable Development Goals. That flaw is the absence of any mention of the reasons our world has sunk into its current “unsustainability.” In medicine, when treating a seriously ill patient, the doctors use interviews and observations in order to grasp the underlying causes and make a diagnosis before choosing the most appropriate treatment. Similarly, if the Earth is afflicted with serious prognosis that threaten our continued existence, should we not first accurately identify the cause and then take the most suitable countermeasures? But because the causes are not documented, the SDGs can feel like no more than palliative treatment.

Let us look at one aspect of poverty: while progress on the elimination of poverty in developing countries remains stalled overall globally, Japan’s Official Development Assistance (ODA) to developing countries exceeded 2 trillion yen in 2023, ranking third in the world. However, 44% of this was allocated to economic infrastructure, overwhelmingly more than any other type of allocation, and it is difficult to show that it proportionally contributes proactively and directly to reducing the rate of absolute poverty, estimated by the World Bank at approximately 690

million people.

Among those in absolute poverty, about 117.3 million people are estimated to have been displaced due to conflict or persecution. Around one million of them are Rohingya refugees who fled from Myanmar to Bangladesh beginning in 2017.

The degree of poverty for the Rohingya refugees is severe. The funding currently provided for food is around \$12 per person per month—only about \$0.40 per day. While the international absolute poverty line is \$2.15 per day, it still falls far short. Moreover, recently, international aid for the Rohingya refugees has not gathered sufficient continuing support. In 2023 only 62% was ultimately collected.[1]

The Japanese government was between the third and seventh largest donor to the Rohingya refugees from 2018 to 2022. However, emergency and food aid directed toward refugees (both Rohingya and others) accounts for only 3% of Japan’s total ODA, far below the levels of Western countries.

The Japanese government’s response to the issue of relative poverty within Japan itself is similarly passive. One reason is that while there are

administrative ministries for fields such as health, education, and environment, there is no ministry dedicated to poverty. Poverty is treated merely as a political issue—an income problem handled by the ruling party, which wants to increase support through measures like tax cuts. Therefore, within the Japanese government’s SDGs working groups—mainly led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs—domestic poverty issues are not given high priority.

Every few years, the MHLW has been including Japan’s relative poverty rate in its “National Livelihood Survey,” based on the OECD definitions. It is crucial that the SDGs Promotion Headquarters of the Japanese government, chaired by the Prime Minister, officially recognize this as Japan’s relative poverty rate; disclose the current status of SDG Goal 2, Target 2.1; and actively promote progress toward halving it. A serious effort by the Japanese government to address domestic poverty issues—which it has thus far neglected—is urgently needed until 2030.

At the beginning of this article, I stated that the SDGs are not perfect. But that does not mean there is any reason to devalue them. Issues which are often overlooked in developed nations can often be surfaced clearly through the “leave no one behind” lens of the SDGs, revealing their true global importance on par with other goals and targets, and the necessity of domestic responses.

Even if at worst the SDGs merely treat the symptoms and not the underlying illnesses, these symptoms are each severe and important matters in their own rights. All UN member states, including Japan, have agreed to the SDGs in order to respond to these.

This July, the annual “High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development” will be held, and the Japanese government will present its third “Voluntary National Review (VNR)” on the progress of the SDGs.

I hope that the VNR will not end with superficial boasting by the reporting country, but will instead become an opportunity for creating multinational dialogue around better practices and overlooked issues from the perspective of “leave no one behind,” and that it will be utilized particularly for Japan’s own implementation of the SDGs going forward.

[1] Joint Response Plan 2023, Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis (2023)

https://rohingyaresponse.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/bangladesh_2023_jrp_rhc_snapshot_en.pdf

- This article is an edited version of a chapter excerpt from the SDGs Spotlight Report 2025 compiled by the Japan Civil Society Network on SDGs (*SDGs Japan*). The whole report will be available for download soon at www.sdgs-japan.net

Japan and the Holy See: From Missionaries to Artful Diplomacy

BY Victor Gaetan



Pope Francis attends a meeting with the diplomatic community at the Japan's prime minister's office on November 25, 2019 in Tokyo, Japan. (photo: Pool / Getty)

ANALYSIS: Respect has been a defining element of the relationship between Rome and Tokyo.

The special relationship between Japan and the Holy See can be discerned in elegant and exceptional moments. One is constantly struck by the respect that characterizes relations between Rome and Tokyo — even in the midst of World War II. For example, the Vatican owns only one painting by Caravaggio, the Baroque maestro of chiaroscuro, light and shadow in dramatic tension

— a painter whose works are so fresh that many look like they were painted last year. This masterpiece, *The Entombment of Christ* (1600-1604), is traveling to Osaka, Japan, to be displayed at the international Expo 2025, where the Vatican's theme is "Beauty Brings Hope" — just when millions of Jubilee 2025 visitors will descend on Rome, some invariably looking for the lone Caravaggio normally hanging in the Vatican Museums.

Considering the Jubilee, "it was a critical decision made by the Holy Father himself that it be sent to Japan, as he is quite affectionate toward Japan, so we are all very happy," explained Ambassador Akira Chiba, Tokyo's representative to the Holy See, who is a personal fan of the painter. "I travel all over Italy to see Caravaggios!"

One of Japan's leading multimedia and publishing companies, Kadokawa, supported "Vatican & Japan: The 100 Year Project" through its cultural foundation and is helping Caravaggio appear at the expo. The foundation's founder, Tsuguhiko Kadokawa, considers the Japanese-Vatican relationship to be a priceless connection.

More recently, speaking fluent Japanese, Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich endorsed the "100 Year Project," including the Caravaggio exhibit, explaining, "By deeply examining both history and the present and promoting cultural exchange, we lay the foundation for true globalization."

Long History

Ambassador Chiba represents the high caliber of talent Japan deploys to Rome. Born in Tehran, where his father was a career diplomat, Chiba studied in the U.S. and has had major assignments in both Washington, D.C., and Beijing.

As we chat via Zoom, the ambassador sits in front of a striking yellow-and-black screen depicting the arrival of Catholic missionaries to the island-nation on a Portuguese ship in the mid-16th century. Chiba explained, “In Japan, we don’t just talk about diplomatic ties that started, officially, in 1942. We talk about Japanese-Catholic relations, which take us back to 1549, when St. Francis Xavier came to Japan and Catholicism spread quite quickly. Pope Francis wanted to be a missionary to Japan based on this history.”

The long historical relationship — plus Catholic missionaries who educated the Japanese elite — helps explain fascinating moments such as Crown Prince Hirohito’s meeting with Pope Benedict XV in July 1921.

The crown prince was coming of age in a new era that saw the disintegration of several empires. The Japanese royal family decided he should visit some of Japan’s World War I allies, including Britain and France, since he had never traveled and his father was sickly. One of Hirohito’s advisers was Admiral Shinjiro Yamamoto (1877-1942), a devout Catholic and former naval attaché in Italy during World War I. Educated by French missionaries and baptized at age 16, he was undecided between a vocation and naval service until a priestly adviser recommended the military. Yamamoto (not to be

confused with Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, who commanded the Japanese fleet during World War II) maintained career-long contact with the Roman Curia, including meetings with four popes: Leo XIII, Pius X, Benedict XV and Pius XI.

Rome was Hirohito’s last stop on his European tour. According to The New York Times, Hirohito visited St. Peter’s Basilica and extended to Benedict XV wishes for a long reign from his father, Emperor Yoshihito, who had approved an apostolic delegate taking residence in Tokyo in 1919 despite objections from Buddhist and Shinto religious leaders. (The Vatican had sent special envoys to the emperor in 1885 and 1905.)

After Hirohito’s meeting with the Pope, the government allocated funds for a Vatican diplomatic mission but energetic protests by Shinto and Buddhist organizations sank the project. Today, Buddhist organizations such as Soka Gakkai and Japan’s Association of Shinto Shrines partner with the Holy See on nuclear disarmament.

Shared Values

Ambassador Yoshio Nakamura was posted to the Holy See during the government of Shinzo Abe, Japan’s longest-serving prime minister. (Japan has had three Catholic PMs: Hara Takashi, 1918-1921; Shigeru Yoshida, 1946-1947 and 1948-1954; and Taro Aso, 2008-2009).

Nakamura observed in an email to the Register, “I think that although the number of Catholics is small, Catholic thinking has permeated Japan to a considerable extent. Japan and the Vatican share values.”

He continued, “When the late Prime Minister Abe appointed me, he emphasized the strength of the Vatican’s information power spread

throughout the world. In fact, during my term, I was surprised at the incredible power” of that network.

Formal Diplomatic Relations

That network was what Emperor Hirohito was keen to leverage in 1942, when Japan and the Holy See agreed to full diplomatic relations; Japan was the first Asian country to do so, which shocked the Allies.

American and British officials were furious. The agreement came just two months after the cataclysmic Japanese air attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The Allies assumed the public would see the Vatican’s decision as a victory for the Japanese. But their response proved they did not understand the Church’s diplomatic mission. As Pope Pius XI said in 1929, “When there is question of saving souls, or preventing greater harm to souls, we feel the courage to treat with the devil in person.”

An excellent analysis of this period is Mariko Ikehara’s “Kanayama Masahide: Catholicism and Mid-Century Japanese Diplomacy,” in Georgetown University professor Kevin Doak’s *Xavier’s Legacies: Catholicism in Modern Japanese Culture* (University of British Columbia Press, 2011).

The essay looks at Vatican-Japan relations from the Japanese perspective in the figure of Augustine Masahide Kanayama, a Catholic diplomat who was Tokyo’s No. 2 man at the Holy See from 1942 to 1945, before leading the office from 1945 to 1952. At age 21, while studying law in Tokyo, Kanayama was baptized in the chapel of a leprosy hospital because he was moved by the faith of the patients and the clinic’s president, a Catholic priest he had known for several

years.

Ikehara looks at why Emperor Hirohito initiated relations with the Vatican in 1942. She explains, first, that Hirohito was mimicking U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt’s bid to cultivate the Vatican.

Second, even before Pearl Harbor, the emperor saw potential for the Holy See to help his country negotiate peace with the Allies. On Oct. 13, 1941, Hirohito wrote, “It looks like we will not be able to avoid this war, but once we enter this war, think now how to engage in peace negotiations. ... For this purpose, it is necessary to establish diplomatic relations with the Vatican.”

Ikehara told the Register by telephone that the chapter began as research for a Japanese TV program on Martin Quigley, author of *Peace Without Hiroshima: Secret Action at the Vatican in the Spring of 1945* and a U.S. intelligence agent working for the Office of Strategic Services, predecessor of the CIA. He claims he approached Japan’s diplomats at the Vatican to try to open negotiations on behalf of the U.S. government.

“I don’t know if it was approved by his superiors,” the author mused. In the end, the initiative did not gain ground. “The government of Japan was looking for possible peace settlements via Sweden and the Soviet Union (with whom Japan had a neutrality treaty), which was quite wrongheaded,” Ikehara explained.

‘Mutual Respect’

Cardinal Peter Turkson reflected on the values shared between Japan and the Vatican at a symposium in Tokyo marking the 70th anniversary of mutual recognition.

He said, “Over these decades, the Holy See’s diplomatic relations

with Japan have been marked by mutual respect and a common desire to foster peace and reconciliation in global affairs.

“Based on its own experience of suffering, as well as its cultural emphasis on social harmony, Japan has promoted multilateralism and peaceful cooperation among nations. This commitment echoes that of the Holy See, which has long dedicated itself to the cause of world peace.”



Victor Gaetan

Victor Gaetan is a senior correspondent for the National Catholic Register, focusing on international issues. He also writes for Foreign Affairs magazine, The American Spectator and the Washington Examiner. He contributed to Catholic News Service for several years.

The Catholic Press
Association of North America

has given his articles four first place awards, including Individual Excellence, over the last five years. Gaetan received a license (B.A.) in Ottoman and Byzantine Studies from Sorbonne University in Paris, an M.A. from the Fletcher School of International Law and Diplomacy, and a Ph.D. in Ideology in Literature from Tufts University. His

book *God's Diplomats: Pope Francis, Vatican Diplomacy, and America's Armageddon* was published by Rowman & Littlefield

『INPS Japan/[National Catholic Register](#)』

Combining IPCC targets with SDGs

BY Nepali Times editorial



The IPCC meet in China this week is urged to integrate Sustainable Development Goals with climate targets

The Donald Trump administration is withdrawing from multilateral mechanisms to tackle development, health and environmental challenges just as the world is impacted by accelerated climate breakdown. The US pullout of the Paris Agreement signed by most

countries in 2015 to curb emissions, his plans to increase fossil fuel production, and cut funding for global nature conservation and climate adaptation, threaten to reverse the past decade of progress.

All this comes as the United States has decided to cancel participation of its scientists in a critical meeting this week of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in the Chinese city of Hangzhou which is set to agree on a timeline and budget for its Seventh Assessment Report.

The Conference will be also discussing geoengineering options to remove carbon that has accumulated in the atmosphere, to capture and store it. Some scientists say that at the rate emissions are spiking worldwide, cutting back on fossil fuel use will not be enough to keep global average temperatures in check.

Some of the CO₂ emitted today is absorbed by the oceans and plants, but most of it remains in the atmosphere for as much as 1,000 years.

Carbon sequestration remains controversial, and environmentalists argue that the best method of removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere is to increase forest cover around the world.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is an international body of scientists from 195 countries and was set up nearly 20 years ago to provide governments regular reports on the state of the global climate as well as propose measures to adapt to the climate crisis and reduce emissions.

Previous IPCC assessments have painted an increasingly alarming picture of overshoot of greenhouse gas emissions, and the world is already nearing the 1.5C target for 2050 set in Paris 20 years ago.

The 62nd session of the IPCC taking place in Hangzhou from 24-28 February will pool available scientific data on climate change, analyse it and come up with recommendations for governments as part of its regular 6-year process.

But the outlines of the Seventh Assessment report is not due till 2028, and many scientists worry that at present rate of atmospheric and ocean warming, it will be too late to take meaningful action.

Now, a new study has shown that past IPCC reports have failed to align its targets with another time bound plan agreed to by most of the world's countries at the United Nations: the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

“The Hangzhou meeting is the right time to influence decision-making to holistically link climate change and sustainability issues in the upcoming IPCC reports,” says Prajal Pradhan of the Integrated Research on Energy, Environment, and Society at the University of Groningen in The Netherlands, and lead author of a new report in the journal *Resources, Environment and Sustainability*.

The SDGs were agreed upon at the United Nations the same year as the Paris Climate Agreement to achieve a set of 17 development targets by 2030 to, among other things, end poverty and hunger, ensure health and education, and reduce emissions to mitigate climate change.

The SDGs superseded the earlier Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and underlined the interlinkages of the global crises like inequality, migration, food production, poverty and climate breakdown.

Pradhan, who is a scientist from Nepal, and his fellow researchers and authors analysed 150 chapters of the Fifth and Sixth Assessment Reports of the IPCC to see how much they had incorporated SDG targets.

“Our analysis shows that the reports contain gaps when it comes to the SDGs,” notes Pradhan. “Climate change and sustainability cannot be seen in isolation, and several SDGs are not sufficiently reflected in the previous IPCC reports, such as gender equality, education, inequality, and health issues.”

Besides its 17 broad goals, the SDGs also have 169 sub-goals and incorporate them into the next scientific assessment of the IPCC because they relate to structural problems with national development, many of which pre-date the climate crisis.

Says Pradhan: “If we want to achieve climate action, we need to link them to development issues. Climate change has negative impacts on several SDGs. At the same time, they can also have a positive effect on several sustainability goals. There are synergies and trade-offs.”

The paper in Resource, Environment and Sustainability notes that while SDGs figure more prominently in the IPCC’s Sixth Assessment Report compared to the Fifth, there is a need for a more holistic coverage of sustainability and development goals as the underlying causes and solutions to the climate crisis.

Incorporating SDGs into the Seventh Assessment Report, it adds, would make the next one more policy-relevant, stimulate more research on SDG and climate change linkages.

Says Klaus Hubacek, another co-author from the University of Groningen: “Climate change is not just about rising temperatures,

there is also a direct link to people’s well-being, which the SDGs emphasise. These development issues resonate more with governments, and this is how they hope to accelerate climate actions.”

The paper was a collaboration between scientists from 15 institutions worldwide which also included other Nepali scientists like Shobhakar Dhakal of the Asian Institute of Technology in Thailand and , Maheswar Rupakheti, as well as former and present members of IPCC working groups like Bart van den Hurk, Debra C Roberts.

The researchers hope that the journal article will convince participants at the IPCC meeting in China this week to push urgent global action on climate mitigation and adaptation by integrating SDGs more closely with emission targets and strategies to cope with impact. “Timing is key,” Hubacek notes. “The SDGs are in place until 2030. If the IPCC reports incorporate SDG targets they will help the sustainability agenda beyond 2030, a potential follow-up.”

『INPS Japan/ Nepali Times』

Application of Innovations in Desert Agriculture

BY Roman Yanushevsky

Growing crops in desert conditions has always been a challenge for humanity, as the desert was considered barren. However, throughout history, there have been individuals who took on this challenge and achieved success. Thanks to the technological revolution and rapid advancements in technology, modern agriculture is no longer confined to fertile regions alone.

Jerusalem (INPS Japan) –

If back in 5000 BC people managed to grow fruits and vegetables in the Negev Desert, it is not surprising that, with the opportunities modern technology offers humanity, deserts have been used for decades as locations for cultivating agricultural crops. Countries like Israel, the USA, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE have proven that harsh climatic conditions, poor soils, and water scarcity are not barriers to successful crop cultivation.

A critical element of successful plant cultivation in desert conditions—especially in the context of global warming—is the adoption of



Advanced agricultural technology at Kibbutz Ketura. By No machine-readable author provided. CaptainHaddock assumed (based on copyright claims). - No machine-readable source provided. Own work assumed (based on copyright claims)., CC BY-SA 3.0

sustainable practices, including careful water management. These practices involve water recycling (wastewater treatment), desalination of saltwater, and drip irrigation.

In recent years, with the development of artificial intelligence, new opportunities have emerged, particularly for advancing and applying technologies in agriculture.

Israel

One of the pioneers in desert agriculture is Israel, a small Middle Eastern country with scarce natural resources. Driven by the necessity to establish an efficient agricultural system, Israel invented drip irrigation technology, now used worldwide.

It is said that necessity is the mother of invention. The region's water scarcity led to a realization that water should be used with great efficiency. In practice, drip irrigation reduces water consumption by

80% while doubling crop yields.



Israeli Netafim, drip irrigation. By Borisshin – Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Another important solution for conserving water resources has been the reuse of treated wastewater for agricultural purposes. Around 90% of wastewater in Israel is treated at specialized facilities and then reused for irrigation. As a result, approximately 40% of the water used in Israeli agriculture is treated wastewater, effectively given a second life. Desalination of seawater is another technological innovation. The country operates five desalination plants, supplying over 585 million cubic meters of water annually.

For nearly a century, Israel has been home to the Volcani Institute, an agricultural research center that trains specialists in agriculture. Many of these specialists come from around the world to study there.

The institute focuses on climate change research, desert agriculture techniques, irrigation using treated and desalinated water, efficient water usage, crop cultivation in controlled environments, and developing new varieties of fruit and grain crops that require less water but yield more.

United States

In Southern California lies the Imperial Valley. Until the early 20th century, few people lived there due to the challenging desert climate, with daytime summer temperatures reaching extreme levels. However, from late October to early April, temperatures become more tolerable. Even in winter, the region receives up to eight hours of sunlight per day, making it the sunniest place in the United States.

For the past hundred years, agriculture has flourished in the Imperial Valley, becoming the backbone of the region's economy. The valley boasts 500,000 acres of farmland. Today, it supplies two-thirds of the United States' winter vegetable demand, producing 65 different crops. Additionally, livestock such as cows and sheep are raised there.

Transforming the desert into an agricultural oasis has been made possible through irrigation. 100% of the water used for irrigation comes from the Colorado River, delivered via a network of irrigation canals totaling about 5,000 kilometers in length. Desalinated water is also used for irrigation in the region's agricultural practices.

Saudi Arabia

In recent years, the Saudi Arabian government has placed significant emphasis on developing agriculture. While the region once thrived on a nomadic culture centered around livestock herding, that way of life

ended in the 1960s. Over the past decades, Saudi Arabia has not only achieved self-sufficiency in agricultural production but also exports products such as dates, dairy products, eggs, fish, poultry, fruits, vegetables, and flowers.

Irrigation and efficient water resource management play a critical role in crop cultivation. Three of the world's six largest desalination plants are located in Saudi Arabia (the others are in Israel, the UAE, and Egypt).

In recent decades, Saudi Arabia has faced significant depletion of its groundwater reserves, prompting measures to address the issue. Currently, the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) is developing sustainable methods to advance the country's agricultural sector. In September 2024, Saudi Arabia launched a two-year project to explore methods such as nanofiltration, electrodialysis, and reverse osmosis to optimize and reduce the cost of water desalination.

United Arab Emirates (UAE)

The majority of the United Arab Emirates' territory is desert. However, the use of technological innovations has opened new opportunities for agriculture.

Like many other desert nations (mentioned above) that are advancing agricultural development, the UAE actively supports agricultural startups and invests heavily in this sector.

In recent years, these technological companies have been seeking innovative solutions to longstanding challenges, leveraging artificial intelligence, robotics, hydroponics, vertical farming, and the creation of supportive ecosystems. The rapid development of technology is

unlocking numerous opportunities, even for a traditional industry like agriculture.

『INPS Japan』

The slaughter of our daughters

BY Shristi Karki



Photo: SUMAN NEPALI

Kathumandu (Nepali Times) -Nepal ranks highest for sex ratio at birth in the region due to gender-biased sex selection

Public health expert Aruna Uprety was flying from Dolpo to Nepalganj a few years ago when she struck up a conversation with a pregnant woman who told her she was travelling to the city for a doctor's appointment.

Uprety's initial happiness at learning that rural women were actively seeking prenatal care turned into shock when the woman, who had two daughters, said she would terminate her pregnancy if the

ultrasound showed a female foetus.

When Uprety recounted her conversation with nurses at a hospital in Nepalganj, they did not bat an eyelid, telling her that pregnant people came from all over the Karnali to get ultrasounds for sex-selective abortions.

This example, multiplied tens of thousands of times every year, is visible in the 2021 census data: there are significantly more male than female live births in Nepal, giving the country one of the highest sex ratio at birth (SRB) in Asia.

SRB indicates the number of boys born for every 100 baby girls. Globally, biological birth ratios are slightly biased towards male babies, and the theoretical or expected SRB is 105 males per 100 female live births. Higher values indicate much higher numbers of newborn boys than girls.

According to the 2021 census, Nepal has a SRB of 112 males per 100 females, up from 106 recorded in the 2011 census. Dhanusa district bordering India has the highest SRB (133) while Mustang in the trans-Himalaya has 92 boys per every 100 girls born. The Madhes (118) has the highest SRB among Nepal's provinces.

Experts are worried that this trend could lead to long-term demographic disparities, and say there has not been enough research into the drivers of this imbalance.

"Nepal's skewed sex ratio at birth is one of the most concerning demographic issues," says Yogendra B Gurung of the Central Department of Population Studies at Tribhuvan University.

Contributing to this is gender-biased sex selection (GBSS) and other forms of discrimination and inequality enabled by Nepal's patriarchal, socio-cultural, traditional structures.

Gender-biased sex selection determines the outcome of a pregnancy, and can be postnatal or prenatal. Postnatal sex selection can be due to neglect, differences in maternal nutrition and child care, or infanticide of a girl child.

Prenatal gender-biased sex selection occurs prior to or during conception, either by the selection of a particular sex during fertilisation, or through termination of pregnancy when the sex of the foetus is determined. Across the world, GBSS is an outcome of a preference of sons over daughters.

The census result proves that Nepalis are increasingly opting for sex selection and consequently, sex-selective abortions through the use of prenatal diagnostic technologies to determine the sex of a baby, even though the law prohibits clinics from revealing the sex of a foetus.

"There are three detriments that enable gender-biased sex selection: our socio cultural norms, and the preference of sons over daughters, and the availability of technology that is able to determine the sex of a foetus," explains Apekchya Rana Khatri at the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Kathmandu. "We analysed the social and demographic trends, and identified Nepal as one of the countries where GBSS prevails based on the prevalence of these three issues."

Many Nepali families prefer sons because they are still expected to solely carry forward the family lineage, provide economic benefit to the family and actively engage in society, take care of their parents in their old age, perform funeral rites, and gain inheritance.

Imbalanced sex ratio at birth is not just a problem in Nepal. The sex ratio at birth of countries in the region, including India and China reflect socio-cultural norms that ascribe more importance to boys.

Sex ratio at birth in India (108) is mostly due to cultural factors, while in China (112) it is a legacy of the previous One Child Policy. The imbalance has actually begun to improve in the past years in both countries. However, in Nepal, the opposite has happened: SRB rose from 104 in 2001 to 106 in 2011 to 112 in 2021.

The 2021 census also shows that sex ratio at birth in Nepal's urban municipalities is 114 — higher than rural municipalities (109). This is in contradiction to the belief that discrimination against girl children is less among educated and better off city dwellers than in rural areas.

Better access to healthcare institutions might also account for higher sex ratio at birth in urban areas. In the case of Madhes Province, access to both legal and unsafe abortion across the border could be why SRB is higher.

"Nepal's sex ratio at birth shines a light on the deeply-entrenched patriarchy in our country," says demographer Gurung. "And it also clarifies the misconception that traditional and conservative mindsets and discriminatory practices exist exclusively in rural communities, because the data points to educated, economically well off people engaging in practices like GBSS."

Historically, agrarian societies like Nepal preferred to have many sons because men were considered better suited to physical work. Today, many Nepalis hope to have male children so that they can migrate overseas, earn livelihoods, and support their families.

"Although evolving political, legal, and social systems have given women more robust rights to education and rights to inheritance, and

ensured their participation in the workforce, the implementation of interventions is another matter,” says Aruna Uprety. “Our cultural and especially religious practices have continued to reinforce gender inequality.”

Experts say they have been unable to collect relevant data from medical and health facilities.

“Even when we identify the issues contributing to sex-selective practices, we are largely working on assumptions because there is no officially-backed data about sex-selective abortions through legal channels or unofficial and unsafe providers,” says Won Young Hong, UNFPA Country Representative for Nepal. “We need to obtain more data from hospitals, clinics and the many other service providers so that we can conduct more extensive research.”

Another dimension to sex determination, selection, and sex-selective abortion is that it is not always a pregnant person’s choice to terminate a pregnancy if they find their child is female. Studies at local levels have revealed that husbands and mothers-in-law play pivotal roles in decision-making regarding prenatal sex determination.

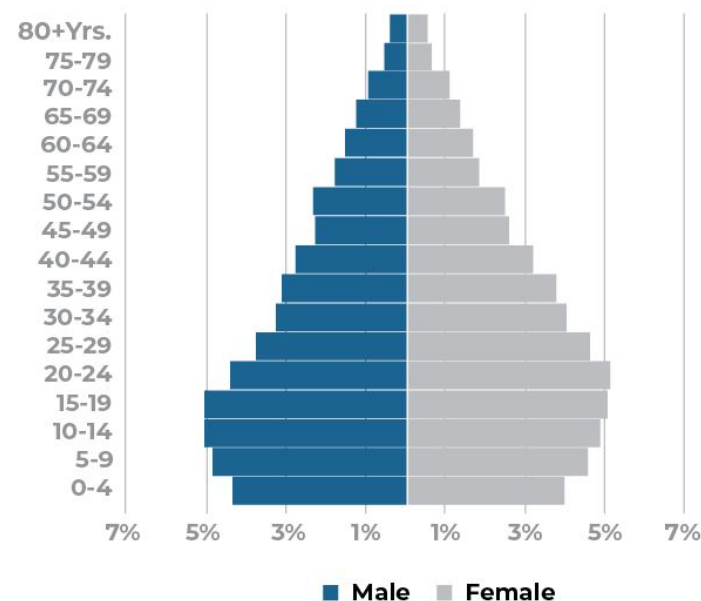
Nepal’s decreasing total fertility rate also contributes to a warped sex ratio at birth. Two decades ago, Nepal’s total fertility rate was 4.6, today a Nepali mother on average gives birth to only 2.1 children — which is at replacement level. And since Nepalis are having fewer children, especially if they plan to have only one child, they want to make sure they have a son.

Studies by the Center for Research on Environment Health and Population Activities (CREHPA) show that while neither women nor men have a preference for the sex of their child during the birth of their first child, having a female child first will lead to a preference for sons

from the second birth, the preference increases in subsequent birth orders. Although Nepal’s sex ratio at birth is skewed towards boys, the country has more women than men, as differences in lifestyles contribute to a higher male mortality rate. The 2021 census shows that Nepal’s sex ratio is 95.6 males per 100 females.

However, the male to female ratio from ages 0-19 has gone from 102 in 2011 to 107 in 2021, mainly due to rising sex ratio at birth. In the coming decades, the number of females above age 19 will decline.

Nepal Population Pyramid



Source: 2021 NEPAL CENSUS

The number of males under 20 being higher also proves that gender-biased sex selection has been going on in Nepal for at least the three

decades, says Gurung.

“Nepal’s sex ratio at birth could indicate a larger demographic shift in the long run where the male population outnumbers the female population,” he adds.

This would in turn have an impact on fertility, male-female partnerships and marriage dynamics, the work force, and Nepal’s existing social structures as a whole. In particular, a population significantly skewed towards males might make women and girls more vulnerable to abuse, sexual exploitation and assault, trafficking, forced marriages, and other serious crimes, say experts.

Studies have also found that birth registration right after the birth of a child is not common in Nepal, and some couples register the birth of sons and ignore daughters, which may be reflected in fewer recorded female live births. Cultural norms and practices do not change despite laws, and Nepal needs to do much more to change societal values, protect, and educate its women and girls. UNFPA, for example, in 2021 supported the Ministry of Health and Population to draft the first-ever national strategy to address gender-biased sex selection, its implementation already in place.

The agency’s Ruparantan program also equips adolescent girls with practical skills and knowledge on gender equality and decision-making. But for this to work, new policies and political will to implement them by the government are critical. Strong regulatory mechanisms to monitor prenatal sex determination technologies will also be required. In addition, Nepal needs systems in place to guarantee safety and security of its ageing population, so that there are less financial and socio-cultural pressure on sons to take care of their families, and less incentives for parents to opt for male children.

“The state needs to prepare to provide adequate services for the elderly population, especially with the anticipation of the growth in ageing population,” says Won Young Hong at UNFPA.

India has stricter regulations over the use of prenatal diagnostic technologies to determine the sex of a baby, as well as rigorous campaigning across state and national levels like the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao program that have helped address the country’s declining female births. Nepal also needs to address the drivers of its skewed sex ratio at birth while safeguarding the reproductive rights of women and the right to safe abortions.

Access to these services have contributed significantly to lowering the maternal mortality rate. Abortions are important for medical emergencies, for survivors of sexual assault, for family planning, and to ensure the right of women to choose what to do with their own body.

“Safe abortion is a right, and cutting off access to it will not stop gender-biased sex selection,” says Aruna Uprety. “Legality has no bearing on people’s decisions— women were getting abortions in private facilities across Nepal and India even when it was not yet legal.” What is needed is a multi-sectoral approach that addresses existing socio-cultural norms, what women need to be empowered and linked to jobs, as well as policies that promote women and girls, giving them opportunities.

Adds Uprety: “Socio-cultural interventions are just as important as legal and policy ones, and we cannot address society’s preference for sons unless we look critically at our patriarchal cultural practices. Gender discrimination is a cross-cutting issue.”

『INPS Japan/Nepali Times』

From Darkness to Dawn: Escaping Taliban Oppression

BY Raza Syed



Image Credit: Ministry of Defense of Spain/Handout via REUTERS

The Story of Ahmad*'s Journey to Freedom

London Post – In the heart of London, a 35 year old man sits quietly in a small, dimly lit room, his eyes reflecting the weight of memories from a home he was forced to leave. His name is Ahmad, and his journey from Afghanistan to the UK is one of survival, loss, and an unyielding hope to reunite with his family.

Ahmad fled Afghanistan in 2021, just two weeks before the Taliban seized control. "I was terrified," he recalls. "When they came, they would have killed me." His crime? Working for a development and education organization that published schoolbooks for Afghan

children. The Taliban accused him of promoting democracy, calling the books a Western conspiracy. When they sent him a warning letter, he knew his life was in imminent danger.

"I couldn't even go to my own village," he says. "They would have killed me there." His wife, fearing for his life, made the painful decision. "At least you will still be alive," she told him, urging him to flee. Ahmad's departure was bittersweet—he left behind his wife and two children, including a newborn daughter he had never met.

The journey to the UK was perilous. "It was 100% dangerous," Ahmad says. Traveling through treacherous routes, he often went days without food, surviving on leaves from trees. Smugglers dictated their every move. "We were under their control. They hurt us, swore at us, treated us like we weren't human." Along the way, he saw families desperate to reunite, facing horrors—women and young boys fell victim to brutalities, and those caught by border guards risked their lives.

After months of harrowing travel, Ahmad finally reached the UK by crossing the Channel in an overcrowded boat. "It was meant for eight people. We were more than thirty," he says, his voice heavy. "I want to thank the British force that saved us. If they hadn't, I wouldn't be here today."

On the same day he arrived in the UK, his wife gave birth by emergency caesarean. "I called home, but she was too weak to speak." The separation has been agonizing. His eldest daughter doesn't understand why her father is gone. "She always asks, 'Where

are you? Come home!”

Ahmad claimed asylum upon arrival and was taken to a detention center, where he received five pounds and a phone to contact his family. Life in the UK was a struggle. He moved between hotels and shared accommodations, barely able to afford food, let alone anything else. “I wanted to work, to support myself and ease the burden on the government, but without a work permit, I felt trapped,” he says.

Two years after his arrival, Ahmad was granted refugee status. “I was in a shopping center when I received the call. It was life-changing,” he recalls. Yet, the elation was short-lived. Forced out of government accommodation within 14 days, he found himself sleeping in a dining room for two nights before a kind friend took him in. “Sometimes, when he has guests, I sleep in the car,” Ahmad admits.

Despite the hardships, Ahmad remains hopeful. He now has a job and dreams of building a future. But his biggest wish remains unfulfilled—to bring his wife and daughters to safety. The legal process is painfully slow. It took six months just to get Afghan passports for his children, and his wife endures daily stress from authorities questioning his absence. “It’s been three years. A husband and wife can’t survive without each other,” he says.

Ahmad’s wife and children remain in Afghanistan, living under Taliban rule. His wife isn’t allowed to leave the house alone, not even to buy milk for their children. The stress is taking its toll. “My wife has to ask others for help with even the smallest tasks. It’s unbearable,” he says.

Despite everything, Ahmad remains resilient. He dreams of contributing to the UK, proving that refugees seek not handouts but

opportunities. “People think we come here for benefits,” he says. “But no one leaves their home unless they have no choice.”

He calls for a legal pathway for refugees, not just for their sake but for UK security. “If there was a safe, legal way, people wouldn’t risk their lives. The UK could check who is coming. Most are women and children, vulnerable and in danger,” he explains.

Ahmad’s story is a testament to the strength of the human spirit. He dreams of a future where his family can join him, and he can contribute positively to British society. “One day, I hope to do something good for this country. And one day, I hope to hold my children again,” he says.

His message is one of hope and understanding. “I want the world to stand with Afghanistan and all those in danger. There shouldn’t be any difference between refugees and how people from different countries are treated. I want equality for everyone, whether they’re from Ukraine, Afghanistan, or anywhere else. They should have the same rights.”

As I prepared to leave, the sorrow of being separated from home and family was evident in his eyes. I silently prayed for a world where peace prevails, so that no one would ever be forced to part from their loved ones due to oppression, injustice, or the need for safety.

Note: The name “Ahmed” and the location mentioned in this article are fictionalized for the sake of protecting lives.

『INPS Japan/ London Post』

Versatile bamboo reduces climate risk

BY Pinki Sris Rana



Moso bamboo grove in Kavre. Photo: SAILESH RC

Chitwan (Nepali Times) - Nepal's villages use fast-growing bamboo groves to protect them from more frequent floods

Nepal's diverse culture uses the bamboo plant for birth, death and all rituals in between. The versatile plant is also used for construction, to make musical instruments, to carry things, to write with, even to eat.

Now, bamboo groves are being used to protect villages near Chitwan National Park that are prone to frequent flooding due to climate breakdown.

It is the smaller streams that are dry in winter that are the most destructive during the monsoon. So, farmers in the village of Madi are

planting bamboo forests along the banks of streams that block floods and stop soil erosion.

"Once the rainy season starts, we are afraid to close our eyes at night," says Shanti Chapai, 58, who lives near the Patare Khola stream that burst its banks last year.



Google Earth images show the greening the floodplain of the Patare Khola over 15 years. Photos courtesy: ABARI

On a recent visit, the Patare Khola was just a small stream, it is hard to imagine that it would become a raging river in the rainy season, bursting its banks and threatening farms and settlements.

Despite bamboo having everyday use for fencing, furniture and an important cash crop, farmers here were initially opposed to the idea of using it for flood control. They thought bamboo was an invasive species, and sucked up all the groundwater.

But for the past 15 years, the architects at ABARI (Adobe and Bamboo Research Institute) have been experimenting with a thorny bamboo species like *Bambusa bluemeana* and *Bambusa balcooa*

to restore degraded land and control floods. The area is now a dense bamboo grove greening the floodplain of the Patara Khola.

Sediment from last monsoon's floods are deposited at the foot of the bamboo trees, proving that the plants stabilised the banks, protecting the surroundings by reducing the velocity of flood waters.

Madi's villagers are now convinced that this is an effective bioengineering solution to floods. Bamboo is also fast-growing, and is ideal for reclaiming the eroded banks of rivers. Nepal has more than 50 species of bamboo, most of them found in the wetter eastern plains and foothills. But some species grow at altitudes of up to 4,000.

"Bamboo is a misunderstood plant in our culture because it is used for funeral rites and has a negative connotation," says Nripal Adhikary ABARI, which builds bamboo and rammed earth buildings in Nepal. "It took a while to convince locals of its benefits."

Monsoons in Nepal have always been synonymous with disasters, but extreme weather events caused by climate breakdown have made landslides and floods worse. Poor construction of roads, unregulated quarrying of sensitive watersheds, and encroachment along floodplains increase the risk.

But here in Madi, villagers have seen with their own eyes the direct benefit of bamboo for flood protection. Says farmer Phadendra Bhattarai: "Even though there was heavy rainfall, the extent of flood damage this monsoon was considerably less. The bamboo acted as a barrier and did not let the floods destroy our crops."

This tried and tested bamboo plantation can be replicated and upscaled across Nepal, and farmers in Kanchanpur in the western plains have also planted bamboo, napier and elephant grass along the banks of a river that unleashed destructive floods in 2018.

A thick strategic bamboo plantation can be made into a fence of porcupine structured embankment to provide protection in flood prone areas.

Floods in September in central Nepal killed 224 people with southern Lalitpur and Kavre being hardest hit. The Rosi Valley in Kavre was devastated, and settlements swept away entire slopes. But an area in the vicinity with bamboo plantation remained intact.

Dhaneswar Baikiya Community Forest in Kavre is half a hectare of plot bamboo planted by the government in a pilot project in 2007 to study and research the moso bamboo *Phyllostachys pubescens*. It has been 17 years and the Ministry of Forests and Environment's Forest Research and Training Center had long forgotten about it.

"Although no research has not been done here specifically in the plot, it is precisely this bamboo forest that saved villages down the mountains from major destruction," says Badri Adhikari, custodian of the Community Forest. "Their expansive and entangled roots hold the soil firmly, protecting the slope's stability."

This plot may have been overlooked but there have been other efforts. All 12 districts of Lumbini province have initiated a bamboo plantation campaign to prevent erosion and flooding.

Traditionally, too, bamboo is believed to control landslides, and it is not uncommon to see villagers along the mountains reviving depleted bamboo groves once they see its benefits. Besides landslide protection, the bamboo also has many other uses.

Says Badri Adhikari: "The bamboo tree grows upwards in height during the summer and its roots expand in the winter. So, winter is the right time to prepare for the next monsoon of damaging floods."

『INPS Japan/Nepali Times』

Malnutrition in Nigeria Rises Alarming, Urgent Action Needed

BY Promise Eze



Children beg for food in Gusau, the capital of Zamfara, Nigeria.
Credit: Promise Eze/IPS

ABUJA (IPS) – In June 2024, 26-year-old Zainab Abdul noticed her two-year-old daughter growing pale, losing weight, and battling diarrhea. She wasn't surprised. Since jihadist-linked bandits had forced them out of their village in Kadadaba, Zamfara State, in northwestern Nigeria, her family had been living in a refugee camp with limited access to food.

Abdul's fears were confirmed at a center run by Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans

Frontières (MSF), where she was told her baby was suffering from acute malnutrition.

"I received ready-to-use therapeutic food (RUTF), and it helped her a lot. She felt relief as they gave her injections, medicine and milk. As you can see, she's now recovering gradually, unlike before," Abdul told IPS.

While Abdul's baby survived malnutrition, many others are not as fortunate. Nigeria is grappling with a severe malnutrition crisis, particularly in the northern region, where poverty, food insecurity, inadequate healthcare, and soaring living costs are widespread. The country has one of the world's highest rates of stunted growth among children, with 32 percent of those under five affected. According to UNICEF, malnutrition impacts 2 million children in Nigeria, primarily in the north, and results in the deaths of approximately 2,400 children under five every day.



Zainab Abdul and her two-year-old daughter at a refugee camp in Zamfara, northwest Nigeria. Credit: Promise Eze/IPS

Shrouded in Violence

Experts say insecurity is a major cause of malnutrition in northern Nigeria. In the northwest, armed groups drive farmers off their land, shut down markets, and extort communities. This violence has forced over 2.2 million people to flee, with many now living in overcrowded camps with few resources.

In the northeast, ongoing conflicts disrupt farming and food production. Families returning to their land are afraid to farm far

from military towns, leaving them at risk of hunger.

Food shortages are so bad that some families have to eat cassava peels to survive.

“We are suffering greatly. We barely have food to eat and have been unable to farm for over four years because bandits drove us from our communities. We don’t even have proper shelter. As I speak to you now, I haven’t eaten anything. We urgently need support from the government,” said Hannatu Ismail, a resident of a refugee camp in Zamfara.

Aminu Balarabe, a middle-aged doctor at a local clinic in Gusau, the capital of Zamfara, fears that if the problem is not addressed immediately, the outcome could be disastrous. Although the government has launched several military campaigns to eradicate the bandits and encourage people to return to their farms, Balarabe believes more needs to be done.

He lamented that the ongoing insecurity has already crippled healthcare services, making it difficult to diagnose and treat malnutrition effectively in the region.

“The solution is to tackle insecurity. People on the ground are mostly unprotected and left

vulnerable. They are constantly in danger. If the government steps in, provides real support, and takes strong action to bring peace to these communities, things can change for the better. To fight this insecurity, the government must act urgently and decisively. It’s heartbreaking that some people cannot live in their towns or villages because of the insecurity. They are forced to live and sleep in camps,” Balarabe said.

Humanitarian Crisis

For years, organizations like the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), UNICEF, and MSF have raised alarms about the worsening malnutrition crisis, emphasizing the urgent need for more humanitarian aid. They have repeatedly called on Nigerian authorities, organizations, and donors to take immediate action to tackle the root causes of the crisis.

In 2024, MSF provided care to more than 294,000 malnourished children in northern Nigeria. The aid organization revealed that overcrowded conditions had left them treating patients on mattresses on the floor due to a lack of space.

By mid-2024, the ICRC reported a 48 percent increase in severe malnutrition cases

with complications among children under five in health facilities it supports compared to the previous year.

Reduced funding has made it more difficult for organizations to care for malnourished children. The shortage of therapeutic food has persisted and worsened. Despite the rising cases of acute malnutrition worldwide, the UN’s humanitarian response plan still does not include Nigeria’s northwest region.

Oluwagbemisola Olukogbe, a nutritionist in Lagos, Nigeria, is concerned that malnutrition can severely impact children’s growth, human development, and economic progress, creating a cycle that holds society back.

“Chronic malnutrition and stunted growth in early childhood can lead to poor brain development, learning difficulties, and behavioral issues. This affects education, lowers productivity in adulthood, and increases the risk of the problem being passed to the next generation,” she told IPS.

Failed Solutions

In 2020, the Nigerian government introduced the National Multisectoral Plan of Action for Food and Nutrition, a 2021–2025

initiative aimed at tackling food security and malnutrition, with a focus on boosting food production through agricultural investment. However, Dr. Idris Olabode Badiru, a reader at the University of Ibadan, highlights that government investment in agriculture has been insufficient.

Although agriculture accounts for 24 percent of Nigeria's GDP and employs more than 30 percent of the entire labour force, funding remains well below the 10 percent target set by the African Union in the 2003 Maputo Declaration.

Badiru says this underinvestment hampers productivity, fails to address the growing food demands of Nigeria's rapidly increasing population and is unable to tackle food insecurity.

"Even if farmers in crisis areas can't work their fields, nearby regions can still contribute to food production. These farmers should be supported to increase their output through measures like training programmes delivered by effective agricultural extension services. Unfortunately, many state extension agencies are not functioning well and need improvement to better assist farmers," Badiru noted.

He added, "It's also important to provide farmers with the necessary tools and financial support, although previous attempts have been hindered by fraud. To address this, better systems of accountability must be established. Moreover, agriculture shouldn't be treated in isolation, as it depends on other sectors. Restoring essential infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, storage facilities, and electricity supply, is vital to improving agricultural productivity and addressing long-term challenges."

The government's efforts to distribute free grains to vulnerable populations, particularly in conflict-affected and economically struggling areas, have largely fallen short. These initiatives have been undermined by widespread corruption and diversion of resources, preventing aid from reaching those who need it most.

Bleak Future?

Save the Children International has revealed that an additional one million children in Nigeria will be suffering from acute malnutrition by April 2025 if no urgent action is taken.

UNICEF has urged the government to enhance nutrition programmes and reinforce

primary healthcare, highlighting that an additional 200,000 children in the northwest will need therapeutic food in 2025.

For Abdul in the refugee camp in Zamfara, government aid is non-negotiable.

"We urgently need the government's support with food. I can't bear to think of how much these children have suffered from hunger. Most days, they eat only once in the morning and go without food until the next day or sometimes until late at night. Our children cry from hunger until they're too exhausted to continue, and it breaks our hearts because we have nothing to give them," she told IPS.

『INPS Japan/ IPS UN Bureau Report』

'It's Very Tough': Turning Youth Employment Dreams Into Reality

BY Catherine Wilson



Young Jordanians undertake soft skills training organized by local youth development organization, LOYAC Jordan. Credit: LOYAC Jordan

SKOPJE, North Macedonia (IPS) – It's a bright winter day in Skopje, the capital of North Macedonia in the southern Balkans. By lunchtime, the cafes are full. The atmosphere is busy and social, and it is not difficult to see why the city, home to one-third of the country's population of 2 million, is the focus of hope for young jobseekers. But, for many, it is not an easy road.

"It's very tough to get employment. Young people here are waiting up to 18 months to find their first job," 28-year-old Aleksandra Filipova told IPS. "But I am hopeful for the

future," she added. Filipova understands the challenges her generation faces and is determined to make hope a reality through her work with the National Youth Council of Macedonia, where she is Program Manager.

Last year, the global youth unemployment rate of 13 percent marked a significant decline in 15 years, reports the International Labour Organization (ILO). But the situation varies widely across regions. Large youth populations, uneven post-COVID-19 economic recovery, the Ukraine war and energy crisis, structural labour market issues, and socio-cultural expectations have contributed to above-average unemployment rates in parts of the Balkans, Middle East, and North Africa (MENA).

Skopje, the capital of North Macedonia, is home to one quarter of the country's population and a focus for young jobseekers. Credit: Catherine Wilson/IPS

The Republic of North Macedonia is a landlocked nation located south of Serbia and north of Greece. It gained independence from the former Yugoslavia in 1991 and is

planning accession to the European Union (EU). Economic growth has been slow in recent years. But a major obstacle in securing a job, even for the highly educated, is a mismatch between educational qualifications and skills required by employers. It's a key factor in the youth unemployment rate of 28 percent, more than double the national rate of 13 percent.

"Our education system is based on theoretical knowledge and not on technical and vocational skills. Employers want to employ young people, but they need them to have other skills," Filipova said. For the private sector, especially small and medium-sized businesses, "soft skills are missing, even just how to write an email or how to talk to people in a business environment. Entrepreneurial skills are needed. There is also a lack of people who speak foreign languages for global businesses," she pointed out.

The National Youth Council of Macedonia has rolled out a paid internship program, in association with the government's Youth

Guarantee policy, which is generating employment success for the country's youth.

Credit: National Youth Council of Macedonia

The transition from education to work can be a disappointing experience for new jobseekers. And many, up to 45 percent of those employed, are turning to jobs unrelated to their education or informal work, such as market selling and seasonal hospitality work. Young women who face traditional social expectations are also highly represented in informal employment. Long-term joblessness is a real risk. Last year, more than 73 percent of all unemployed people in the country had been out of work for more than a year, while one in five young people were not in employment or education, reports the ILO.

But, in 2018, the North Macedonian Government launched the Youth Guarantee policy—a pledge to respond to youth challenges. Four years later, aligned with the policy, the youth council launched a paid internship program, now hailed a major success. Today, 2,000 employers participate in offering two-month work placements.

“It works well for them [the employers] because they say that, after two months, they have long-term employees. During the

internship, youths have learned the skills needed by the business,” Filipova said. “So they are investing in the long-term future of their business.” And 70 percent of young people who have taken a paid internship are now employed.

North Macedonia was the first Balkan country to implement the Youth Guarantee and demonstrate its success.

“About 60,000 young people have taken part in the Youth Guarantee program in North Macedonia so far. I'd like to point out that since 2019, statistics related to the labour market show significant and major improvement in relation to young people. The youth employment rate has increased by 3.5 percentage points compared to 2018,” North Macedonia's Minister for Labour and Social Policy, Jagoda Shahpaska, told the media in 2021. Youth employment is a significant focus of the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals, and other internationally agreed frameworks emphasize the importance of youth development and engagement, and youth are seen as key to achieving the SDGS. One of the challenges youth face in the transition from education to employment is a skills mismatch with what



recruiters require. Credit: LOYAC Jordan

Across the Mediterranean in the Levant region, youth face a similar plight in Jordan, where 63 percent of the population of 11 million people are aged under 30 years. The Hashemite Kingdom, which has managed economic stability while hosting more than 3 million refugees fleeing from conflicts in neighbouring Syria and the occupied Palestinian Territories, has a youth unemployment rate of 40 percent. It's a common challenge across the MENA region, where one in three young people are unemployed and where 33 million new jobs will need to emerge by 2030 to meet the demands of working-age populations, forecasts the United Nations.

Every year, 100,000 young Jordanians, many highly educated, strive to enter the

workforce. Economic growth is not generating enough jobs, and even the large public sector is unable to absorb increasing jobseekers.

“Jordan is one of the few Arab countries outside of the Gulf that has continued to provide fairly large numbers of public sector jobs to new jobseekers as part of its social pact, but this is fiscally very costly and distorts labour market incentives,” Dr. Steffen Hertog, Associate Professor in Comparative Politics at the London School of Economics and Political Science, told IPS.

Amman, Jordan’s capital, a sprawling city on the edge of the Jordan Valley, is the administrative and commercial heartbeat of the country. Here, Ali Haddad, Executive Director of the Jordan Youth Innovation Forum, a national youth development organization, told IPS that many youths have “a strong preference for public sector jobs, as they are seen as more stable,” but growing the private sector was vital.

“Expanding businesses can absorb the increasing numbers of young jobseekers; private industries encourage skills development and innovation; and a robust private sector contributes to GDP growth,

benefiting the economy and opening more opportunities for youth,” he said.

However, ensuring people can access opportunities is also essential. Ahmad Asfour, General Manager of LOYAC Jordan, a local social enterprise focused on youth skills development, said there were also rural-urban disparities in the country. “Employment opportunities are concentrated in urban areas, making it difficult for rural youth to access jobs,” while “women often face extra challenges such as societal norms, lack of childcare, and unequal pay.”

The skills mismatch with labour market expectations is a major hurdle too. Youths need communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skills, and an entrepreneurial mindset with critical thinking, innovation, digital, and business skills, Asfour said. LOYAC has also found success in bridging the gap with a national internship program. “We annually train 1,200 students and match 850 with internships on a national level, providing many with the skills, confidence, and connections necessary to secure employment,” Asfour said.

Empowering the younger generation is part of the Jordan Government’s 10-year

development and modernization strategy, announced in 2021. It is committed “to provide a stimulating environment that enables young people to unleash their creative energies and contribute effectively to economic and social development,” Eng. Yazan Al-Shdeifat, Jordan’s Minister for Youth, said in a statement on 24 November.

And there have been entrepreneurial successes, Haddad emphasised, such as Arab Therapy, an online service that offers expert mental health support by Arab-speaking professionals to people worldwide. And Mawdoo3, founded by young Jordanian entrepreneurs, Mohammad Jaber and Rami Al Qawasmi, is now the world’s largest Arabic content platform and, in 2021, was listed by Forbes as one of the most visited websites in the Middle East. Beyond the unemployment statistics, there are increasing numbers of youth finding employment success through dedicated initiatives in both regions. There is still a long way to go. But growing the successes is crucial for the generation that will determine future sustainable economic and national development in their countries and beyond.

『INPS Japan/ IPS UN Bureau Report』

Islamic Extremism and Terrorism: A Major Threat to Freedom and Democracy in Europe

BY Aurora Weiss

Vienna (INPS Japan) - In 2030, there will be 60 million Muslims living in Europe. According to the Pew Research Center, Muslims are projected to make up more than 10% of the total population in 10 European countries: Kosovo (93.5%), Albania (83.2%), Bosnia and Herzegovina (42.7%), Republic of Macedonia (40.3%), Montenegro (21.5%), Bulgaria (15.7%), Russia (14.4%), Georgia (11.5%), France (10.3%), and Belgium (10.2%). We are witnessing the process of the Islamization of Europe, including Belgium, France, Germany, and Sweden.

Political Islam turned the Byzantine Empire into a fully Islamic land. The Middle East, Turkey and North Africa used to be Christian, Afghanistan was Buddhist, Pakistan was Hindu, and Iran was Zoroastrian. There are no post-Islamic countries. There were 1.8 billion Muslims in the world as of 2015 – roughly 24% of the global population – according to a Pew Research Center estimate. But while Islam is currently the world's second-largest religion, after Christianity, it is the fastest-growing major religion. Indeed, if current demographic



Muslim Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina displays its mujahedin strength, Zenica 1994

trends continue, the number of Muslims is expected to exceed the number of Christians by the end of this century.

57% of young Muslims in France think that Sharia law is above the state constitution

However, Muslim communities are also divided, while some pursuing extremism and violence, others fighting against it. Moderate groups of Muslims denounce extremist violence such as Islamic terrorism, Jihadism and radical Islamism. But, the most of the Muslims in Europa are living in

closed communities, mainly in the suburbs of cities, which are de facto not subject to the law of the land. In these communities, Sharia law applies and families living there pay Islamic taxes. The French Institute of Public Opinion research showed that 57% of young Muslims think that Sharia law is above the state constitution and national laws. Sharia is the religious law of Islam based on the Qur'an and other sources, and in its most radical forms, it prescribes the death penalty, stoning, amputation of hands and limiting the rights of women. It is closely connected with political islam. 51% of Islamic doctrinal texts

is about politics. The goal of these politics is the submission of all people to Mohammed and Allah. For over 1,400 years, submission to Mohammed and Allah changed many cultures to an Islamic one. Now, knowing the doctrine and tactics of Political Islam, we can help prevent its expansion with the intent of avoiding violence and human suffering. Many experts on public opinion in Europe believe that due to the results shown by the polls, all efforts should be invested in the secularization of the education system because it creates conditions for the development and emancipation of citizens.

Bosnia and Herzegovina – The Future EU member country with Islamic doctrine

Muslims constitute some 40% of the population of Bosnia-Herzegovina, they have defined the character of the republic because of the peculiarities of the power structure. Iran has also consolidated a Muslim leadership network supportive of Tehran's world view. At the center of the Iranian system in Europe was Bosnia-Herzegovina's President, Alija Izetbegovic, "a fundamentalist Muslim and a member of the Fida'iYan-e Islam organization," who is committed to the establishment of an Islamic Republic in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Fida'iyen-e Islam group advocates the struggle for the establishment of Islamic rule wherever Muslims live, and as early as the late-1960s, had already recognized the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeyni and maintained close cooperation with his people. Indeed, in 1970, Izetbegovic published his Islamic Declaration stating his world view: "There can be no peace or coexistence between Islamic faith and non-Islamic faith and non-Islamic institutions," he wrote. "The Islamic movement must and can take power as soon as it is morally and

numerically strong enough, not only to destroy the non-Islamic power, but to build up a new Islamic one." After Khomeyni's triumph in Tehran, Izetbegovic renewed his call to implement his Islamic Declaration, began organizing an Islamist political movement, and within a few years was thrown in jail for subversion.

Later, in pursuit of his goal to establish an Islamic Republic in Europa, Izetbegovic also visited Libya in the summer of 1991, seeking financial and political support. With the changes in the military situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, primarily the tightening of the siege on Sarajevo, and the off-again, on-again cooperation between the Muslims and the local Croat forces.

In spring 1992, Muslim troops had been reinforced by "volunteers" from the ranks of several Islamist organizations. They arrived in Bosnia-Herzegovina in answer to Tehran's call to fight the Jihad and eager to commit martyrdom in the name of Islam. They included highly trained and combat proven volunteers from Iran, Afghanistan, Lebanon (HizbAllah), and several other Arab countries. Most of the Arab volunteers had previously fought in the ranks of Palestinian terrorist organizations in Lebanon and the resistance in Afghanistan, and in fact General Amin Pohara of the Bosnian Army confirmed that some 180 Mujahideen had arrived from the Middle East by mid-August. Iranian sources claim that their number is more than one thousand. They did not only come to fight, but some of them have remained there to this day. Extremism spread thanks to some Islamic religious leaders who played a leading role in recruiting for ISIS in Bosnia and Herzegovina. But, the collapse of the Islamic State did not mean the collapse of the Balkan Islamist extremist movement. BiH

has its own Islamic movement raised on home soil, as foreign experts write, which is largely the result of the life and actions of previous leaders, even Izetbegović, who in the 90s wholeheartedly welcomed the arrival of thousands of Islamic extremists in BiH and wholeheartedly welcomed the influx of billions of dollars from Muslim donor countries and Islamic missionary organizations with the intention of spreading extreme forms in Europe and beyond. In the last period, we had the opportunity to watch how the anti-Semitic movements unfolded in FBiH, and the members of the RBiH Army offered their services to Hamas, for which they received great applause.

Obscure organization the Third World Relief Agency (TWRA)

The capital of Austria, Vienna is the hot spot for the financing of the terrorism and arms trafficking.

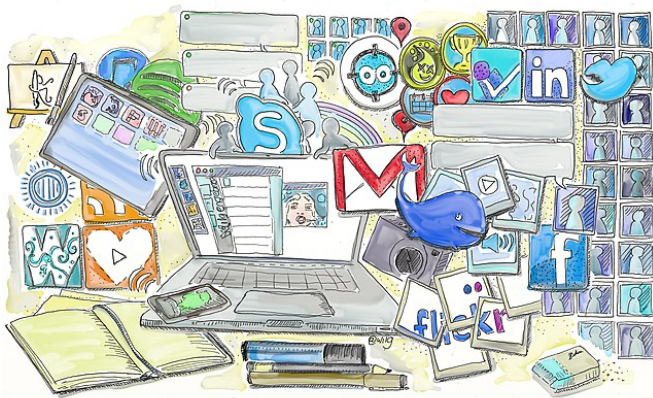
In the documents and in the bank accounts of the Third World Relief Agency in Vienna (TWRA) -, Austrian investigators have tracked \$350 million that flowed from Muslim governments and radical Islamic movements to Bosnia, writes John Pomfret in Washington Post Foreign Service published in 1996. At least half was used to purchase weapons illegally and smuggle them to the Bosnian government army, according to Western intelligence estimates. TWRA was founded by Fatih al-Hassanain, a Sudanese activist of the NIF (National Islamic Front). After he completed his medical studies in Sarajevo, he got linked to Bosnian-Muslim nationalists and founded in Vienna in 1987 an organization, the TWRA (Third World Relief Agency), to defend the rights of the Muslim minority in Yugoslavia. When the war escalates in

Bosnia in 1992, he supported the resistance of the Muslims surrounded by the Serbians, especially Alija Izetbegovic and his Democratic Action Party, the SDA (Stranka demokratske akcije), which he supplies with arms. The funds are paid to the Bosnian combatants through the TWRA. According to estimates, it is about 350 millions dollars by the the contributions of the International Islamic Relief Organisation of Saudi Arabia (IIRO) and other Islamist NGOs are cumulated between 1992 and 1995. Such an activism obviously does not go unnoticed as IIRO identity cards are found on the bodies of mujaheddin killed in Bosnia.

Militants in the terrorist underworld are also believed to have used the relief agency to get money to the Bosnian government, including the wealthy Saudi Arabian emigre Osama Binladen, a suspected sponsor of militant Islamic groups around the Middle East. Binladen, a resident of Sudan until last year, is reportedly now in Afghanistan, where he has issued statements calling for attacks on U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf. Investigators say the agency also had ties to Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman, a radical Egyptian cleric who was convicted of planning several terrorist bombings in New York and is linked to the group that carried out the World Trade Center bombing in February 1993. The Bosian TWRA approach aimed at spreading radical Islam was adopted and continued to spread in other countries in the region.

This is shown by the fact that a Muhammad Abbas, close friend of the Izetbegovic family, despite criticism, opened the same organization in Czech Republic and built the first mosque. Abbas is son of a Sudanese diplomat who settled in the Czech Republic after his university graduation there.

TikTok Jihad:



Social networking services, By Wilgengebroed on Flickr, CC BY 2.0,

In the last few years, it has been shown that the perpetrators of terrorist attacks in the European Union are radicalized in virtual space. The Internet is one of the main channels for spreading extremist views and recruiting

members. Social networks have increased the influence of jihadist and far-right or left-wing extremist propaganda by allowing terrorist organizations easier access to a wide target audience, sending targeted recruitment messages and supporting propaganda thanks to trolls. According to the EU report on the state and trends in the field of terrorism for 2020, in recent years applications that use encrypted messages, such as WhatsApp or Telegram, have been used to a large extent for coordination and planning attacks. Although the virtual space opened a whole new trend in the recruitment of Islamic extremists, some organizations focus on recruiting new members in schools, universities and religious spaces, such as mosques but also in prisons. Persons who are suddenly outside their social circles, are more inclined to accept new beliefs and join radicalized groups.

How much of a threat this type of attack represents for democracy in Europe was shown by the recent prevention of a terrorist attack that

was supposed to take lives at a concert by megastar Taylor Swift in Vienna. However, lives were not saved when a minor extremist entered a police station in Bosnia and Herzegovina at the end of October and killed one police officer and seriously wounded another. It is also the fifth theoretical attack in that country in the last 15 years.

The events in the Middle East, which began on October 7, 2023 with the Hamas terrorist attack on Israel and the Israel response with the killing of civilians in the Gaza Strip, have radicalized a significant number of people. We can witness the awakening of networks for spreading mobilizing narratives to perpetrate violence that everyone thought were completely extinguished after the defeat of ISIL in 2019.

However, it was naive to believe that such a movement would disappear easily because since then several dozen terrorist attacks have been carried out in European Union countries in which around 60 people have been arrested, two thirds of whom are between the ages of 13 and 18. This new phenomenon that is spreading among young people, the so-called TikTok terrorists, invites minors aged 13, 14, 15 years old through social networks to engage as perpetrators of serious crimes such as terrorism.

『INPS Japan』

Life Below Water: Protecting Marine Ecosystems and Promoting Sustainable Fishing Practices in Africa

BY Susan Novela



Susan Novela

Cape Town, South Africa (London Post) – Africa contains vast aquatic resources, including extensive coastlines, inland lakes, and rivers. These waters host a rich diversity of marine and freshwater life, serving as vital sources of sustenance, livelihoods, and economic growth for millions across the continent. However, Africa's marine and freshwater ecosystems face escalating threats from: overfishing, pollution, and climate change.

These endanger biodiversity and the communities that depend on these resources. To safeguard this natural wealth, countries across

the continent are intensifying efforts to protect marine ecosystems and promote sustainable fishing practices.

In this article we explore a sample of what some countries – including South Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, and Republic of Congo (Brazzaville) are doing in this important regard. Some of the initiatives are also regional in nature. We start below with South Africa, a very important player on the continent.

South Africa: Leading Marine Conservation Efforts

South Africa's 3,000-kilometre coastline along two oceans, has forced it to become a continental leader in marine conservation. Its marine ecosystems host iconic species such as great white sharks, African penguins, and humpback whales. These draw in tourists and researchers alike. To protect these ecosystems, South Africa has established 41 Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), covering over 14% of its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

One such MPAs is the iSimangaliso Wetland Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is a sanctuary for coral reefs, mangroves, and seagrass beds, providing crucial habitats for marine life. By regulating fishing, mining, and tourism within these areas, South Africa ensures the sustainable use of marine resources while preserving biodiversity.

South Africa has also implemented policies such as the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) system, to curb overfishing. This sets annual

limits for fish stocks such as hake and sardines. Community-based initiatives, such as the Small-Scale Fisheries Policy, empower coastal communities to manage fisheries sustainably while improving their livelihoods. These efforts mirror what Uganda is also trying to do as per below.

Uganda: Protecting Inland Water Resources

Despite being landlocked, Uganda owns vast freshwater systems. These include Lake Victoria – the largest freshwater lake in Africa; these play an important role in its economy and food security. However, unsustainable fishing practices, such as the use of illegal fishing gear and overfishing, have depleted fish stocks, particularly Nile perch and tilapia.

In response, Uganda has intensified efforts to regulate fishing activities on Lake Victoria. The government has launched initiatives to combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. These include patrols and community sensitization campaigns. These efforts aim at restoring fish stocks while ensuring that local fishermen can sustain their livelihoods.

Uganda is also promoting aquaculture as an alternative to traditional fishing. The rise of fish farming, supported by government incentives and private sector investment, has provided new opportunities for rural communities. In the process, it is reducing pressure on natural fish stocks. Also located in the equatorial region and facing similar challenges is the Republic of Congo, which has embarked on a similar mission.

Republic of Congo (Brazzaville): Preserving Coastal and Marine Ecosystems

The Republic of Congo, with its Atlantic coastline, is home to critical marine habitats; they include mangroves and seagrass meadows. These serve as nurseries for fish and protect shorelines from erosion. However, industrial activities, pollution, and illegal fishing threaten these ecosystems.

The Congolese government has taken significant steps to address these challenges. It has established MPAs, such as the Conkouati-Douli National Park, which combines terrestrial and marine conservation. This park protects endangered species such as sea turtles and manatees, while supporting sustainable fishing practices for local communities.

Additionally, Congo participates in regional initiatives such as the Central African Fisheries Organization (COREP). This promotes collaboration on marine resource management and combating illegal fishing in the Gulf of Guinea.

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC): Managing Inland Fisheries

Similarly, the DRC, with its extensive network of rivers and lakes, including the Congo River, boasts some of the most biodiverse aquatic ecosystems in the world. These waters are crucial for food security and livelihoods, particularly in rural areas.

However, unsustainable practices, such as overfishing and habitat destruction, threaten the health of these ecosystems. The DRC is addressing these challenges through regulation and protection of critical habitats. For example, the government has established fish

breeding zones in key lakes and rivers, where fishing is restricted to allow stocks to replenish.

The DRC is also promoting community-based fisheries management, empowering local communities to take a leading role in conservation. By combining traditional knowledge with modern techniques, these initiatives are fostering sustainable practices that benefit both people and the environment.

The Role of Regional Collaboration

Africa's water bodies are interconnected, transcending national boundaries and thus require regional collaboration for effective management. Initiatives such as the African Union's Blue Economy Strategy and the Fisheries Committee for the West Central Gulf of Guinea (FCWC) emphasize the importance of sustainable practices and regional cooperation. These frameworks aim to harmonize policies, combat illegal fishing, and foster knowledge exchange among member states.

There are some common threads among the various countries in their approaches. First, they are all interested in striking a balance between retaining livelihoods while preserving their natural resource heritages. The key instruments they are all deploying include formal policies, enforcement, education, community participation and creation of alternatives to harvesting. Alternatives include aquaculture.



SDGs Goal No.13

Because of the interconnectedness of their resources, they also find it useful to engage through regional initiatives as per below. The key to success is to understand that conservation sits within a broader sustainability and climate change

agenda that is everyone's problem.

Addressing Climate Change and Pollution

Climate change exacerbates Africa's aquatic ecosystem challenge through Rising sea temperatures, ocean acidification, and changing rainfall patterns.

The consequence is the disruption of marine and freshwater ecosystems. In turn, this impacts fish stocks and biodiversity. Coastal erosion and sea-level rise also threaten communities and infrastructure.

Pollution, including plastic waste, industrial runoff, and oil spills, compound these threats. Countries such as South Africa and the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville) are investing in waste management systems, environmental education, and clean-up campaigns to mitigate pollution.

A Sustainable Path Forward

The health of Africa's marine and freshwater ecosystems is integral to the continent's environmental, economic, and social well-being. By prioritizing conservation, promoting sustainable fishing practices, and fostering regional collaboration, African nations are paving the way for a blue economy that balances ecological protection with economic growth.

South Africa, Uganda, the Republic of Congo, and the DRC exemplify the diverse strategies being implemented to achieve this vision. Through continued investment in conservation, innovative policies, and community empowerment, Africa can ensure that life below water thrives for generations to come.

To recap, South Africa has established 41 Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), covering over 14% of its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), among other efforts. DRC is targeting overfishing as well as restocking through fish breeding. Congo Brazzaville is focused on conservation of mangroves and seagrass meadows that serve as nurseries for fish and that are threatened by industrial activities, pollution, and illegal fishing. Uganda has intensified regulation and is promoting Aquaculture as an alternative to fishing. Since Africa's water bodies are interconnected, regional collaboration is needed and is being pursued for effective management. Initiatives such as the African Union's Blue Economy Strategy and the Fisheries Committee for the West Central Gulf of Guinea (FCWC) emphasize the importance of sustainable practices and regional cooperation. These frameworks aim to harmonize policies, combat IUU fishing, and foster knowledge exchange among member states.

『INPS Japan/London Post』

Right climate for Nepal's energy transition

BY Ramesh Kumar



The 456MW Upper Tamakosi Hydroelectric Project just after it came into operation in 2021. Photo: UTKHPL

The country's ambition to boost the economy through clean energy is itself affected by climate risk

Kathumandu

(Nepali Times) - Nepal now generates a surplus of electricity and it is all from renewable hydropower. Nearly half the country is under forest cover. Despite meeting these decarbonisation goals, Nepal's hydropower plants are threatened by increased risk due to climate impact.

Till 28 September, Nepal was exporting just over 1,000MW of electricity to power-hungry India, when flash floods and landslides unleashed by historically heavy rains damaged over 30 hydropower plants across the country, temporarily slashing nearly half the power generation.

The 456MW Upper Tamakosi in Dolakha was the hardest hit and it will take six months and Rs2 billion to repair. This has significantly reduced exports as well as domestic generation. Two months later, Nepal has still not been unable to fully keep its export commitment,

and is actually paying Rs100 million in fines to India.

Thirty-seven existing and under construction projects under the Independent Power Producers' Association Nepal (IPPAN) suffered Rs2.5 billion in damage. One of them is the 22MW Bagmati project in Makwanpur which was almost completely buried in flood debris.

Even before record-breaking rain in September, 15 other hydropower projects had been damaged by floods. Last year, floods caused by heavy localised rain damaged 28 hydropower plants.

World governments met in Baku for COP29 to discuss the Loss & Damage Fund and the Adaptation Fund, but for countries like Nepal the commas and brackets are meaningless until they are turned into \$ and €. And likelihood of adequate compensation for climate-related damage is a long way off, if ever.

Nepal's national strategy is to use its vast hydropower resource as clean energy to spur economic growth, job creation, and boost export revenue. But the plants are located in narrow Himalayan valleys prone to landslides and floods even at the best of times. Now, those risks have been heightened by weather extremes due to climate breakdown.

At present, Nepal generates over 3,300MW of clean hydropower, and the target is to reach 12,700MW in the next five years. Projects equivalent to 6,000MW are under construction or ready to start. The

Ministry of Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation has an Energy Development Roadmap and Action Plan with the target of producing 28,500MW by 2035 by when more than half of it will be exported.

“The climate crisis will further change the rainfall patterns making hydropower generation a big question mark in the future,” Manjeet Dhakal in Baku, who is also the Nepali adviser to the LDC Chair at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). “We are building hydropower projects on rivers without evaluating risk. This whole process needs to be reviewed and reconsidered.”

The report of the National Adaptation Plan published by the Ministry of Forest and Environment last year mentions that hydropower production, transmission and distribution will be at risk from flash floods, debris flows, glacial lake outbursts and rising temperatures.

This risk is not confined to Nepal. Average global temperatures have increased by 1.3°C compared to the pre-industrial era. Worse, the Himalayan mountains are warming faster than the global average by 0.7°C because of elevation-dependent warming.

A study conducted by our own Department of Hydrology and Meteorology in 2017 showed that the average temperature in Nepal has increased in the last four decades. Scientists say this is leading to extreme weather unleashing floods and landslides on slopes already destabilized by seismicity.

Increased atmospheric temperatures has made the monsoon rains more erratic. It does not rain when it is supposed to, and it comes down in torrents when it is not supposed to. The September floods happened two weeks after the monsoon was supposed to retreat from central Nepal. Kathmandu Valley received half its annual precipitation

in just over a day. Winter precipitation has also failed, especially in the high mountains and trans-Himalayan valleys. Thirteen of the past 19 years experienced winter drought. This impacts on dry season flows of the rivers, reducing hydropower generation.

Nepal's power capacity normally goes down by one-fourth during winter, but the gap is widening. The Kabeli corridor could only generate 20MW November-March even though plants there have an installed capacity of 200MW. Similarly, Upper Tamakosi only produced 65MW at most against its 456MW capacity last winter.

The Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) pays producers double the price for winter electricity, Rs8.40 per unit. Even though winter operation is highly profitable the rivers run low and NEA has to import from India to meet the winter demand.

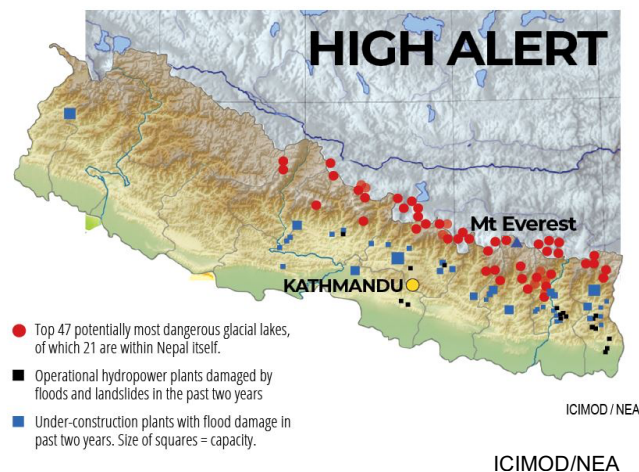
“This is not just a weather problem but a serious challenge also for the country's energy future, good climate-friendly design should be combined with policy and effective implementation,” says Subarna Das Shrestha, a hydropower investor and CEO of Sanima Mai Hydropower. “Insurance premiums have gone up as well, and settlement for damage is not timely.”

Hydropower investment at one time was regarded as having a high rate of return. Now, some investors have become wary of the risks involved. Says IPPAN's Uttam Blon Lama: “Hydropower projects expected to give stable returns are now looking risky. Not only is climate adaptation design and planning expensive, but future repair and maintenance costs will also skyrocket.”

Nepal has only one storage type dam in Kulekhani and another one is being built in Tanahu, but they are also at risk. In September, the sluice gates of Kulekhani Dam had to be opened causing loss of life

and destruction downstream. Nepal has to learn lessons from the deadly collapse of the \$1 billion Chungthang Dam in Sikkim in October 2023 caused by a glacial lake burst.

Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs) in Nepal pose potentially catastrophic risk to infrastructure. The Thame flood in August was a relatively minor debris flow that damaged half of this village in the



Everest region when two glacial lakes at 4,760m burst.

Luckily there was no loss of life.

Of the 47 high-risk glacial lakes in the eastern Nepal Himalaya, 21 are in Nepal and the rest are in rivers in China

that are tributaries of the Arun and Bhothe Kosi where Nepal has major hydropower plants under construction, or planned.

Global temperature rise is accelerating the melting of Himalayan snow and ice, increasing the number and size of glacial lakes so that we do not even have names for them. Imja Tso did not even exist in the old trekking maps until 25 years ago, but is now a 2km long lake.

“Natural moraine dams in the mountains are weak, and the projects downstream can face major destruction if they burst, and the risk will only increase in future,” warns climatologist Arun Bhakta Shrestha at the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD).

An ICIMOD assessment in 2019 projected that if present heating trends continue, as they probably will, the Himalaya will lose two-thirds of our glaciers by the end of this century.

“Generally speaking, hydropower developers hand over the project to the government after 30 years but by that time given the climate risks, they may not be an asset anymore,” says Manjeet Dhakal. Indeed, the cascade of expensive projects India is building on the Arun River are supposed to be handed back to Nepal in 25 years, but there is a big ‘if’ about whether they will survive that long.

Planning of hydropower projects is still based on historical hydrological data, and does not take into account future temperature rise and its consequences. Investors, on the other hand, say that planning hydropower projects with climate components would make them even more expensive.

“It’s not that we aren’t preparing for climate risk, we design keeping in mind the once-in-100-year flood,” says Blon of IPPAN. “But if we start designing based on once in 1,000 years flood, the cost would be so high that we won’t be able to build them at all.”

Nonetheless, Subarna Das Shrestha of Sanima Mai Hydropower says that there is no option but to go for climate smart infrastructure despite the higher cost. Sanima Mai’s powerhouse, for example, is completely underground. The strategy could also be to spread the risk by building less expensive plants located on rivers all over the country.

Nepal is also diversifying away from its sole reliance on hydroelectricity, which at present supplies 92% of the power in the grid. Most of the rest comes from solar plants, where the total potential has not even been scratched.

『INPS Japan/Nepali Times』

Water, a challenge that science embraces in Mexico

BY Guillermo Ayala Alanis



Image: The Science and Humanities Festival. Authors: DGDC, UNAM and Guillermo Ayala.

Mexico City (INPS Japan) - In Mexico, 12 million people lack drinking water services and almost 9 million do not have piped water. UNAM organized a science festival where the water problem was approached with a perspective of possible solutions and not a crisis.

With more than 500 activities, including open-air talks, films, workshops, exhibitions and concerts, the National Autonomous University of Mexico, UNAM, held the twelfth edition of the Science and Humanities Festival, in the facilities of the Science

Museum, UNIVERSUM.

The main theme of this edition of the event was water, its care, importance and fundamental role for the life of all species that inhabit the planet.

With the slogan “Water, our vital challenge”, the organizers emphasized that the Science and Humanities Festival 2024 sought to be a playful space for learning and generating critical thinking, in which the aim is to share the knowledge of academics, scientists and students from various universities and national and international institutions. “This year we decided to focus on water because it is a current issue and a topic that demands urgency to reflect on it... We do not want to focus on the crisis part... we also wanted to address water from different perspectives and especially from a multidisciplinary scope that would allow us to see the possible solutions for the conservation and care of water,” said Milagros Varguez, member of the

organizing committee and Director of Science Diffusion Media, UNAM.

Water in Mexico is a serious problem that requires immediate attention from authorities, scientists and civil society. A study conducted by the Mexican Council of Social Sciences reported that 12 million people lack drinking water services; UNAM also reported that almost 9 million people do not have piped water service, while 13 million lack sanitation infrastructures so the dissemination of studies and research on access, care and sanitation of water are important for the fulfillment of Sustainable Development Goal # 6 “Clean water and sanitation”.

The professor of the Universidad de las Americas Puebla and Director of the UNESCO Chair, Benito Corona Vázquez highlighted that the trend in studies on water care and sanitation point to have the vital liquid in sufficient quantity and quality in an

increasingly changing world, “we are living in an era in which hydrometeorological extremes are happening more and more frequently and then how do we ensure that quantity and quality of water... ‘We have to generate clearer and more tangible elements so that decision makers can generate the



Photo: Professor, Benito Corona Vázquez, Universidad de las Américas Puebla and director of the UNESCO Chair. Author: Guillermo Ayala Alanís.

next step’.

Furthermore, Ariana Mendoza Fragoso from the Institute of Social Research of the UNAM commented that access to quality water is a fundamental right that, if not guaranteed, has other serious consequences for the affected communities such as violence and social inequality, situations that also hinder the fulfillment of other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) such as the end of poverty, zero hunger, reduction of inequalities, as well

as health and welfare; Ariana Mendoza also participated in a talk on the paradox of the Valley of Mexico... a place in which, although the water issue is always a political issue, it is not only environmental or ecological. a place where, although during the rainy season, the region is capable of flooding, there are also communities that suffer from the constant shortage of the vital liquid. He urged the audience to denaturalize the lack of water and react so that the authorities guarantee access to the liquid “We must not assume that there is nothing to do, but that we must talk about the issue all the time, disseminate it in order to denaturalize it and also think that alternatives are possible to achieve them”.

New technologies and artificial intelligence were also present at the Science and Humanities Fair to help care for water, professors Ricardo Castañeda and Selene Martínez, from the Institute of Applied Sciences and Technology, UNAM are directing a podcast called “Aguas con el agua” (Water with water... an expression that in México meaning: Be careful with water), which aims to show young people that new technologies can be used to address social and sustainable issues, in addition to

teaching the new generations that their participation in the care of water is essential to contribute to the chaining of the culture of saving water from their homes by saving water when bathing, turning off taps, dealing with leaks and avoiding waste.

The seas and their care were also present at the twelfth edition of the Science and Humanities Festival. Daniel Ortiz, archeologist and professional diver, emphasized that the care of sea water is a task that is gaining more and more strength among diving schools. Students and tourists have become aware of the importance of preserving this type of habitat, where a large number of animal and plant species converge, by practicing this activity and closely observing the marine ecosystems. He assured that diving has allowed more people to be more aware and educated about the preservation of the aquatic environment.

“People come to diving in a thousand ways and forms, but what is incredible is that we can agree that it is necessary to preserve these oceans”.

Mexico is home to the second largest coral reef in the world, the Mesoamerican reef,

which extends along the coasts of the State of Quintana Roo, where one of the most



Image, Valentina, exhibitor. Author: Guillermo Ayala Alanis.

touristic places in the country, Cancun, is located in the Yucatan Peninsula.

At the Science and Humanities Festival, the youngest exhibitor was Valentina, who is only 9 years old. Less than a decade old, Valentina, who studies at Centro Escolar Zamá, a school located in the State of Mexico. As part of a research project, Valentina has taken on the task of promoting the study of Axolotls, a species of amphibian characteristic of Mexican culture. She shared her wisdom with attendees and exhibitors who were able to find a relationship between her research and activities related to the care of chinampas, water and habitat zones of the axolotl with Valentina's research and curiosity. "There are many species like the salamander that

are in danger of extinction, there are many people who go to the beach a lot and throw garbage in the sea, turtles get entangled, I think it is very important, besides, water is being wasted a lot".

The Science and Humanities Festival was held on November 15 and 16 and was attended by more than 20 thousand people.

『INPS Japan』

Peace Talks—Delegates Turn To Climate Summit for Insights Into What Really Makes People Safe

BY Joyce Chimbi

BAKU, Azerbaijan (IPS) – At a time when the COP29 summit is primarily focused on climate finance as a tool to cool catastrophically high global temperatures and reverse consequences for all life on earth, delegates—alarmed and concerned by the state of world peace and stability—are seeking ways to enhance safety. Delegates at a side event organized by Soka Gakkai International (SGI) and SGI-UK, British Quakers, Quaker Earthcare Witness, and Friends World Committee for Consultation (Quakers), Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), explored key questions on what climate action approaches contribute to a safer world for people and planet or risk a more unsafe world.

“We are negotiating in this COP for increased finance, yet everyone in this room who is a major fossil fuel extraction country, except Colombia, is increasing their oil and gas extraction. And outside, war is spreading, and finance for the military is at levels higher than at any time since the Cold War. We bring experts from various walks of life

into discussions on what really makes us safe,” said event moderator Lindsey Fielder Cook from the Quaker United Nations Office.

There were experts on techno-fixed reliance and risks to techno-fixed reliance, military spending, peace activists, climate finance in fragile states, and also others who spoke about their lives, faith, and working with youth. They talked about peace, climate finance, and climate action in an existential time and how human activities are also driving existential rates of species extinction and chemical pollution as we know. Andrew Okem from the Intergovernmental



Experts from diverse fields seek answers to the question of what really makes people safe at an event organized by Soka Gakkai International and partners. Credit: Joyce Chimbi/IPS

Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and an expert in science adaptation, vulnerability, and impacts observed, “Science has given us a range of actions that we as a society can implement and can contribute towards making our society better and safer for all of us, such as building climate-resilient agri-food systems. This includes diversifying climate-smart coping and climate-smart practices. Rapid decarbonization is critical, hence the need to phase out fossil fuels and a shift to renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and

hydropower.”

Okem spoke about the need for nature-based solutions, integrated water management, sustainable cities, and inclusive governance and decision-making. Emphasizing that any further delay “in concerted, anticipated global action on adaptation and mitigation will miss this great and rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a developed and sustainable future for all.”

Lucy Plummer, member of the international grassroots lay Buddhist organization Soka Gakkai International, which actively engages in society in the areas of peace, culture, and education, said she wanted to “amplify the COP16 message. We need to make peace with nature. I have closely followed discussions, including the round table on the global framework on children, youth, peace, and climate security.”

Saying that it was encouraging that the interconnection of climate and peace is being recognized and that there was great support for this initiative from states and other key stakeholders. But Plummer also felt that the most key issue was not mentioned at all—“our ongoing war with nature. It is a war because there is so much violence in the way that we relate to nature. We urgently need to disarm our ways of thinking about nature.”

“In yesterday’s peace talks and in all of the talks happening all around the COP29, this vital piece of the puzzle is missing. Humans’ separation from nature is the root of the climate crisis, and unless we rectify this and make peace with nature, we simply will not have the wisdom needed to resolve this crisis and prevent so much suffering. The Indigenous peoples know it and have been coming to these COPs every year trying to get us to understand this. Their messages have not changed. They get it, but for some reason we are not ready

to hear it or we do not want to hear it.”

Dr. Duncan McLaren, a research fellow from the UCLA School of Law and an expert in technofixes and ethical mitigation options, spoke about his research that explores the justice and political implications of global technologies, including carbon removal. His recent work explores the geopolitics of geoengineering and the governance of carbon removal techniques in the context of net zero policy goals.

“Climate insecurity is all around us. We’ve seen floods, wildfires, droughts, and storms. Clearly, emissions cuts alone can no longer avert dangerous climate change. It is wishful thinking that we can avoid reaching 1.5 degrees Celsius with just more emissions at 8,000. So that is why I have been looking at other technologies and how they might work. Carbon removal can contribute to climate repair, the repair of humanity’s relationship with the earth,” McLaren emphasized.

“Carbon removal techniques can help us counterbalance recalcitrant emissions to achieve net zero. And more importantly, deal with the unfairly generated legacy of excess emissions. But as Professor Corrie and I show in our briefing paper for the Quaker UN Office, they will only make us safer if we keep the tasks they ask us to do small. Emissions need to be cut by 95 percent.”

Harriet Mackaill-Hill from International Alert spoke about climate, conflict, and finance and the need to define the COP29 New Collective Quantified Goal through these lenses. She said the linkages between “climate and conflict are well established. While climate is never the sole cause of conflict, it is very much a stressor. Climate will exacerbate various stressors for conflict. These can be human security, food security, or competition over natural resources, which will in turn very much create and worsen conflict. How can people

adapt to the impacts of climate change when in extreme vulnerability, sometimes conflict, when livelihoods or lives are at stake?”

Deborah Burton, co-founder of Tipping Point North South, spoke about the intersection between military spending and climate finance. Giving a perspective on what makes people unsafe in terms of military spending and military missions, she said there is a need to understand “the scale of global military missions in peacetime and war and the associated scale of military spending that enables those missions.”

“They combine to achieve one thing and one thing only: the undermining of human safety in this climate emergency. So, the estimated global military carbon footprint, and it is an estimate because it’s not fully reported by any stretch of the imagination, is estimated to be at 5.5 percent of total global emissions. This is more than the combined annual emissions of the 54 nations of the African continent. It is twice as much as emissions of civilian aviation, and that estimate does not include conflict-related emissions.”

Shirine Jurdi spoke of her lived experience from Lebanon linking to climate finance. She said, “There is no climate justice during war, and there is no ecological justice during war. With every bomb that drops, the land, the sea, and the people suffer irreparable harm.”

Stressing that “safety is not only about survival and its destruction. It is about thriving in peace under skies that are blue, not filled with smoke or phosphorus bombs. To create a safer world, let’s stop colonization and redirect resources from destruction to building sustainable, productive communities. Let us invest in ecological peacebuilding and restore the lands and the ecosystems damaged by conflict.”

『INPS Japan/ IPS UN Bureau Report』

The Dying sea: the struggle for the Dead Sea's survival

BY Roman Yanushevsky



Dead Sea. Photo Credit: Roman Yanushevsky.

Tel Aviv (INPS Japan) - The Dead Sea is one of the most beautiful and unique places on the planet. But it is a gem that is dying. Its shoreline is constantly changing—the body of water is shrinking, and it is drying up.

The Dead Sea is a salt lake on the border of Jordan, Israel, and the Palestinian territories. It lies more than 400 meters below sea level, at the lowest point of land on Earth. The water of the Dead Sea has a high salt content, allowing people to float effortlessly. Because of this salinity, there is no life in the lake, which is why it has its name. Therapeutic mud can also be found along its shores.

But it's visible to the naked eye that, especially in its northern part, the water level continues to drop. In 2015, its area was 810 square kilometers. Now it's less than 605 square kilometers. Since 1990, the lake's water level has fallen by more than 30 meters

Projects for saving the Dead sea are related to a number of the United Nations' sustainable development goals:

Goal 12 Responsible consumption and production

Goal 13 Climate action

Goal 14 Life below water

Goal 17 Partnerships for the goals

Fortunately, the Dead Sea is located at a point along the Syrian-African Rift, the boundary between two tectonic plates, making it quite deep. However, even so, the receding water harms local unique ecosystems.

On the shores of the Dead Sea, there are insect and plant species that can only thrive at this elevation. As the sea recedes, it erodes the soil and creates sinkholes, large and small—over 1,400 in total.

The dying of the sea is driven not only by climate change but also by human activity. Due to water diversion for agricultural needs, the Jordan River, which flows into the Dead Sea and is one of its main sources, has significantly shallowed. Over the past half-century, the river's flow has decreased 15-fold, to 100 million cubic meters per

year.

Additionally, on the southern shore of the Dead Sea, industries operate that process its waters to extract magnesium, table salt, magnesia, bromine, potassium chloride (potash), and granulated potash. The cosmetics industry is also active in this area, which further impacts the water level.

For many years, experts have proposed various options to save the Dead Sea, but these require international cooperation, which is often hindered by political challenges.

There are at least three projects aimed at supplying water to the Dead Sea.

1. ****Northern Route****: This plan involves constructing an open canal from Haifa Bay through Galilee, connecting the Mediterranean Sea to the Dead Sea. The canal would cross a large area with roads, bridges, populated settlements, and agricultural lands.

2. ****Central Route****: Engineers propose building a tunnel to link the Mediterranean Sea and the Dead Sea, starting near Ashkelon and passing by Arad down to the Dead Sea. This project was dismissed due to the high cost, as the mountainous terrain with ravines would make construction expensive.

3. ****Southern Route****: This plan suggests building a 160-kilometer open canal along with a hydroelectric power plant and tourist infrastructure. Environmentalists opposed this project, as it would disrupt the local ecosystem. This area is a critical stopover for migratory birds traveling to and from Africa.



Another similar project proposes laying a 200-kilometer pipeline from the Red Sea to the Dead Sea, along with the construction of desalination plants and power stations. However, this project faces not only environmental but also political challenges.

Implementing such a project requires close cooperation among Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian territories. Discussions about it have been ongoing since the mid-1990s, but it has repeatedly been taken off the agenda for political reasons, most recently in 2017. Neighboring Egypt has also expressed concerns, fearing that such a canal could increase earthquake activity in this seismically active region. Egyptians also worry that Israel might use the canal water to cool its nuclear reactor, which they oppose.

As the countries struggle to reach an agreement, the water level in the Dead Sea continues to recede each year, leaving barren land in its wake.

『INPS Japan』

Back to the land in the cities

BY Prajal Pradhan



Ratna Rani Newar does not know how much longer she can keep her vegetable farm in Thimi. Photo: TAYLOR MASON

Urban agriculture can be Nepal's solution to falling food production, can create jobs, recharge groundwater and preserve open spaces

Kathumandu (Nepali Times) -

When the United Nations held its Summit of the Future at its headquarters in New York in September, many world leaders, including Nepal's Prime Minister K P Oli, highlighted the effect of climate breakdown in increasing the frequency and intensity of natural disasters.

What did not get as much attention was the long term impact of the climate crisis on food production. In fact, heat stress, weather extremes and the consequences on rain-fed agriculture is already being felt worldwide, undermining the chances of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) being met by 2030.

The SDG's 17 targets commit countries like Nepal to reduce poverty and inequality, end malnutrition, protect the natural environment, and ensure that citizens all enjoy health, justice and prosperity without leaving anyone behind.

However, besides the impact of climate breakdown on agricultural production, in Nepal the area under cultivation is impacted by urban expansion, falling productivity and the need for expensive inputs like fertiliser and pesticides.

Now, a new study led by Nepali researcher Prajal Pradhan at the University of Groningen in The Netherlands looks at how urban agriculture may offer a solution to falling food production and meeting SDG targets.

The researchers evaluated 1,450 publications exploring the contributions of urban agriculture with both positive and negative effects, and published their findings in the journal Cells Report Sustainability.

Urban agriculture can help achieve 17 SDGs, positively influencing 81 targets. However, it could also undermine 51 goals.

"Urban agriculture offers immense potential for sustainable development, but realising this potential depends crucially on adopting practices that minimise its adverse effects while maximising its benefits," Pradhan explains.

Urban agriculture can substantially enhance urban food security,



Kathmandu's urban sprawl is eating into its fertile cultivable lands. Photo: TAYLOR

provide employment to the urban poor, serve as ground water recharge in built-up areas, and preserve open spaces that can serve as safe havens during disasters like earthquakes. However, it also presents problems like the potential health risks from contamination and the need for expensive inputs.

“Urban agriculture plays a definitive role in advancing the SDGs, but achieving this requires tailored, context-specific solutions that address the unique challenges of different regions,” says Yuanchao Hu of Wuhan University in China and who is a researcher at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research. “But it needs equitable access and rigorous management of environmental risks.”

Rapid urbanisation is eating into Nepal’s most fertile agricultural land, which means farming in remaining open spaces inside cities can be a viable alternative, especially as food prices rise.

“The conversion of Nepal’s most fertile land into cities is a severe problem,” Pradhan told Nepali Times. “Crop cultivation, horticulture, agroforestry, beekeeping, livestock rearing, or aquaculture can all be farming activities within and around cities.”

The study makes recommendations for sustainable practices that build on the positive aspects of urban agriculture while mitigating the downsides, thereby promoting more resilient cities in future.

Research shows that urban agriculture has been helping many countries attain SDG targets by enhancing food security and biodiversity while helping education and preservation of open spaces.

Indeed, many farmers from the hinterland who have settled in Kathmandu Valley or other urban areas of the country have been practicing urban agriculture, leasing neighbourhood patches or cultivating roof gardens both out of necessity because of inflation and

falling income to grow their own food, and also as a fulfilling hobby.

Saurav Dhakal, a sustainability advocate with Story Cycle and now research fellow at the Asian Institute of Technology in Thailand, says there are socio-economic and environmental benefits of urban agriculture.

“It provides benefits to all urban dwellers, regardless of their income status,” says Dhakal, “families get fresh food, and there are many other benefits like water retention, heat regulation and biodiversity. These are all public goods, so special government incentives may be needed.”

It is not unusual to see vegetable patches and even paddy fields within inner city Kathmandu where an older generation of farmers are using available fertile land and roof gardens to produce fresh, nutritious food to reduce their dependence on food items that have to be bought after being trucked in from large distances.

Nepal’s urban population grew rapidly from only 3.6% in 1991 to 25% today. There is large outmigration from the mountains to peri-urban areas of the Tarai, to Kathmandu Valley and Pokhara, with many young men then moving abroad for work. Kathmandu Valley’s population has swelled to nearly 3 million, and is growing at 6.5% a year.

Dilip Shrestha, 71, used to work for Nepal Food Corporation, so he knew firsthand about inflation, shortages and vegetables with pesticide residue. So, when he designed his new house in

Kathmandu, he built a spacious roof where he grows cucumber, ginger, garlic, coriander, onions, tomatoes, chili, beans, okra, pumpkin and lettuce. His family eats healthier, and he has reduced dependence on the market.

The co-author of the Cell Reports Sustainability journal article, Daya Raj Subedi who is a PhD candidate at Beijing Forestry University, says urban agriculture also promotes inclusion and psycho-social wellbeing. He says, “A crucial finding of the study is the identification of opportunities and challenges associated with urban agriculture, it can promote sustainable transformation of society.”

In Banepa, 55-year-old Bijaya Manandhar in her lifetime has watched the fertile farms of her neighbourhood that used to supply vegetables to Kathmandu, now completely built up with no open space left. The pandemic lockdown prompted her to turn to the family’s ancestral livelihood by growing food not on terrace farms, but on the roof terrace. Manandhar is now a part of कौसी खेती र करेसाबारी क्रान्ती (Rooftop Farming and Garden Revolution) which has an online membership of 52,000, and awards annual prizes to women who excel in urban agriculture.

Pradhan says the challenge now is to upscale such examples of successful urban agricultural practices so they support Nepal’s efforts to meet SDG targets. He adds, “Crop cultivation around cities can be protected by land use plans and regulations. Promoting community-based agriculture, including rooftop gardens, requires community engagement and public-private partnerships across the food value chain.”

Such support would accelerate the popularity of existing rooftop

farming and community gardens in Kathmandu Valley, or kitchen garden initiatives in Pokhara, and building on traditional farming practices that are preserved and integrated into urban settings like in Bhaktapur and Banepa. In Lalitpur, the Women Entrepreneurship

Facilitation Center promotes urban farming enhancing both sustainability and empowerment.

Another co-author of the report, Yuanchao Hu from China says followup research of the team will aim to identify good practices in local urban agriculture practices. He adds, “There are examples of urban agriculture that optimise sustainability, ensuring that it remains a viable solution for cities globally while countries try to meet SDG targets.”

Prajal Pradhan, Daya Raj Subedi, Kshitij Dahal, Yuanchao Hu, Prakriti Gurung, Sijal Pokharel, Sagar Kafle, Biplav Khatri, Sudeeksha Basyal, Monika Gurung, and Aruna Joshi. Urban Agriculture matters for sustainable development. Cell Reports Sustainability, 1:100217, 2024.

『INPS Japan/ Nepali Times』



Rooftop farming is gaining popularity as a form of urban agriculture. Photo: TAYLOR MASON

Blinded by Circumstance: Trachoma's Stranglehold on Kenya's Rural Pastoralists

BY Robert Kibet

ELANKATA ENTERIT, Kenya, (IPS) – Draped in the vibrant red of his Maasai shuka, 52-year-old Rumosiroi Ole Mpoke sits cross-legged on a worn cowhide mat outside his hut, his face etched with a sorrow deeper than the lines of age. His once-sharp eyes, now clouded by trachoma, can barely make out the shadows of the cattle he once tended with pride.

“I should have done something when I still could see,” he says quietly, his voice thick with regret.

“Now, I am useless with my livestock, and my children must guide me around our land. I can no longer provide for them as a father should.”

In Elankata Enterit, Narok County, a remote village tucked 93 miles northwest of Nairobi, Rumosiroi has been stripped not only of his sight but of his role as a provider, now trapped in a cycle of poverty and dependence that gnaws at his spirit.

The Maasai, known for their resilience and deep bond with the land, are among Kenya's pastoralist communities, particularly vulnerable to



Turkana women recover with white bandages over their eyes after undergoing surgery to treat trachoma, the world's leading cause of blindness. Efforts like these are crucial in preventing the spread of this debilitating disease in vulnerable communities. Credit: Robert Kibet/IPS

trachoma. The dusty, arid environment they inhabit fosters this infectious disease, which tightens its grip on communities already cut off from adequate healthcare services. The World Health Organization's (WHO) Sightsavers, and Kenya's Ministry of Health are working to tackle the disease, but for communities like Rumosiroi's, the struggle is unrelenting.

In Kenya's harsh, sun-baked lands of Kenya's Rift Valley and the north, where water sources are scarce and sanitation is poor, trachoma—a neglected tropical disease caused by *Chlamydia trachomatis*—leads to

chronic suffering and blindness, affecting pastoralist communities who rely on livestock for survival. Addressing trachoma is essential to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, specifically SDG 3, which aims to provide universal health coverage, including access to quality healthcare and affordable medicines.

Elsewhere, at Chemolingot Hospital in East Pokot, Baringo County, a group of elderly women sits in the courtyard, not for medical care but

to collect relief food distributed by the county government. Six frail figures lean heavily on walking sticks, guided by young boys to the right spot. Each woman is blind, their sight stolen by trachoma. With red, swollen eyes, they rub incessantly, trying to ease the relentless pain that marks their faces with lines of resignation and fatigue.

“They’ve given me so much eye ointment,” mutters Kakaria Malimtich, her voice tired and defeated. “I don’t even care about treatment anymore—now, it’s just about getting food.”

Malimtich, like many here, has lost her battle with trachoma, which



Julius, a Community Drug Distributor (CDD), educates two women about trachoma and encourages them to take the treatment during a Mass Drug Administration (MDA) in Kajaido, near the Kenyan-Tanzania border. Credit: Sightsavers/Samuel Otieno

afflicts 1.9 million people globally, primarily in poor regions. In the arid lands of Baringo, people battle blindness along with hunger, poverty, and a lack of basic resources.

Cheposukut Lokdap, a 68-year-old resident of Chemolingot, sits nearby, rubbing her eyes to relieve the sharp stinging pain. “It feels like something is cutting into me,” she whispers, half to herself, half to anyone who’ll listen. Two years ago, her remaining vision faded, plunging her into “the dark world.” She remembers that day vividly—the eye she’d relied on to see the sun and shadows finally failed.

Trachoma is prevalent across Kenya, particularly in pastoralist regions like Turkana, Marsabit, Narok, and Wajir. According to WHO, it’s the leading infectious cause of blindness worldwide, yet it remains underfunded and largely overlooked. The disease thrives in communities with limited access to clean water and healthcare—conditions common among pastoralists.

According to April 2024 data from the World Health Organization, approximately 103 million people live in areas endemic to trachoma and are at risk of blindness from the disease.

“Here in Marsabit, clean water is a luxury, not a right,” says 40-year-old Naitore Lekan, whose husband is a cattle herder. “Our children suffer from eye infections all the time, and there’s no proper clinic to take them to. Sometimes we use herbs or hope it heals on its own, but it often doesn’t.” Naitore’s experience highlights broader issues in pastoralist communities, where traditional beliefs and lack of awareness hinder effective treatment and prevention.

She recounts her family’s struggle with trachoma. “My daughter, Aisha, started losing her sight last year. We thought it was just a simple eye infection, but at the clinic, they told us it was trachoma. They gave her antibiotics, but we couldn’t return for follow-up because the clinic is too far and we can’t afford transport.” For families like Naitore’s, the distance to healthcare centers and financial constraints



Pascal, a Community Drug Distributor (CDD), measures 3-year-old Praygod's height to determine the correct dose of azithromycin syrup during a Mass Drug Administration (MDA) in Kajaido, near the Kenyan-Tanzania border. Credit: Sightsavers/Samuel Otieno

make trachoma treatment challenging.

In Marsabit, community health worker Hassan Diba is determined to fight trachoma. “Awareness is key,” he says. “I travel to different homesteads, teaching families about trachoma, its causes, and prevention. But I can only reach so many people.

We need more resources and support to tackle this issue on a larger scale.”

Trachoma’s impact goes beyond health; it disrupts pastoralist families’ economic stability. “When someone in the family is sick, everything stops,” says Rumosiroi. “I can’t go to graze the animals, and if our livestock aren’t healthy, we can’t sell them. Then we can’t buy food or pay school fees.” According to WHO, the economic burden of trachoma deepens poverty, as families divert resources to medical expenses.

Kenya’s health system faces major challenges, particularly in remote pastoralist areas. The government’s commitment to universal health coverage is commendable, yet implementation lags in regions where access to health services is hindered by geography and infrastructure.

“Most health facilities here are understaffed and under-resourced,” says Dr. Wanjiru Kuria, a public health official in Marsabit. “We need to prioritize funding for preventive measures like clean water and sanitation and train health workers to manage trachoma cases. Without these basics, the fight against trachoma won’t succeed.”

Moses Chege, Director of Sightsavers Kenya, explains that “trachoma disproportionately affects the poorest communities, and eliminating it has profound benefits for individuals and their broader communities.” He adds, “Kenya has made significant strides in the fight against trachoma, which is transforming lives—allowing more children to attend school and more adults to work and support their families.”

“The challenge to eliminate trachoma in Kenya is immense—over 1.1 million people remain at risk,” he told IPS. “Keeping hands and faces clean is essential to prevent the spread, but it’s difficult to maintain good hygiene when communities lack access to clean water. For nomadic groups like the Maasai, reaching them with consistent health services is challenging. There’s also a cultural aspect—some Maasai see the presence of houseflies as a sign of wealth and prosperous livestock. However, these flies carry the bacteria that cause trachoma.”

According to Moses Chege, Kenya has the potential to eliminate trachoma through strategic, evidence-based investments and urgent action, joining the ranks of 21 other countries that have already eradicated the disease. Since 2010, Sightsavers Kenya has been a strong partner to the Ministry of Health, distributing over 13 million trachoma treatments, including 1.6 million treatments in 2022 alone to protect Kenyans from the disease.

The recent launch of Kenya's Neglected Tropical Disease (NTD) master plan by the Ministry of Health is also expected to accelerate efforts in preventing, eradicating, eliminating, and controlling trachoma and other NTDs across the country.

Organizations like Sightsavers and the Ministry of Health have implemented programs to combat trachoma through mass drug administration and education campaigns. These efforts aim not only to treat the infected but also to promote hygiene practices to prevent the disease's spread. "We're seeing positive changes," says Wanjiru. "When communities understand hygiene's importance and have treatment access, they can break the cycle of trachoma. But it requires commitment from everyone."

In 2022, Malawi became the first country in Southern Africa to eliminate trachoma, while Vanuatu achieved this milestone as the first Pacific Island nation.

As the world moves closer to the 2030 SDG deadline, addressing trachoma in pastoralist communities is essential for fulfilling the promise of health for all. It demands a multi-faceted approach combining community education, infrastructure development, and equitable healthcare access. For pastoralists like Naitore, Rumosiroi, and Malimtich, these interventions are not just a promise of restored

health but a lifeline to a better future.

『INPS Japan/ IPS UN Bureau Report』

Reviving the Spirit of the Steppe: Kazakhstan has hosted the 5th World Nomad Games

BY Katsuhiko Asagiri

Astana/Tokyo

INPS Japan – In a vibrant display of culture and tradition, Kazakhstan recently hosted the 5th World Nomad Games in Astana, celebrating the enduring spirit of nomadic heritage against a backdrop of modernity and globalization. This biennial event, which drew competitors and spectators from around the globe, served not only as a showcase of traditional sports but also as a poignant reminder of the resilience of a culture that faced near extinction under Soviet rule.

The Games, held from 8 – 13 September, featured a kaleidoscope of



Photo credit: The Directorate of the World Nomad Games.

activities that harkened back to the lifestyles of the nomadic peoples who roamed the vast steppes of Central Asia. From horse wrestling to

archery, each competition echoed the ancestral skills honed over centuries. Yet, for many participants and visitors, the significance of these games transcended mere athleticism. They embodied a reclamation of identity that was long suppressed.

During Joseph Stalin's collectivization policies in the

1930s, the nomadic lifestyle was effectively dismantled. Entire communities were uprooted as the Soviet regime sought to impose agricultural models on a population that had thrived as pastoralists. This brutal transformation led to the erosion of traditional practices

and a devastating loss of life. The scars of this cultural genocide run deep, and for decades, the vibrant tapestry of nomadic culture was all but silenced.

However, the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked a turning point for Kazakhstan and other newly independent states. In the wake of independence, there has been a concerted effort to revive and celebrate nomadic traditions, transforming historical calamities into platforms for positive development. For Kazakhstan, this revival has become a central pillar of national identity, a way to reconnect with a rich history that predates colonial imposition.

The World Nomad Games are emblematic of this cultural renaissance. Since their inception in 2014, the Games have attracted participants from over 80 countries, fostering a sense of camaraderie among those who share a nomadic heritage. “This is not just a competition; it’s a celebration of our roots,” said Madiyar Aiyp, a Kazakh IT entrepreneur and a former official of the Ministry of industry. “We are showing the world who we are.”

Kazakhstan’s ability to transform its historical challenges into opportunities is evident not only in the revival of its nomadic culture but also in its multi-vector diplomacy. The country has hosted significant events like the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, emphasizing its commitment to promoting dialogue and tolerance among its 130 ethnic groups. This diversity is rooted in a legacy of ethnic and political persecution under Stalin, yet a newly independent Kazakhstan guarantees equality for all citizens, regardless of their backgrounds.

Kazakhstan’s leadership extends beyond cultural diplomacy; it has also made strides in global disarmament. The Semipalatinsk nuclear test site, once the backdrop for 456 nuclear experiments conducted between 1949 and 1989, was closed by an independent Kazakhstan,



The 7th Congress of leaders of the World and Traditional Religions photo credit: Katsuhiko Asagiri

which eliminated its entire nuclear arsenal. This bold move transformed the nation from the fourth largest nuclear power to a staunch advocate for a nuclear-free world. The closure of Semipalatinsk is recognized by the UN as a pivotal moment in the fight against nuclear testing.



Semipalatinsk former Nuclear test site. Photo Credit: Katsuhiro Asagiri

As the Games concluded, the atmosphere was one of celebration and pride, a testament to a culture that refused to be extinguished. The nomadic spirit, resilient and adaptable, is being woven back into the fabric of Kazakh identity. In Astana, as competitors took their final bows, it was clear that the past and present are intertwined, forging a future that honors both heritage and innovation.

Kazakhstan stands as a model for turning historical calamities into platforms for positive change, advocating for peace and cooperation on the global stage. The World Nomad Games serve not only as a vibrant reminder of the importance of cultural roots but also as an affirmation that a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society can thrive through dialogue and understanding. In embracing its past, Kazakhstan is redefining its place in the world, proving that the nomadic way of life is not a relic of the past but a living, breathing part

of its national identity and its aspirations for the future.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=elcH5UE9LeI>



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hz3LukrjBsE>

Filmed and Edited by Katsuhiro Asagiri, President and Multimedia director of INPS Japan

『INPS Japan』

Banning banishment is not enough

BY Dhanu Bishwakarma



DETENTION CELL: Tuli Saud of Selpakha village in Achham next to the menstrual shed her family rebuilt after it was demolished by the local government in 2019. A typical chhau hut from the outside. Photos: DHANU BISHWAKARMA

Achiham (Nepali Times) - Menstrual discrimination has been harder to demolish than chhau sheds

– On 20 December 2016, 45-year old Dammara Upadhya of Achham's Timilsain village suffocated to death from a fire to keep away the cold in a windowless shed where she was banished during menstruation.

– That same day in the same district, Roshni Tiruwa, 15, of Gajara village died of asphyxiation in a menstrual hut, called 'chhau.'

– On 11 January 2018, Gauri Budha of Turmakhad of Achham died of suffocation in a chhau shed.

– On 10 June 2018, 22-year old Parvati Buda died of a snakebite in a chhau shed

– Amba Bohara, 35, along with her young sons Suresh and Ramit, died on 18 June 2018 when their chhau shed burned down in Agaupani village of Bajura.

– Parvati Buda Raut, 22, died of asphyxiation inside a menstrual hut on 1 December 2019. Police arrested her brother-in-law for forcing her into the shed, and the court sentenced him to 45 days in prison.

After that tragic death of Parvati Buda Raut, national outrage forced the Home Ministry in Kathmandu to launch a menstrual hut demolition drive across the Karnali and Sudurpaschim provinces.

The Ministry directed the 19 districts in the two provinces to search-and-destroy all sheds used for menstrual banishment. Over 10,000 huts were reportedly razed, most of them in Achham, and 100 local governments declared themselves 'Chhau Free'.

However, after the pandemic many sheds have been rebuilt by locals who believe that women are unclean during menstruation, and keeping them at home will invite divine wrath with failed harvests, illness and livestock deaths.

Tuli Saud, 40, lives in the Selpakha village of Achham and has been spending her periods inside a chhau hut for decades. Now, she has two daughters and two daughters-in-law, all of whom stay in the same shed in her backyard for five days every month during their menstruation.

The small shed is windowless. The mud floor is constantly damp during monsoon and covered in straw. When they get their periods at the same time, which happens often, Tuli and the other women in the family have to share the cramped, dark space.

During the district-wide campaign to demolish sheds in Achham, Tuli's menstrual hut was also torn down. She even helped destroy other huts in her village.

But the practice of chhaupadi, and the stigma around menstruation has been harder to destroy than huts. When Tuli had her periods, she spent five days in a tent where the old hut used to be.

Eventually, the family built another mud and thatch shed because the tent was uncomfortable. Tuli fears that no one in the family will come into the house or eat what she cooks if she does not banish herself to the hut. Indeed, peer pressure to conform comes not just from society at large but from elder women in the village who believe the superstition about menstrual impurity.

"If the rest of the women in the village stop going to chhau sheds, I am ready to do the same," says Tuli. "I cannot wait for my menopause."

Tuli Saud's neighbour Deusari Auji, 40, also rebuilt her shed and spends her periods there. She lived in the hut for weeks at a time after the birth of each of her five children. Mothers who have just given birth are also banished to these huts.

"This is our custom, it will anger the goddess Kali in the nearby temple if we stop practicing it," says Auji with conviction.

Deusari shares the tiny shed with her mother and sister-in-laws when they get their periods at the same time. "It is difficult to breathe and sleep," she admits. "But we have to endure that hardship."

Many deaths have occurred due to asphyxiation because the women light fires in the confined windowless spaces during bitterly cold winters in the mountains.

Ram Bahadur Saud's wife and daughter started spending their periods inside their home after the family chhau hut was demolished four years ago. But his family was ostracised by villagers, so he rebuilt the demolished hut.

Nisha Nepali, 14, of nearby Kamalbazar has learnt about reproductive health at school and the risks of spending her periods in a hut. Yet, she is banished to the shed by her family for five days every month during her periods, when she cannot attend school.

"I cannot even do my homework because there is no light in the hut," says Nisha, who grew up in India before her family moved back to Nepal. Local schoolteacher Srijan Dhakal Kunwar explains that women continue to banish themselves to menstruation huts because they firmly believe that they cannot offend the deities in nearby temples. Khadga KC in the Achham district capital of Mangalsen angrily made a new hut for his two daughters-in-law after the old one was demolished by the government.

KC is a shaman and believes that ill-health will befall those who touch a woman during her periods, and attributes his own chronic illness to having once being touched by a menstruating woman.

"I do not care what anyone says, the chhau hut in my house is here to stay," he states. "Why should I listen to what other people have to say instead of listening to my god?"

Even locally elected officials like female ward member of Chaurpati village Basanti Saud spend their periods inside the family shed, and actually believe that things are better than before.

Saud tells us why: “The sheds used to be far away before ours was demolished, but that is not the case anymore. Every family now has their own hut.” Achham’s Chief District Officer Shiva Prasad Lamsal admits that laws and demolition drives will not be enough to change deeply held beliefs. His office is therefore concentrating on raising awareness against the superstition.

Accham police chief Ishwari Prasad Bhandari agrees community support is needed to restart the demolition of huts so they are not rebuilt. Activists point out that even if they are not banished to huts, many women across Nepal suffer ostracisation and stigma in one form or other, even in educated families. Menstrual discrimination is not only a crime, but also a serious health risk to women.

Nutritionist Aruna Upreti says forcing girls and women to live in cowsheds after childbirth or during their periods makes them prone to accidents, infections and undernourishment at a time when they need a balanced diet. Entrenched cultural beliefs are hard to eradicate, and provincial and local governments are also reluctant to push for radical reform because of societal backlash. The region where oppressive menstrual discrimination is most prevalent is in the constituencies of powerful politicians like Sher Bahadur Deuba, who has become Nepal’s prime minister five times.

Radha Paudel, a dignified menstruation activist, agrees that local governments must mobilise to end the practice (below).

“Menstrual discrimination is like caste discrimination, and besides laws it must be a dedicated part of school curricula,” says Paudel. “Our pad distribution campaigns try to convince women that banishment to menstrual huts is a dangerous superstition.”

Raped in the hut

Of the 16 women in Sudurpaschim Province who were killed in the last 17 years in menstrual huts, 14 died in Achham district. Aside from fatalities from asphyxiation or snakebites, menstruating women have also been victims of rape and molestation.

In June, a young girl in Achham was raped by a relative as she slept inside the shed to which she was evicted during her periods. Neighbours found her unconscious and took her to the District Hospital in Mangalsen.

A police complaint was filed, but that was 19 days after the assault. The Grade nine girl had been raised with her brother by their maternal grandmother after their mother died, and her father remarried.

“He began to follow me six months ago, and had on one occasion come into my house when I was alone and forced himself on me,” the girl told us in a recent interview. The police have demolished the shed where the rape took place, and the case is pending in court.

The Law

Chhaupadi was banned in 2005 by Nepal’s Supreme Court, and three years later the Ministry of Women, Child and Social Welfare set guidelines to banish the practice.

Sub-section 3 of section 168 of the National penal Code 2017 stipulates that ‘Banishing a woman to a shed (chhaupadi) during menstruation or delivery, or subjecting, causing to be subjected, her to similar other discrimination, untouchability or inhumane treatment of any kind is prohibited.’ Anyone who commits such an offence is liable to a three-month prison sentence, a Rs3,000 fine, or both.

『INPS Japan/ Nepali Times』

Summit of the Future: Youth Driven Action Needed to Tackle Nuclear and Climate Crises

BY Naureen Hossain



Dr. Tshilidzi Marwala, USG and Rector of the United Nations University, and Ms. Kaoru Nemoto, Director of the United Nations Information Centre during a discussion 'Building the Future: Synergetic Collaboration on Nuclear and Climate Crises.' Credit: Naureen Hossain/IPS

UNITED NATIONS (IPS) – Driving the Summit of the Future's core messages of international solidarity and decisive action are young people who are determined to address the intersecting issues that the world contends with today.

During the Summit's Action Days (20-21 September), it was young people who led the conversations of increasing and defining

meaningful engagement, both on- and off-site from the United Nations Headquarters.

Not only are they driving the conversation, but in the Pact for the Future adopted by world leaders at the United Nations on Sunday (September 22), youth and future generations are at the forefront of global leaders' concerns, and their role was clearly defined with the first ever Declaration on Future Generations, with concrete steps to take account of future generations in our decision-making, including a possible envoy for future generations.

This includes a commitment to more "meaningful opportunities for young people to participate in the decisions that shape their lives, especially at the global level."

Building the Future: Synergetic Collaboration on Nuclear and Climate Crises, a side event whose co-organizers included Soka Gakkai International (SGI) and the Future Action Festival Organizing Committee, with the support of the United Nations University (UNU) and the United Nations Information Centre (UNIC), brought together young activists to discuss the intersection between two different crises and what will define meaningful youth engagement.

Kaoru Nemoto, the Director General of UNIC in Tokyo, observed that it was "ground-breaking" to see the agenda of the Summit's Action Days largely led and organized by youth participants, as signified by the majority of seats in the General Assembly Hall being filled by young activists.

“There is an undercurrent, a common message, that the youth can make this world a better place to live,” said Nemoto. “No matter what agenda you are working on, be it climate change, nuclear disarmament, fighting inequality... youth issues are cross-cutting, very strong cross-cutting issues across the board.”

Nemoto further added that the United Nations needs to do much more to engage youth for meaningful participation. This would mean allowing youth to consult in decision-making and to be in positions of leadership. Youth presence cannot be reduced to tokenism.

The climate and nuclear crises are existential threats that are deeply connected, said Dr. Tshilidzi Marwala, the rector of the United Nations University. Climate instability fuels the factors that lead to conflict and displacement. Conflict, such as what is happening in Sudan, Israel, Palestine, and Ukraine, increases the risk of nuclear escalation. As leaders in the present day tackle the issues, Marwala called on the youth to continue raising their voices and to hold those powers accountable.

Marwala noted that the United Nations University would be committed to “realizing meaningful participation” in all parties. For young people, while they are motivated and demonstrate a care for deeper social issues, they face challenges in having their voices heard or in feeling galvanized to take action. Marwala noted that it was important to reach out to those young people who are either not involved or feel discouraged from getting involved in political work and activism.

Chief among the Summit of the Future’s agenda is increasing youth

participation in decision-making processes. It has long been acknowledged that young activists and civil society actors drive greater societal change and are motivated to act towards complex issues. Yet they frequently face challenges in participating in policymaking that would shape their countries’ positions.

Among these challenges are representation in political spaces. Within the context of Japan, young people are underrepresented in local and national politics. As Luna Serigano, an advocate from the Japan Youth Council, shared during the event, there is a wider belief among young voters in Japan that their voices will go unheard by authorities.

This is indicated in voter turnout, which shows that only 37 percent of voters are in their 20s, and only 54 percent of voters believe that their votes matter. By contrast, 71 percent of people in their 70s voted in elections. People in their 30s or younger account for just 1 percent of professionals serving in government councils and forums. The Japan Youth Council is currently advocating for active youth participation in the country’s climate change policy by calling for young people to be directly involved as committee members to work on a new energy plan for the coming year.

Yuuki Tokuda, a co-founder of GeNuine, a Japan-based NGO that explores nuclear issues through a gender perspective, shared that young people are out of decision-making spaces. Although their voices may be heard, it is not enough. As she told IPS, the climate and nuclear crises are on the minds of young people in Japan. And while they have ideas on what could be done, they are not informed on how to act.

There is some hope for increasing participation. Tokuda shared

within policymakers on nuclear issues, of which 30 percent include women, have begun to engage with young people in these discussions.

“It is time to reconstruct systems so that youth can meaningfully participate in these processes,” said Tokuda. “We need more intergenerational participation in order to work towards the ban of nuclear weapons and the climate crisis.”

During the event, what meaningful youth engagement should look like was discussed. It was acknowledged that efforts have gone towards giving a space to the perspectives of young people. Including young people in the discussions is a critical step. It was suggested that direction should shift towards ensuring that young people have the authority to take the action needed to resolve intersecting, complex issues. Otherwise, the inclusion is meaningless.

“The future-oriented youth is more needed than ever to tackle the challenges in building and maintaining peace,” said Mitsuo Nishikata of SGI.

“As a youth-driven initiative such as what the Future Action Festival demonstrates, youth solidarity can stand as a starting point for resolving and passing issues.”

Next year (2025) will mark 80 years since the end of World War II and the Hiroshima-Nagasaki atomic bombings. Nishikata pointed out that this will be a time for crucial opportunities to advance the discussions on nuclear disarmament and climate action, ahead of the Third Meeting of State Parties on the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and the 30th UN Climate Conference (COP30).

“We will continue to unite in our desire for peace, sharing the

responsibility for future generations and expanding grassroots actions in Japan and globally.

Other commitments for the Pact for the Future included the first multilateral recommitment to nuclear disarmament in more than a decade, with a clear commitment to the goal of totally eliminating nuclear weapons.

It also pledged reform of the United Nations Security Council since the 1960s, with plans to improve the effectiveness and representativeness of the Council, including by redressing the historical underrepresentation of Africa as a priority.

The pact has at its core a commitment to “turbo-charge” implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including the reform of the international financial architecture so that it better represents and serves developing countries.

“We cannot build a future that is suitable for our grandchildren with a system that our grandparents created,” as the Secretary-General António Guterres stated.

『NPS Japan/IPS UN Bureau』

Australia's reduction in International student quotas: A blow to aspiring minds and businesses

BY Dr. Majid Khan



image credit:Dr.Majid Khan(London Post)

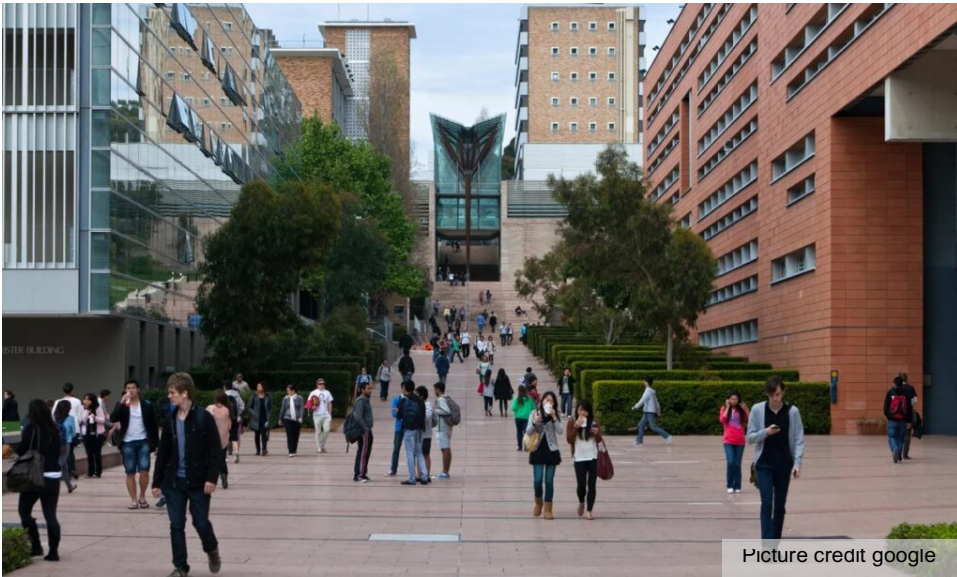
MELBOURNE, Australia (London Post) – The Australian government announced its plan to implement restrictions on the influx of international students as part of efforts to ease housing pressures and control immigration levels. Canberra has expressed concerns that international education programs, which attract foreign students to study in Australia, have been vulnerable to immigration and visa fraud.

Official data from 2023 reveals that Australia hosted 787,000 international students, surpassing pre-pandemic levels. Australian government aims to cap the number of overseas students to relieve strain on rental accommodations and regulate immigration flows.

In December 2023, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said “Australia’s migration numbers needed to be wound back to a “sustainable level,” adding that “the system is broken”. Senior government officials have outlined that limiting international education enrollments will form part of a broader strategy to manage migration, enhance housing availability, and address skills shortages in the economy.

On July 2, 2024, the government went a step further, more than doubling the cost of the international student visa application fee to \$1,600 in a move the International Education Association of Australia called the sector’s “death by a thousand cuts”.

Australia’s decision has sparked debate and concern over its implications for universities, businesses, and aspiring students worldwide. Apparently aimed at alleviating housing shortages exacerbated by an influx of overseas students, the policy shift has raised broader questions about Australia’s economic strategy, educational competitiveness, and its commitment to global cooperation.



Picture credit google

Australia has long been a favored destination for international students, renowned for its high-quality education and multicultural environment. The influx of international students has not only enriched the academic landscape but also significantly contributed to the economy.

Tuition fees paid by international students, often higher than those paid by domestic counterparts, have become a vital revenue stream for universities and colleges. These funds support various aspects of institutional development, including research, infrastructure, and scholarships, thus bolstering Australia's educational standing globally.

Meanwhile, the admission and student fee remain in the treasury of the Australian government, and in many cases, the visas had been delayed and cancelled. The students are of the view that the amount paid has not been returned, ranging from months to a year.

The government's decision to halve the quota of international students has sent shock waves through the higher education sector.

Already reeling from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted international travel and student enrollments, universities and colleges now face a substantial financial blow. The sudden reduction in student numbers threatens to undermine the financial stability of institutions that rely heavily on international student fees to sustain their operations and growth.

The repercussions extend beyond educational institutions to small businesses that have flourished around campuses, catering to the needs and preferences of international students. These businesses, often owned and operated by immigrants themselves, have thrived on the steady influx of students and their spending power.

Car renting business owner, Ahmed Hanjra, shared to London Post that due to cut on international students, we are experiencing negative impact on our business as their business is widely dealing with international students. Director of Leads Education Consultant, Muhammad Imtinan Ali Virk, expresses that the government decision is backlash and disappointment for the hundreds of thousands of students worldwide. As an education consultant, we are also experiencing negative impact to our business.

From accommodation providers and cafes to bookstores and specialized services, these enterprises face an uncertain future with the anticipated decline in student numbers, jeopardizing jobs and economic vitality in local communities.

Policymakers argue that reducing student numbers will alleviate some of this pressure on housing supply, potentially stabilizing rental markets and improving affordability for Australian citizens.

Critics, however, argue that slashing international student quotas is a short-sighted approach to addressing housing issues. They

emphasize that Australia's education sector benefits not only economically but also culturally and academically from the presence of international students. Beyond financial contributions, these students bring diverse perspectives, enriching the educational experience for all students and fostering global connections that are increasingly crucial in an interconnected world.

Moreover, the decision has had a profound personal impact on thousands of aspiring students worldwide who had set their sights on studying in Australia. Many had meticulously planned and invested significant resources in pursuing their educational dreams, only to have their plans disrupted by the sudden policy shift. This uncertainty has left them disillusioned and uncertain about their future educational and career paths, prompting some to reconsider their options altogether.

In response to mounting pressure from various stakeholders including educational institutions, businesses, and advocacy groups; the government faces calls to reconsider and revise its decision. Critics argue for alternative solutions that address housing issues without jeopardizing Australia's reputation as a welcoming and competitive destination for international students.

Suggestions include increasing investment in affordable housing, implementing targeted policies to manage student accommodation, and fostering partnerships between universities and local communities to mitigate housing impacts.

The debate over international student quotas underscores broader questions about Australia's role as a global education hub and its commitment to international cooperation and exchange.

Australia risks losing its competitive edge if perceived as

unwelcoming or unpredictable in its policies toward international students, potentially impacting its attractiveness as a destination for global talent.

As stakeholders await further developments and potential revisions to the government's policy, the outcome will significantly influence the trajectory of Australia's education sector and broader economic fabric.

The world watches closely, mindful of the implications for global mobility, educational opportunities, and Australia's positioning in an interconnected global economy. The decisions made in the coming months will not only shape the immediate future of international education in Australia but also reverberate across sectors and societies, shaping perceptions of Australia's openness and commitment to global engagement.

『INPS Japan/London Post』

Helping farmers who help themselves

BY Jana Asenbrennerova

Kathumandu (Nepali Times) -

Nepal's mountain farmers are already adapting to the impacts of climate change on their own.

Himalayan farmers are at the forefront of the climate crisis, having to deal with extreme heat or cold, prolonged droughts or excessive rain, landslides and floods.

But they are also the most resilient farmers, who have struggled on their own for generations to grow enough food on terraces meticulously carved into the fragile top soils of the slopes.

"The government did not know or care about us farmers up here," says Surya Adhikari, 70. "We have to adapt to climate change on our own, just like all the other problems we have dealt with in the past."

Indeed, the problems of Himalayan mountain agriculture predate climate change, and for farmers like Adhikari it is just the latest crisis they have to deal with.

In his own lifetime, Adhikari has seen the snowline recede up the Annapurna range that towers over his village of Sundari Danda near Pokhara, and once predictable weather patterns have become erratic.



Adhikari has responded by diversifying crops, ensuring irrigation, and protecting indigenous seeds.

Climate scientists say the Himalayan mountains are warming up to 0.7°C more than the global average due a phenomenon called 'altitude effect'. In 2023, global average temperature rose by 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, and this means in these mountains the increase was 2.2°C.

Part of the impact is record-breaking heat even at a 1,500m elevation in these villages near Pokhara, and there have been successive years of dry winters. This spring saw record-breaking wildfires that raged for months nationwide, and many of the surrounding slopes around Begnas and Rupa lakes still bear the scars of fires.

These changes combined with economic factors have intensified out-migration with some districts like Kaski seeing a 17% drop in population since 2011.

Even though rural youth are migrating out, Nepal is still a predominantly agricultural country with two-thirds of the population

dependent on farming, and 33% of the GDP coming from agriculture.

Thus, when late monsoons delay the planting of rice or when droughts destroy crops, it is not just the agricultural sector that suffers but the country's economy as a whole. Nepal is already a net importer of food products, and imports have grown most noticeably in the last 10 years.

This year's monsoon so far has been higher than normal, and paddy planting is supposed to be nearly 100% nationwide. But cloudbursts have also set off landslides and flashfloods. This week, 12 more people were killed in landslides in Gulmi and Baglung, bringing the total death toll since June to at least 175.

The trend over the past decade has been that monsoon rains start later than usual. There are extended dry spells followed by destructive local downpours. Groundwater levels have fallen due to insufficient recharge and over-extraction, making springs go dry.

Without adequate government investment in building and maintaining irrigation systems, farmers in many rural areas are entirely at the mercy of the rains.

Delayed planting leaves fields barren and susceptible to erosion of nutritious top soil, while also pushing back the harvest cycle. When the rains do come, intense storms damage or destroy crops.

Similarly, pests previously found only in the Tarai or those entirely foreign to Nepal such as the American fall armyworm, which targets maize, are moving up the mountains. Agriculture in Nepal is mostly subsistence to begin with, but the climate crisis has pushed them off the edge, forcing many to abandon their fields and migrate to the cities or abroad.

Pokhara-based LI-BIRD (Local Initiatives for Biodiversity, Research

and Development) works in 23 districts to improve livelihoods of small farmers while conserving biodiversity. It has proven answers to help farmers adapt to the impact climate crisis, and just needs the government to scale up the measures nationwide.

Focus on farms

Indigenous paddy, wheat, millet and buckwheat seeds are hardier than imported hybrids, and better able to adapt to a hotter climate. They have evolved to local soils and the micro-climate, and are genetically better suited to deal with changes.

This is what the Pokhara-based action research organisation LI-BIRD is trying to do: preserve indigenous crop varieties through its seed banks, and distribute them through farmer-owned cooperatives.

"When working to improve agriculture, we have to keep farmers at the front and centre, particularly their traditional knowledge," says Bishnu Bhusal of LI-BIRD. "Bringing outside knowledge is not going to work here."

LI-BIRD's Participatory Plant Breeding initiative gathers a variety of seed samples of local crops from farmers and plants them side-by-side (pictured, right). Those samples deemed most fit by farmers in terms of yield, weather and pest resistance are then distributed across the country by the Community Seed Bank Association.

Local seed banks, collections of region-specific seeds made available to farmers, allow for what Bhusal says is "conservation through use". This ensures that indigenous crops have a chance to evolve, and do not face extinction from natural disasters or climate change.

While imported high-yielding seed varieties are tempting, they also

require expensive chemical fertiliser and pesticide inputs, which also end up destroying the soil. Indigenous seeds are significantly more



A Farmers Field School in Kanchanpur observing a plot with diverse varieties of rice with help from LI-BIRD. Photo: LI-BIRD PHOTO BANK

resilient and reliable.

“Even with minimal care and inputs, local varieties survive,” explains Jenny Shrestha of LI-BIRD. “This means less fertiliser, pesticide, and water are needed.”

Indigenous seeds are naturally adapted to local environmental conditions and thus are more resistant to pests, droughts, and other disasters, she adds.

“When the climate changes, harvest reduction is much greater in imported seed varieties than local indigenous varieties,” Shrestha says, pointing to the performance of Setho Dabdi wheat variety native to Doti which in tests in 2022 gave higher yield than imported wheat despite a winter drought.

While crop dependability is important, so is sustainable income.

Landscape Branding, whereby agro products are marketed for being endemic to a certain region demanding high market value, has become an incentive for farmers to return to local indigenous crops.

Two such crops are Pokhareli Jethobudho, a rice native to Pokhara and admired for its aroma, and Setho Kaguno, the foxtail millet native to the fields near Begnas and Rupa Lakes. Both products are branded and marketed by the social enterprise Annapaat, guaranteeing farmers a set minimum rate. In coordination with local governments, farmers are reimbursed if they are unable to sell their products at or above that rate, which for Setho Kaguno is Rs120 per kg.

LI-BIRD’s success with seeds are now being upscaled by the government. The Crop Development and Agricultural Biodiversity Conservation Centre of the Ministry of Agriculture is helping farmers across 30 districts with money to preserve local crops.

Government subsidy on organic pesticides is also encouraging sustainable farming methods, although there is skepticism whether it is the government or non-profits driving this initiative.

Alternative cash crops

Resilience to the impact of the climate crisis can also come from diversifying to cash crops that raise household incomes, allowing farmers more breathing space.

Surya Adhikari is a well-known plant breeder in Begnas, and has begun noticing troubling environmental changes after more than 40 years working in agriculture.

“In the last five years, it has become so hot that it is hard to stay in the village and the crops won’t grow because there are so many bugs and pests,” he says.

So, Adhikari has taken to coffee and fruits, which have proven to be more resistant to heat stress compared to traditional crops such as rice, which he used to grow. Coffee takes up minimal space and enriches soil quality, while also allowing other crops to be grown in between.

But with pests and erratic rainfall becoming even bigger threats of late, Adhikari is diversifying further to moringa, nicknamed 'Miracle Tree' for its myriad medicinal benefits.

Moringa leaves are used in dietary supplements, are rich in vitamins, have antioxidant properties and fetch a high market price.

Moringa is fast-growing and drought resistant, and Adhikari was a pioneer in introducing the tree to Nepal, but wishes the government was more proactive in helping market this unique product.

Government inaction is a given, Adhikari reckons, and this means farmers like him have to find innovative ways to adapt to the climate crisis on their own.

He says, "The government makes a policy but it is often short-sighted, and on-the-ground implementation never really happens."

Whether it is seed preservation or climate-change education, rural farmers are therefore on their own. This means climate impact, on top of lack of jobs and opportunities, is driving increased outmigration.

"The government is happy to neglect farmers because there is enough money coming from overseas remittances," says Adhikari, "We have to bring changes on our own."

Which is why Adhikari is organising farmers so there is strength in numbers, and adaptation ideas can be shared more widely. The National Farmers Group Federation is playing this role as an umbrella organisation for advocacy organisations at the village, district, and

central levels.

Mighty Millet

Although she may not have an official title, Ambika Bhandari is a leader in her village. Five years ago, she began piloting the Setho Kaguno variety of local millet on her farm, previously having grown maize like many locals.

Seeing Bhandari's strong yield and the higher market value for her millet, neighbouring farmers in the village of Kafalghari in Kaski followed in her footsteps.

Changing weather patterns and heat stress convinced farmers to switch from maize to millet. Five years later, Kafalghari today is the biggest Setho Kaguno producing village in the country, harvesting more than 2.56 tonnes last year.

Bhandari gets her seeds from LI-BIRD's seed bank and sells her crop to the non-profit Merit Pokhara, which is run by students also inspired by LI-BIRD's work with seed preservation.

Merit provides farmers like Bhandari with instruction on using phone apps to track rain and temperature patterns so as to ensure planting, harvesting, and drying are carried out at optimal periods.

Based on Merit Pokhara's model, the local government adopted a compensatory scheme to ensure farmers are paid fairly for their produce. Says Bhandari: "This public-private cooperation has been truly helpful. It also proves that we carve out our own destiny even without outside help."

『INPS Japan/ Nepali Times』

How Women Volunteers Are Shaping India's Water Future

BY Manipadma Jena

BHUBANESWAR, India (IPS) –

“Daily squabbles at the lone water point in Bhubaneswar’s slums, where hundreds of households depended on this single non-potable water source, have now receded into the past,” says Aparna Khuntia, a member of a large cohort of water volunteers who have played an important enabling role in ensuring households in the eastern India city now have their own on-premises potable running tap water available all 24 hours.

No mean feat this, considering that the capital city of India’s eastern state, Odisha, is flooding with much of the outbound rural to urban migrants. Of Odisha’s 8.86 million rural households, one in three has an out-migrant according to government data. Of this, 70% move within the State, a majority landing up in Odisha’s fast developing capital city.

For new migrants into a city, they may set up a shelter using discarded flex advertisement banners with a few bamboo poles but access to water, let alone potable water, remains a huge challenge.



Water partner Aparna Khuntia tests on-premises drinking quality water from a tap for a slum household in Bhubaneswar. Credit: Manipadma Jena/IPS

“Even government-recognized slums like our colony in 2019 got just two hours of water supply in a day. Large families who could not store enough faced untold difficulties. Many had to pay for a water tanker every other day. Illegal water connections were rampant, resulting in huge revenue losses for the government,” 36-year-old Khuntia told IPS.

By 2030, 2 billion people will still live without safe drinking water

“The midpoint of our journey to 2030 has passed. The world is on track to achieve only 17 per cent of the targets under the Sustainable

Development Goals (SDG),” reveals the recent 2024 United Nations SDG report card.

Goal 6 focusing on ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all, found between 2015 and 2022, the proportion of the global population using safely managed drinking water increased from 69 to 73 per cent according to report. Although more people now access safe drinking water, in 2022, 2.2 billion still went without this basic human right. Achieving universal

coverage by 2030 will require a sixfold increase in current rates of progress for safely managed drinking water, it warns.

In 2022, the UN said, roughly half the world's population experienced severe water scarcity for at least part of the year. One quarter faced "extremely high" levels of water stress.

Such situations were experienced this extreme summer 2024 in India's largest economic hubs Bangaluru and Delhi.

Climate change worsens these issues. Rating agency Moody's in June warned water shortage may hit India's future economic growth.

Even so, according to the report 93.3% of India's population are now using at least basic drinking water services which UN rates as "moderately improving."

Women Benefit the Most From Women Water Managers

To further progress on SDG-6, in 2020 when Odisha launched the 'Drink from Tap Mission' to dispense certified quality drinking water 24X7 from piped supply installed at each urban household, it created a pool of the women water volunteers. Designated Jal Sathi or water partner, they were stringently selected from among local Self-Help Groups (SHGs), trained and raring to make a difference.

And a difference they did bring about. The government's implementing Housing and Urban Development department "increased their water tariff collection by around 90 percent," said Khuntia. Representing community partnership in urban water management, they are key stake-holders in a novel initiative.

A key government official G Mathi Vathanan, who once headed the State-owned non-profit company Water Corporation of Odisha (WATCO) that rolls out the water mission for the State government,

even went on to write a book on the women volunteers giving them much of the credit for the initiative's success.

"The women from SHGs are the ones who helped make reality the goal of bringing water to the doorstep of each household. The mission's success was due to (their ability to) building people's trust in the government," he said.

The service these women volunteers provided to households turned the tide against diarrhea, jaundice, and poor gut health that plagued the poor, especially children.

The UN's Sustainable Development Report 2024 ranks India on SDG progress at 109 out of 166 indicating a "score moderately improving" but "insufficient to attain goal."

India's federal government is mulling replicating Odisha's Pure Water Scheme's success in other States.

These women managers helped other householder women by bringing drinking and cooking water to their doorstep, eliminating the disproportionate burden of water on women in India.

Change-Makers' Contribution: A Working Day in a Water Partner's Life

Each woman volunteer works with 1,200 designated households, both in her own tenements and higher-end households. This familiarity with her gives her an edge with her clients—of trust, of openness in interactions helping her to achieve what government staff are unable to.

Every month she visits her households, reads the installed water meter, generates the bill and often gets paid too. But for those who are unable to pay, the water-partner will visit again and again urging,

cajoling payments.

“We urge them not to waste such a precious commodity like water, and for those who lagged in taking new connection we convinced them to do so,” said Khuntia. With water meters installed and payments mandatory, households tend not to waste water. In slums, bills often were no more than 50 to 65 rupees (less than one dollar), affordable even for the poorest.

“So, this tap drinking water mission was a win-win for both government and consumers,” Khuntia, a mother of two told IPS. It also ensures Sustainable Cities and Communities under SDG-11. Revenue accruing to the government ensures water infrastructure maintenance.

On water-users’ request, Khuntia said they tested the tap water with kits they carried. They also reported water-related issues and information of pipe leaks that compromised water purity, to the government’s maintenance staff who attended immediately.

“Earlier, people would rarely call the staff if they noticed water pipe damages; sometimes it was deliberate, for water theft. But because we visit families often and they are comfortable with us, we get this information very quickly,” she added.

The SDG targets 6–1 of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals call for universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all. The drink from tap mission is a move to achieve this.

According to WATCO, by March 2023, 4.5 million urban residents in 29 Urban Local Bodies out of 115 ULBs in Odisha State have access to or be in line to drink from tap utilities.

Under the scheme, not only water equity is ensured, but sustainability is also ensured by fixing water meters for every

household water pipeline. Since households pay for their water, they tend not to waste it.

However, after four years of service, these women volunteers have been demanding better pecuniary recognition for their services. What they get now is 5% of their total bill collection as an incentive, 100 rupees if she enrolls a new customer for a water connection, and a bicycle. Aparna Khuntia told IPS she gives 4 hours a day to this work while her monthly income approximates 5000–7000 rupees (60–84 USD). Much of it is spent supplementing her husband’s 15000 rupees (180 USD) income from plying a three-wheeler auto rickshaw for household expenses, including their one-room rent. What is left over is spent during festivals or when we visit relatives in the village.

“With a government change in the June election this year, Odisha’s new government is reorganizing the entire women’s self-help group set-up. The Jaal Sathis will possibly get a new designation but the programme which has been highly successful, will continue,” WATCO’s chief operating officer, Sarat Chandra Mishra, told IPS.

『INPS Japan/ IPS UN Bureau』

THE AXOLOTLS, A CRUCIAL LINK FOR THE PRESERVATION OF XOCHIMILCO'S ECOSYSTEM

BY Guillermo Ayala Alanis



Axolotls on murals in Mexico City. Photo credit: Guillermo Ayala Alanis.

Mexico city (INPS Japan) In recent years, the *Ambystoma mexicanum* has become so popular among the inhabitants of Mexico City that it has become a symbol of the region and has played a key role in the conservation of

ecosystems in the south of the Mexican capital.

An amphibian native to the Basin of Mexico, which measures 30 centimeters long and has a friendly appearance because when you look at it, it seems to be smiling, has become an important connector for the preservation of the ecosystem of Xochimilco, a lake area located in the south of Mexico City, that has high ecological, historical and cultural value dating back to pre-Hispanic times.

In recent years, the Axolotls o Mexican salamander (*Ambystoma mexicanum*) has become a symbol of Mexico City that can be seen everywhere. It is painted on murals as a component of urban art, on money that is used all over the country, as well as in universities and Research Centers that have taken advantage of the salamander and its charismatic appearance to study its biological and social aspects.

Doctor, José Antonio Ocampo Cervantes, Head of the Cuemanco Biological and Aquaculture Research Project of the Autonomous Metropolitan University, Xochimilco Unit (UAM-X) assured that the Mexican salamander is an animal that has become a link of great importance for the preservation of the natural area of Xochimilco, home to several animal and plant species and an important lung of the Mexican capital. “We can use it as a symbol of conservation, take advantage of that characteristic, that empathy that people have towards the salamander and say well... if we like it, we must conserve the species, but we must also conserve the entire ecosystem on which this species depends. I think that is where the importance... It is a species that is like an intermediate energy flow between the aquatic system and the terrestrial system”.

Since 2017, Dr. Ocampo has directed the Center for Biological and Aquaculture Research of Cuemanco belonging to UAM-X, a space located in the heart of the natural protected area of Xochimilco and whose function in addition to research and contribute to the teaching of students of this university, is to preserve and promote among society the conservation of this emblematic area of high ecological value for Mexico City, since in addition to the salamander, it is home to birds, rodents and fish.

In an interview for INPS News, Dr. Ocampo commented that as part of these activities to promote and link citizens with nature, CIBAC organizes guided visits to schools and vulnerable groups of all ages,

which he says are amazed by the axolotls and their habitat: “We have visits from kindergarten to graduate school, vulnerable groups such as homeless children. People like it very much because when they arrive the first thing they say is that they could not imagine that there was a place like this, it doesn’t seem like we are in the middle of the city, you don’t hear noise and you can hear the birds.

In 1998 a study reported by the UAM indicate that in Xochimilco Lake there were 6, 000 axolotls per Square Kilometers but, in 2014, a study by the Institute of Biology of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) reported that there were already only 35 amphibians per Square Kilometers due to the contamination of their habitat, the invasion of species in its ecosystem and the reduction of the space where it lives, so it is important to preserve the original specimens in captivity, since there are less specimens in the wild.

Although in captivity the axolotl has been able to reproduce in light



Mexican salamander depicted in a tourist attraction. Mexico has designated 1 February as the National Day of this mysterious creature. Crédito de foto:

colors such as pink or white, CIBAC researches and preserves the phenotype of the original axolotl, which is black, has gills on the back of its head and always remains young because it does not mutate to become a salamander, so it could well be called the Peter Pan of nature. It is important to remember that the Mexican salamander is a species that is also very much studied due to its capacity to regenerate parts of its body such as limbs and brain. Universities around the world have specimens to try to decipher some of the secrets of its genome, which is

10 times larger than that of the human being, and that if deciphered could help scientists to develop regenerative medicine projects to treat affections associated with cancer and aging.

At CIBAC, in addition to the study of the salamander, there is also research on the cultivation of plants and vegetables such as tomatoes and cucumbers, free of pesticides and industrialized products.

In addition, there is research with the care and preservation of species native to the basin of Mexico. Among them are some birds and butterflies such as the Monarch and *Leptophobia aripa*, which are studied, cared for and monitored in a butterfly garden.

The link between the axolotl and its community in Xochimilco can also be seen a few meters from CIBAC, in the tourist area where the trajineras are located, a type of boat emblematic of Xochimilco that serves as an attraction for visitors from all over the world because of the colorful boats. In this area, the inhabitants have understood that the axolotl is one more inhabitant of Xochimilco that helps them to have an international presence and which they have integrated into their activities with visitors by having it present in paintings and in the trajineras themselves.

In 2018, the Mexican Senate declared February 1 the National Day of the Axolotl, with the aim of highlighting the importance of this enigmatic amphibian in the ecosystem and the country’s cultural identity.

『INPS Japan』

New Child Marriages, Cohabitation With a Child Law in Sierra Leone Lauded

BY Joyce Chimbi



FREETOWN & NAIROBI (IPS) – “A person shall not contract marriage with a child,” Sierra Leone’s landmark Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2024 says, outlawing, in no uncertain terms, child marriage, giving consent to and attempted child marriage, officiating, attending and promoting child marriage, and use of force or ill-treatment of a child.

The legislation was signed by Sierra Leone President Julius Maada Bio earlier in July in a ceremony organized by First Lady Fatima Bio,

whose “Hands Off Our Girls” campaign played a crucial role in this achievement.

Men who marry girls under 18 face 15 years in prison, a fine of around USD 4,000, or both.

Fatou Gueye Ndir, Senior Regional Engagement and Advocacy Officer for Girls Not Brides, told IPS that the power of the new legislation towards ending harmful practices cannot be overemphasized, as “it also includes provisions for enforcing penalties on offenders, protecting victims’ wives, and ensuring access to education and support services for young girls affected.”

Girls Not Brides is a global partnership of over 1,400 civil society organizations committed to ending child marriage and enabling girls to fulfill their potential. Fatou says the new law has injected new life into the fight against child marriage and early and forced marriages in Sierra Leone.

“This is a turning point. We call upon the government to continue to provide support services for affected girls and access to education, which are essential so that girls are protected and are not negatively impacted by criminalization of child marriage.”



Fatima Maada Bio, the First Lady of Sierra Leone, championed the legislation with her Hands Off Our Girls campaign. Credit: UN

The law also prohibits conspiracy to cause child marriage and aiding and abetting child marriage. So comprehensive is the new law that it also prohibits cohabitation with a child, any attempt to do so, conspiracy to cause cohabitation with a child and, aiding and abetting cohabitation with a child.

UNICEF says in 2020 alone, nearly 800,000 girls under the age of 18 were married, accounting for a third of the girls in Sierra Leone. Half of them married before they turned 15. So prevalent is the child marriage scourge that approximately nine percent of all children will have gotten married by age 15, and 30 percent by age 18.

Hannah Yambasu, director for Women Against Violence and Exploitation in Society Sierra Leone (WAVES-SL), which is a national NGO, told IPS that in the absence of a law prohibiting child marriages,

“the compulsory education policy, where all children must go to school, has not been enough to keep girls within the education system. There are ethnic groups and communities that believe girls, in and out of school, should not turn 18 years old before getting married.” She says girls entered risky territory at the age of 12 and that many were subsequently forced into child marriages and their lifelong consequences.

Yambasu agrees, saying that the law in and of itself is not enough and concerted efforts must be made to sensitize the community on all sections of the law, especially as the Customary Marriage and Divorce Act 2009 allowed for child marriages with the consent of a parent or guardian and did not stipulate a minimum age of marriage. Stressing that massive, grassroots civic education is urgently needed.

Fatou said effective implementation of the law will lead to substantial gains and positive outcomes in education, health and the economic advancement of women. Emphasizing that child marriage and education are strongly interlinked, as girls who stay longer in school are protected from child marriages. Furthermore, girls will have fewer disruption caused by early marriage or early pregnancy and, are more likely to perform better.

“Child marriage is linked to girls’ pregnancy, so the law will progressively help reduce maternal and infant mortality. Delaying marriage and pregnancy will significantly lower the risk associated with early childbirth, including all the complications that often lead to higher rates of maternal and infant mortality,” Fatou says.

Further indicating that girls who avoid early child marriage are less likely to experience the psychological trauma or stress associated with

child marriage, leading to improved mental health outcomes.

“When more girls complete their education, there will be a larger pool of educated women entering the workforce, contributing to economic growth and development. Educated women are more likely to secure better-paying jobs, which can elevate the economic status of their families, reducing poverty levels,” she says.

The rapid rise in the child population in Africa necessitates radical steps towards ending all harmful practices, including child marriage, as they derail progress towards universal access to education. Child marriage is particularly a major obstacle to sustainable development. Six of the world’s 10 countries with the highest rates of child marriage are in West and Central Africa, where the average prevalence across the region remains high—nearly 41 per cent of girls marry before reaching the age of 18.

The new Sierra Leone law is timely, especially in light of the Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024, which details the significant challenges the world is facing in making substantial strides towards achieving the SDGs. It features areas with setbacks while also showcasing where tangible progress has been made, for instance, the world continues to lag in its pursuit of gender equality by 2030.

While harmful practices are decreasing, the report finds it are not keeping up with population growth. One in five girls still marries before age 18, compared to one in four 25 years ago—68 million child marriages were averted in this period.

The report raises concerns that far too many women still cannot realize the right to decide on their sexual and reproductive health.

Violence against women persists, disproportionately affecting those

with disabilities. With just six years remaining, current progress falls far short of what is required to meet the SDGs. Without massive investment and scaled-up action, the report calls into question the achievement of the SDGs.

The UN’s Summit of the Future will be held in September 2024. A once-in-a-generation opportunity to enhance cooperation on critical challenges and reaffirm existing commitments, including to the Sustainable Development Goals.

Yambasu understands these challenges all too well, as she works closely with adolescent girls, women and vulnerable persons, including those with disabilities and implores all governments, stakeholders and the older generation to give girls a chance to live their life as they choose

“A chance to go to school and to later on choose the husband of their choice. They go into forced marriages with their hearts bleeding and the trajectory of their lives changing for the worst. All children deserve protection and happiness, and we now have a legal blueprint to safeguard their dreams,” she says.

Stressing that girls deserve “access to all the tools necessary to fully participate in developing our nations in Africa. We need to rise up against all harmful practices. The traditions are there, yes, and we want to preserve them. But let us keep only those that develop and advance our communities.”

『INPS Japan/ IPS UN Bureau』

In the time of digital feudalism, we need critical journalists' voices

BY Aurora Weiss



Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting (SHDM) of 2024 - Media Literacy and Democracy
Photo: OSCE

Vienna (INPS Japan) - Media literacy is a skill learned like reading or math. It is the ability to navigate within today's complex and ever-changing media landscape and to know how to consume information, ask critical questions, avoid manipulation, and engage in digital spaces safely and confidently. As one of the life tools, educational initiatives on that topic were also launched in schools.

To discuss this topic more than 200 people from across the “Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe” region, meet end of the May 2024. at the Supplementary



Teresa Ribeiro (OSCE) Photo: portugal.gov.pt

Human Dimension Meeting under the title “Media Literacy and Democracy”. The gathering was organized by the OSCE Chairpersonship of Malta, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM) and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). Chair-in-Office Minister Dr. Ian Borg has consistently emphasized its significance, stating that “in an era characterized by rapid and often unchecked information flows, media literacy is not just beneficial but essential. This is especially true during this important election year, where an informed electorate, capable of critically assessing the information they encounter, strengthens the resilience of our democracies and enhances trust and confidence in our electoral processes.”

Technological advances have revolutionized access to a wide range of

sources and sophisticated tools that enrich public discourse. However, social media and artificial intelligence do not only provide a vast array of opportunities but also numerous challenges, potentially threatening democratic public debate and undermining trust in democratic processes.

“Media literacy is not only about recognizing fake news; it’s about empowering citizens to navigate the digital landscape with discernment and critical thinking, ensuring informed democratic participation,” said the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Teresa Ribeiro.

The significance of media literacy for the democratic election process was in the focus of the conference. Strategies to enhance media literacy specifically in the context of elections will help to strengthen the foundations of democratic governance and ensure that citizens are empowered to make well-informed decisions at the ballot box.

“And nowhere is it more important to have all the facts than when we are standing in a polling booth to cast our vote,” stressed ODIHR Director Matteo Mecacci.

If you want to protect independence in media: Give journalists appropriate rights to protect themselves

In the pool of fake news, disinformation, and propaganda, the public is usually discussing the consummation of the desirable neutral, objective and critical journalism. Everybody wants to see the glorious “naked truth”! However, what it is and how to create an atmosphere and environment in which journalists can deliver authentic news to the public was explained to us by Dr. Klaus Unterberger, director of the Public Value department at the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF). The task of the Public Value Competence Center is to

proactively promote the quality media debate and make a contribution to the legitimization of ORF in terms of fulfilling its public service mandate, as well as to media literacy and the role of the media for society and democracy.

One of Unterberger’s most significant statements was: “If you want to protect independence in media: Give journalists appropriate rights to protect themselves.”

According to him, there are key pillars that are necessary to maintain neutral and objective journalism inside the media-house. The first one is verifiability through external, public control, effective regulations and mandatory quality assurance. Of course, second is sustainable financing that enables independence from governments, political parties, but above all from the economic interests of the owners.

“Third are the rights and obligations which ensure that journalists are also able to protect their independence, including even from their bosses, if necessary. And last but not least: The courage, boldness and unconditional will for critical journalism beyond “courtyard reporting”, false balancing, and careerism,” told us Unterberger.

We can see that technology, in particular, has led to major problems of credibility in the media space. Unterberger claims that there is a cure in the fight against symptoms such as misinformation and recognizing fake news or propaganda. This can be achieved through close verification, double/triple checking, fact-checking, possibly also through appropriate AI technologies, but above all through the principles of critical journalism that doubts, verifies and questions.

Nowadays, there are many discussions about how to defend freedom of speech against political influences and their interference in private

and public media houses. We asked Klaus Unterberger if he agrees that journalism today, especially with the advent of new technologies, is undervalued and underpaid, which are also signs that the quality has sunk.

“Absolutely! Across Europe, right-wing nationalist, populist governments and parties are jeopardizing the independence of the media, especially the public service media. The last example is Slovakia. At the same time, digital feudalism is emerging in which globally effective technologies are owned by a few corporations whose AI is completely unverifiable by the public. Both developments threaten not only quality journalism, but also the public communication space of democratic societies. As the digital market is dominated by a few oligarchic companies and there is still no business model for quality journalism, its existence is acutely endangered. The cost-cutting programs implemented in the public sector also pose a substantial threat to journalistic quality,” concluded Unterberger in our conversation.

Gender-specific attacks on female journalists is a growing trend. In the Report on the period from November 2023 until June 2024, The Representative on Freedom of the Media Teresa Ribeiro addressed the growing prevalence in various OSCE participating States of the false dichotomy of security versus media freedom. In a rapid rise is the political hostility towards independent journalism, the rise in violence and online attacks against journalists, and the use of technology to surveil journalists.

“Concerns like media sustainability and online violence against journalists are exacerbated by disinformation, technological

advancements and profit-driven business models of Big Tech. Today’s technology concentrates power unprecedentedly, and large language models, like social media, facilitate the exploitation of democratic liberties and openness,” Representative Ribeiro highlighted disruptions in the digital information landscape.

After many journalists suffered pressure from their superiors during the carefully directed pro corona coverage during the pandemic, now some journalists lost their jobs for dared to investigate the war in Ukraine such as flows and money laundering or the behavior of soldiers as well as the weapons trafficking. Some of these European journalists not only lost their jobs but were exiled from their countries, which indicates orchestrated and well-organized attacks at all levels. We had the opportunity to hear their shocking experiences during a side event in OSCE that examined Freedom of the Media and democracy in the European Union. On the other side, Russia is isolated and rules a regime of full message control and disinformation.

Of particular concern is the alarming trend of online violence and disinformation disproportionately targeting women journalists, with severe repercussions for plurality and democracy. With nearly three quarters of women journalists experiencing online gender-based violence in the course of their work increased collaborative efforts are urgently needed to address the safety of women journalists, both online and offline. Studies from OSCE further substantiate a clear causal relationship between online threats and gender-related disinformation targeting women journalists and subsequent offline attacks.

A special phenomenon is the trend of a third party ordering attacks, criminal threats and intimidation on female journalists through

embassy employees who are protected by diplomatic immunity, more precisely, diplomat with Red ID card which grants them full immunity, including against prosecution in criminal matters. The Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as the Austrian Ministry of the Interior, should carry out special supervision, i.e. check individuals to whom they issue the highest rank of diplomatic immunity to foreign agents who operate in their country, thus not only violating the constitution but also the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.

In addition to external factors, professional journalists are also threatened by individuals who have infiltrated the media space and have completely different goals than providing information of public interest. I personally went through attacks orchestrated by individuals who abused their position as producers of the Voice of America (VOA) with the aim of misinforming and discrediting professional journalists, about which the editorial staff was informed. Also worth mentioning are the attacks by political activists Jamin Mujanovic, who presents himself as a Bosniak political expert of Balkan with the aim of sabotaging and discrediting the journalist through social media.

Gender-based violence online and offline and gender-related disinformation endangers the well-being of journalists and their ability to perform their professional duties. These acts have a chilling effect, causing women journalists to self-censor or even leave their careers entirely at a cost not only to those targeted but also to media freedom and plurality as a whole, is agreed by the Joint Statement on the Safety of Women Journalists on the 30th Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council Skopje in December 2023.

The pervasive practice of silencing critical voices continues with an

increasing number of news outlets being declared ‘undesirable’ and outlawed, and journalists being designated as ‘foreign agents.’ The ongoing attacks and imprisonments of independent journalists for simply doing their work, blockages of international information sources, and continuing harassment of journalists living in exile illustrate the grim picture of an information landscape where any courageous effort to disseminate independent news and information carries a profound personal risk.

It is good that we have recently started to talk about media literacy, but we should never stop talking about the safety of journalists. That is why we are putting to light a record number of media workers who were killed while performing their jobs.

Attacks on journalists’ lives and liberty remained at near-record levels in 2023, with the Committee to Protect Journalists documenting 99 journalists killed worldwide, the highest total since 2015. CPJ also documented 320 journalists imprisoned for their work as of the December 1 date of its annual prison census — near the global all-time high of more than 360 a year earlier.

The Israel-Gaza war has taken an unprecedented toll on Gazan journalists since Israel declared war on Hamas following its attack against Israel on October 7, 2023. As of July 1, 2024, preliminary investigations from the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) showed at least 108 journalists and media workers were among the more than 38,000 killed since the war began. 32 journalists were reported injured, 2 journalists were reported missing and 51 were reported arrested.

Eighteen journalists and media workers were killed in the Russo-

Ukrainian War, seven in the war in Donbas in 2014–2015, and ten in the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Ribeiro in the report on the 13 June 2024 underlined the need to break the vicious circle of impunity and reignite efforts to ensure full accountability for the assassination of journalist Giorgos Karaivaz, in Greece, Ján Kuciak, in Slovakia, and Duško Jovanović, who was murdered 20 years ago in Montenegro.

“I also expressed my deep concern regarding the setback caused by the unfortunate acquittal in the murder case of journalist Slavko Ćuruvija, in Serbia. The true test of a rule of law-based society is how it delivers justice, especially to those who put themselves at risk to uphold the values of a free press. I will also keep an eye on the judicial processes of the assassination of journalists Daphne Caruana Galizia in Malta, and of Peter R. de Vries in the Netherlands. I am relieved to hear that yesterday a Dutch court convicted several suspects for the killing of investigative reporter de Vries,” stressed Ribeiro in her report in June 2024

『INPS Japan』

Vague War

BY Roman Yanushevsky



"A fortified room in a house in Be'eri, an Israeli kibbutz near the Gaza Strip, tells a harrowing story. Inside, a couple with two children desperately held the door shut to keep terrorists out. The militants began shooting through the door, tragically killing the mother on the spot. Her young son also succumbed to his wounds from severe blood loss shortly afterward. The teenage daughter heroically managed to save her father's life by staunching the bleeding. Although his leg was amputated, he survived. Inside the room, there is a mattress soaked in blood, numerous stains on the floor, and bullet holes riddling the walls—a testament to the brutal reality faced by those living in the kibbutz". Photo by Roman Yanushevsky.

Tel Aviv (INPS Japan) -There is a profound misunderstanding of the events unfolding in Gaza Strip and Israel. Most of the public doesn't even attempt to delve into it. As for the news, they provide only fragmented information and don't offer the full perspective. Moreover, there are entities deliberately distorting information.

More than 37,000 casualties in Gaza, including children, numerous internally displaced persons, extensive destruction, reports of hunger, and accusations of genocide. The situation of Palestinians in the sector is dire.

The current war in the Gaza Strip is related to several of the United Nations' sustainable development goals simultaneously: Goal 2 – to reduce hunger, and Goal 16 – peace, justice, and strong institutions.

When analyzing wars and conflicts around the world, attention should be paid to how they began. The war in Gaza started with a meticulously planned bloody terrorist attack on Israel on October 7th.

The secret plan of Hamas

Since 2007, the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas has been in control of the Gaza Strip. It is recognized as a terrorist organization by several countries. Its charter explicitly states its goal of destroying the State of Israel. This is not mere rhetoric but the group's fundamental aspiration, inevitably leading to regular escalations.

In recent years, Hamas had been working on a plan to invade Israeli territory, carry out the mass killing of Israelis and take hostages. The goal of the attack was to attract global attention to the Palestinian cause and to provoke Israel into deploying troops into the Gaza Strip.

The plan was developed secretly by a small group of leaders within the organization. The operatives prepared for the attack over several years, understanding only in general terms what was expected of them. However, the specific details were only presented to them early on Saturday morning, October 7th, just hours before the invasion took place.

On that day in Israel, the religious holiday of Shmini Atzeret was being observed, coinciding with the traditional day of rest for Jews, Shabbat. Hamas deliberately exploited this to lower Israeli vigilance.

At the time, Israel's political leadership believed Hamas had moved away from violence. The military and intelligence did not anticipate a large-scale attack, resulting in fewer forces deployed on the ground than usual. Additionally, Israel relied on its "smart fence" – a strip of obstacles equipped with sensors and an automatic firing system – along the Gaza border. However, the militants meticulously planned every detail, finding individual solutions to circumvent each element of Israeli defense.

Early in the morning on October 7th, Israelis were unexpectedly showered with a salvo of rockets – militants fired around three thousand rockets at Israeli towns and villages within the first three hours of the attack, causing chaos and overwhelming the defense systems.

Simultaneously, thousands of well-prepared and heavily armed militants breached Israel's "smart fence" at multiple points, using drones to disable sections and infiltrating Israeli territory. Some flew over the fence on paragliders, others approached by land or sea. Israeli forces defending the perimeter were swept aside and

destroyed. Israelis had not anticipated such a massive attack, and individual tanks and patrols were no match for thousands of well-prepared fighters.

Despite intelligence within Israel's military intelligence indicating preparations for such an attack, the leadership of the security services and the military did not believe Hamas would go through with it. As a result, Israel paid a very high price. Militant squads seized a number of IDF bases and strategic points along the border and conducted a brutal massacre in most settlements and some cities within a 20-kilometer radius of the border with the sector.

In border settlements, militants killed everything in their path – people and domestic animals. They broke into homes and shot the inhabitants. Some of the locals managed to barricade themselves in fortified rooms with stronger walls against rocket fragments but not against terrorists with Kalashnikovs.

Later, ordinary residents of the Gaza Strip, including teenagers, joined in looting these settlements and setting fire to homes, seeking to inflict more damage. In some cases, they found hiding Israelis and handed them over to the militants.

Hamas fighters gleefully posted videos of their atrocities on social media. There was at least one instance where they went live on Facebook from a hostage's account, mocking them in front of their friends and family, and then killing some of the captives.

In settlements like Be'eri, Kfar Aza, Nir Oz, Nir Am, Nahal Oz, Mefalsim, and others, 10-15% of the population perished, while others were taken hostage and abducted.

Overall, about 1200 Israelis and citizens of other countries perished in a single day. Armed police and individual soldiers who joined them resisted the militants' special forces, but the forces were too uneven.

Bloodshower at the Nova musical festival

During the night of October 7th, about five kilometers from the border, the electronic music festival "Nova" was taking place in a natural setting, attended by approximately three thousand people.

The partygoers were attacked from different directions by Palestinian militants. Although most festival participants managed to evacuate the area quickly before the jihadists' attack, many people remained when militants armed with rifles and grenade launchers appeared.

At least 364 people were killed on the scene. Several stories of personal heroism evolved. Off-duty and unarmed IDF soldier Aner Shapira saved dozens of lives by organizing resistance. He caught grenades thrown into the shelter where frightened festival participants took a hideaway and threw them back towards the attackers. He returned seven grenades to the attackers; the eighth exploded in his hands, and Aner tragically lost his life.

In another incident, clothing vendor Ben Shimoni quickly understood the situation. Militants had blocked movement on the only road leading

away from the festival and were shooting at all vehicles. Ben loaded as many festival participants as he could into his car and took unconventional action. He drove through a hole in the fence made by militants into Gaza territory and, navigating through the most dangerous area on Palestinian territory, returned to Israel through another hole in the fence. He successfully rescued people twice, but when he returned a third time to save a friend, he was shot and killed.

There are numerous accounts of militants committing brutal sexual assaults on captured girls, followed by their mutilation while still alive. After the acts of violence, they were killed. Around forty festival participants were taken hostage by Islamists into the Gaza Strip.

The exact number of casualties on October 7th and the number of hostages remains unknown due to the chaos on the ground and



Private home in Be'eri following the Hamas October 7th attack. Around 70 Hamas militants of the al-Qassam Brigades, Nuseirat Battalion, along with DFLP militants had attacked the kibbutz and at least 130 people were killed in the attack, including women (such as peace activist Vivian Silver), children, and one infant, claiming the lives of 10% of the farming community's residents. Dozens of homes were also burned down. This incident occurred concurrently with a series of other massacres and military engagements in multiple neighbouring Israeli communities, including Netiv haAsara, Kfar Aza, and the Rei'm music festival massacre. Credit: Roman Yanushevsky

Hamas' refusal to share information about the individuals they are holding.

By the end of November, with the involvement of international mediators, Israel managed to negotiate the release of nearly half of approximately 250 hostages in exchange for a temporary ceasefire and the release of Palestinian prisoners from Israeli prisons convicted of terrorist activities. Since then, complex and so far fruitless negotiations have been ongoing with Hamas for the release of the remaining hostages.

The Gaza war

The attack on October 7th in Israel is recognized as the deadliest terrorist attack in the country's history. It took three days to fully clear Israeli territory of militants. By the end of October, Israel initiated a military operation in the Gaza Strip with two objectives: to free the hostages and to destroy Hamas, thereby neutralizing its military capabilities.

Since Hamas seized power in the Gaza Strip in the summer of 2007, it has actively prepared for war with Israel. Billions of dollars in aid intended for building hospitals, schools and civil infrastructure for Palestinians were deliberately invested in military infrastructure instead. An extensive network of tunnels was constructed underground, used by militants for hiding, movement, holding hostages, and attacking Israeli soldiers. Meanwhile, not a single bomb shelter was built for ordinary Palestinians.

The group specifically planned to capture hostages, knowing that Israeli society places a higher value on human life, which would make this a painful blow to Israelis. Most hostages taken were civilians

whose homes were invaded by militants, with only some being military personnel. Among those held in Gaza were citizens of other countries, not just Israelis.

Hamas leadership are cynical religious fanatics for whom human life holds no value. Therefore, the attack plan anticipated Israeli retaliation against terrorist targets in the Gaza Strip.

Hamas believes that the higher the death toll in the sector, the better it is for the group as it increases international pressure on Israel. Consequently, Hamas not only fails to protect the civilian population in the sector but deliberately places military and terrorist infrastructure in residential areas, launches attacks from there against Israeli positions, loots incoming aid and food supplies to artificially create a humanitarian crisis.

Paradoxically, it is the Israeli army that makes efforts to reduce casualties. Before commencing operations in any given neighborhood, the army issues warnings to residents over several days, thereby sacrificing the element of surprise and allowing some terrorists to escape alongside civilians. Strikes are meticulously planned to minimize losses.

Another weapon actively used by Hamas is deception. Data on Gaza casualties only come from sources under the group's control, making verification impossible. Experts note that the published statistics on deaths are highly illogical, clearly inflated, and manipulated. However, due to the lack of alternative figures, the UN and other countries are forced to rely on what is available.

Historical practices show that during conflicts, all deaths and those naturally dying in Gaza are automatically attributed to Israel. This

includes not only militants killed in combat or by “friendly fire,” but also people who die from diseases or old age, just as in peacetime. Hamas artificially inflates the number of dead children and women, counting on sympathy from people unfamiliar with the specifics of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Given that this is a hybrid war between states and a terrorist organization, Hamas heavily relies on propaganda spread through multiple channels. Independent journalism in Gaza does not exist; free journalists have long left the sector or perished at the hands of Islamists. Consequently, all so-called reporters in Gaza engage not in journalism but in propaganda.

Another phenomenon existing for years is “Pallywood,” where disguised locals portray wounded and dying due to Israeli strikes. At times, these actors forget their role, opening their eyes or moving. However, many worldwide are willing to believe these staged performances.

The extensive military actions and Hamas’ deliberate placement of military assets and tunnels in residential areas have led to significant destruction in certain Gaza sectors. Among the Palestinian casualties are civilians.

Back in autumn, Israel demanded Hamas release all hostages and return the bodies of those killed. This could have ended the war, but Hamas is not interested in that. Hostages are merely a tool of pressure on Israel. Periodically, the group releases threatening videos with kidnapped individuals, attempting to influence public opinion in Israel. If Hamas desired, it could have ended the war long ago, but now that seems unrealistic.

War on Multiple Fronts

While often not highlighted in the news, Israel is actually facing not only Hamas but the entire so-called “Axis of Resistance” – a network of militarized groups in the Middle East created by Iran. This axis includes Hezbollah in Lebanon, Ansar Allah (the Houthis) in Yemen, pro-Iranian groups in Syria and Iraq. All of these groups regularly shell Israel or launch drones towards its territory. However, the main source of this aggression is Iran herself. Iran, whose current Islamic regime views the destruction of the State of Israel as its mission, stands as the primary antagonist.

In April, for the first time in the history of its regime, Iran directly attacked Israeli territory with hundreds of rockets and drones. With the involvement of the United States and several moderate Arab regimes in the region, this threat was neutralized. The rockets and drones did not cause significant damage, as the vast majority were intercepted upon approach. At the request of the US, Israel conducted a relatively restrained but demonstrative strike, destroying a modern air defense system that was protecting a crucial strategic site in Iran.

The foremost Iranian proxy abroad is the Lebanese group Hezbollah. Just a day after Hamas’s attack on October 8th, Hezbollah began shelling neighboring Israel without any apparent cause, in a show of solidarity with the Palestinian group.

Gradually, Hezbollah has been increasing pressure on Israel, inflicting significant damage on Israeli towns and settlements near the border. Over the past six months, the United States and France have been making diplomatic efforts to restrain both Israel and Hezbollah, aiming to prevent this conflict from escalating into an unforeseen regional war.

However, these negotiations have yet to yield any significant breakthroughs, and it is doubtful they will. The question of an impending large-scale war between Israel and Lebanon looms large against the backdrop of daily shelling from Israeli territory. This war could potentially commence in the coming weeks.

Roof on Fire

As early as October, residents of the shelled areas in northern Israel began leaving their homes out of fear for their lives. Later, a centralized evacuation was carried out.

These people—more than 61,000 individuals—are now living with friends and relatives or in hotels paid for by the government. They still cannot return home because Hezbollah continues to heavily shell northern Israel, sometimes dozens of times a day.

According to a survey by Tel-Hai College, 13% of evacuated residents from northern Israel stated that they will definitely not return to their apartments and houses because they fear Hezbollah attacks following a similar scenario as Hamas.

Additionally, over 70,000 residents from communities in the south, living near the Gaza Strip, were also forced to leave their homes due to the fighting in the area. Some of these internally displaced persons have already been able to return home.

Israel's land area is only 22,000 square kilometers, whereas for comparison, Japan's area is 378,000 square kilometers. During intense rocket attacks on Israel, there are almost no peaceful places left within it. Therefore, there are tens of thousands of other families who have sent their children abroad, spending their savings just to get them away from the war.

Hana Tzipori, a resident of central Israel, hasn't been living in Israel for long. She repatriated in November 2022 from Russia after a "special military operation" against Ukraine had begun. At that time, she couldn't have imagined that war would find them in Israel too.

"On the morning of October 7, we were sound asleep when suddenly the air raid sirens went off," recounted Hana. "The sirens wouldn't stop, and we rushed to take cover in a reinforced room. It was very scary because we didn't understand what was happening. There were no preliminary signs of this. I saw fear in the eyes of my five-year-old son, and I was very anxious myself. We spent the entire day in that room under bombardment, reading the news non-stop. The moment Israel declared war on Hamas stood out to me especially. That's when it became truly terrifying. War—it was a word from books, from history textbooks. And suddenly, it turns out it's unfolding right next to you."

According to her, reports of terrorists breaking into residential homes and killing people stripped them of their sense of security in their own home. Yet, the sense of reality was very blurred—it felt like a terrible dream.

"After the Home Front Command issued a recommendation for Israelis to stock up on food and supplies for three days, I realized I couldn't take it anymore," she continued. "I grabbed my mom and my two sons, and we flew to Cyprus. The prices of plane tickets skyrocketed, but luckily, we managed to buy them."

Hana describes how they couldn't relax for a long time in Cyprus, flinching at any loud noise. After seeing countless Hamas videos of brutal violence against Israelis, she developed PTSD. While in a safe neighboring country, her sons even made terrorists the main characters in their games. They continued to feel anxiety and fear, and

the sight of blood triggered panic. Moreover, according to her, every time she heard Arabic spoken on the street, she was overcome with horror.

Hana and her family had to return to Israel one month later—the tourist season ended in Cyprus, all hotels, restaurants, and shops were closing, and they made the decision to return home.

Shai is a programmer who lives in the village of Kfar Vradim, just six kilometers from the border with Lebanon. Amidst the sharp escalation of the situation in the fall, he evacuated his wife and two young children to another country. They lived in Europe for over three months, but they were forced to return because their savings were running out, and his employer demanded his return to Israel to regularly attend the office.

The air raid sirens in his village sound every week. In neighboring villages, it's every day. He hears drones and rockets flying past, Israeli defense systems intercepting them, and artillery responding to sources of fire in Lebanon. Shai has seen rockets from Shiite militants flying directly overhead towards deeper parts of Israel.

It turns out that he and his family live very close to the front lines. Yet their village has not been evacuated. He has nowhere else to go.

“We’re all on edge. I’m afraid to leave for work, leaving my wife and children alone. Thankfully, I often get permission to work from home,” says Shai. “Because of the constant anxiety, I started drinking every evening. I even smoke marijuana now to calm down, but it doesn’t help me relax. I’m always tense and worried about my family.”

The world in war

We were born and have lived most of our lives in relatively peaceful

times. War for us is something that happens far away. In the news, in movies, in books. But the last few years have shown that war is much closer to us than it may seem.

The global system that emerged after World War II, which rejected war as a means of resolving conflicts, is gradually wearing down. Outdated mechanisms are ceasing to work. As a result, there are more wars in the world, and the anti-war immunity has been nearly lost. Our generation needs to develop a new system that will protect our children and grandchildren from war and give us all hope for a better future.”

『INPS Japan』

Tracing impact of India's 1991 Trombay radioactive leakage

BY Hrutwi Kshirsagar and Sumaiya Ali



Caption: Corrosive pipeline in the vicinity adjacent to BARC south gate, Trombay district. Photo credit: Hrutwi Kshirsagar

Mumbai (London Post) -Mumbai (London Post) – Adjacent to the cemented walls with overriding barbed wires of Bhabha Atomic Research Center (BARC) complex is the village settlement of Trombay, an eastern suburb of Mumbai. This vicinity is characterised by tin-roofed houses and small gangways to walk through.

The area exudes a pungent and chemical-like odour. Trombay is at walking distance to the two research reactors- CIRUS and Dhruva, which are located within the premises of Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) complex.

The government authorities have coiled the atomic power plant secrecy for nearly seven decades. On December 1, 1991, there was an outflow of a major radioactive leakage from the vicinity of CIRUS and Dhruva reactor complex.

The incident was reported in the August-September 1992 issue of Anumukti, a journal which calls for a non-nuclear India and is dedicated to it. It suggests that reactors located at Trombay surmised that traces of harmful effluents likely trickled into the “Arabian Sea” water stream after severe soil contamination.

The area established over criss-crossed lines of flowing radioactive chemical effluents extrapolated high readings of Cesium-137. These readings were ubiquitous in the soil bed between the reactor and the sea. The pipelines quoted by institutions’ operators end up in the water stream.

When questioned, a scientist at BARC (Bhabha Atomic Research Centre) denied the presence of inhabitancy. “There is no settlement,” the scientist replied. However, the nearest settlements are at Trombay Koliwada and Trombay Cheeta camp, which have people from the low-income class fishermen in majority.

Rupa Chinai, a journalist based in Mumbai, reported about the leakage in 1992. Her article suggests that readings also infer that its consumption by marine life disrupts the food chain. Percolation in



Laboratories BARC also played an essential and important role in nuclear weapons technology and research in India. The plutonium used in India's 1974 Smiling Buddha nuclear test came from a research reactor CIRUS here. Photo: Nuclear reactor of Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (view from Arabian sea) By Sobarwiki – Own work, Public Domain.

marine life can result in severe repercussions on the human body. “Radioactivity is invisible in water and has a very long life,” Chinai comments. Tritiated water, as it is chemically identical to water (identical to regular water), can be easily absorbed through ingestion, through the skin, or vapours can be breathed in.

“Aqua, vegetation, birds, and insects are deemed to be carriers; however, the inhabitants are unaware of the incidents’ occurrence to date”, the report by Chinai adds.

On our visit to the nearest hospital to the site of the 1991 radioactive leakage, they told us of having received a “significant number of women delivering stillbirths between

On our visit to the nearest hospital to the site of the 1991 radioactive leakage, they told us of having received a “significant number of

women delivering stillbirths between 1991-2000,” a senior medical nurse at the hospital said. The same year of the nuclear leak incident.

Dr. A. Gopalkrishnan, former chairman of Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB), pointed out that many villagers from 1970 to 1980s, appointed as temporary workers, were commissioned to clean up radioactive material. The village in Trombay circumscribes a majority of BARC technicians who state that they are checked every day before entering the technicians’ area and while leaving. They are checked to detect if anybody is exposed to radioactivity. When asked, the retired technicians also commented that they were unaware of the reading fluctuations themselves and relied on the operator’s command while working.

According to the website of Bhabha Atomic Research Centre’s safety module, comprehensive monitoring and regular testing is essential.

In our conversation with the local residents of Trombay there seemed to be dissatisfaction with the measures taken by BARC. “Despite having the majority of BARC workers from our community, none of the institutions’ representatives have come for periodical check-ups or study,” one of them told us.

Moreover, provisions laid out in chapter II of The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, explain improving the quality of the environment and preventing, controlling, and abating environmental pollution.

Trombay Koliwada fishermen, at present, are raising complaints about the lack of variety of fish. “The fishnets catch smaller fishes than we used to web before,” said Sanjay Turbhekar, a fisherman residing at Koliwada.

Operators and current scientists claim to have published documents and safety manuals that they use, available to the public on their websites. Find more information on Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), Department of Atomic Energy, Government of India.

Anti-Nuclear resistance in India

In India's Southern state Tamil Nadu is the Kudankulam Power Plant, the country's largest nuclear power plant. Ever since it was proposed in 1979, local residents have been protesting against it. Protestors claim that the effluents released from the plant is discharged into the sea which impacts the quality of fishes. India's magazine Caravan reports that protests against the project picked up in 2011 after the Fukushima disaster in Japan. Fish workers say that ever since the plant has been functional, the quality of fish and their variety has decreased.

66 people were arrested and 1 was killed in 2012 when final step was being completed to make it operational.

In Maharashtra, people have been agitating from time to time regarding the "dark side" of the Tarapur Nuclear Power Plant. A report in Indian newspaper The Telegraph reports that the nuclear power plant has been implemented despite protests from the local villagers and fishermen.

However, a study done by researchers of Bhabha Atomic Research Centre has claimed that radioactive discharge and potential environmental damage from the six plants in India since the last 20 years has been "minimal".

『INPS Japan/London post』

Climate breakdown magnifies western Nepal's woes

BY Unnati Chaudhary

Parched by heatwave and drought, Western Nepal is running out of water

Kailali (Nepali Times) - The mountains of western Nepal have always been food deficit because of the lack of irrigation. Farmers migrated to the plains, where farming has been easier.

But a searing heatwave this year accompanied by a delayed monsoon has led to a water crisis that threatens to undermine Nepal's gains in achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The climate crisis is a water crisis, and it has hit food production, nutrition and the availability of safe drinking water.



Rekcha residents marched to the municipality office with pitchers in their staw basket to demonstate their desperation for water. Photos: LAXMI BHANDARI

Not everything can be blamed on climate breakdown. Wells that used to be the last resort for rice planting, for example, have gone dry because of a falling water table.

In the highway town of Attariya, there used to be five deep tubewells that supplied 4 million litres of water each day to the city's 5,500 households. In the last three years, all but one of them has dried up. The municipality then drilled four more 80m deep wells, but even these have water only for six months in a year.

In the city of Dhangadi with a population of 300,000 on the Indian border, the municipality dug three deep wells after household wells went dry. This summer, even the tubewells ran out of water. The situation is similar in other nearby border towns.

Experts say the reason for the falling water levels in the acquifers

has more to do with over-extraction of groundwater both in Nepal and neighbouring India, where farmers get subsidised electricity for irrigation pumps. The area's industries and farms also have their own wells that have tapped into what used to be a plentiful groundwater supply.

"The water begins to dry out after the end of winter," says Phulram Chaudhary of the nearby town of Krishnapur. "And till the monsoon arrives in June there is no water at all."

Indeed, towns and cities desperate for water are drilling ever deeper for precious water, using up a diminishing supply in the groundwater. Milanpur town dug a 90m deep borewell, but it ran out within ten days.

The over-exploitation of ground water by an expanding populating and growing household and agricultural use has magnified the impact of climate breakdown which has led to chronic winter drought, heatwaves and erratic monsoons in western Nepal.

"Ten years ago, it was enough to drill 20 metres to get water all year round, now it is no water even at 80 metres," says Kalidevi Chaudhary, a farmer in the village of Kailari.

She adds: "There is no water for drinking. Don't even ask me about irrigation."

Water expert and professor at Tribhuvan University's Central Department of Environmental Science Sudeep Thakuri says research has shown that the groundwater table across the Tarai has dropped mainly because of over-extraction, denudation in the catchment areas of the Chure, sand mining in the rivers, as well as climate change.

"We have disturbed the water cycle, and the climate crisis has made the problem more acute with long droughts and uncertain monsoons," Thakuri says. "This means there is not enough recharge of

groundwater."

The distance between borewells and tube wells has also decreased as Tarai settlements grow and water demand increases. Indeed, 140 boreholes have been dug in Kailali and Kanchanpur, out of which only 91 still have water.

Additionally, water has also been extracted through 1,001 deep tube wells in these two districts, according to the Groundwater Resources and Irrigation Development Division offices there.

Nepal's provincial and local governments have invested heavily in subsidising drilling for groundwater, as per the federal policy of maximum utilisation of groundwater with a budget to drill 100 borewells.

Tara Dutta Joshi, head of the Mahakali Irrigation Project in Kanchanpur says that although the aim was to use the groundwater extracted from these projects for the next 20 years, six of the 90 boreholes have already dried up.

While tube wells pump up water from up to 40m feet below ground, there is no water to be found at this depth anymore in most of the western Tarai. Meanwhile, boreholes require drilling up to 110m, and



Tarai's groundwater is being used as a bargaining chip by elected officials, who have drilled arbitrarily to appease voters.

artesian water is extracted between 110-400m below.

Experts say the Tarai's groundwater is being used as a bargaining chip by elected officials, who have drilled arbitrarily to appease voters. There is a lack of research as well as policy regarding how many boreholes can be drilled in a given area, and how much water can be extracted.

Sankar Dutta Awasthi of Kailari village says federal decentralisation led to competition among local politicians to see who could supply more water to their electorates. Indeed, 1,200 small-scale groundwater projects have been constructed in this municipality since the formation of the local government in 2017 in addition to larger-scale projects carried out by the provincial and federal governments.

"Elected officials are far more concerned about how to repeatedly ensure groundwater projects in their constituency than about how this uncontrolled extraction is going to affect the region in the future," says Awasthi.

One of the bores drilled in Kailari was for Ramesh Chaudhary four years ago for irrigation, but the water dried up within two years before a canal could be completed. Nearby in the village of Rampur, a 200m deep borewell drilled for irrigation also went dry.

"The water never even reached any farmer's field, what a waste of Rs10 million," says Chaudhary.

Water expert Tarka Raj Joshi notes that one tubewell should be enough to sustain a village some decades ago, while today even three tubewells in one household is not enough to fulfil basic water needs.

"The local, provincial, and federal governments' water distribution schemes will have a major impact on groundwater levels in the Tarai," says Joshi. "No one is thinking about what this crisis means for the

future."

The shortage of water threatens to undermine Nepal's gains in reducing infant and child mortality as targeted in the SDG because children are forced to drink contaminated water. Their nutrition is also affected as food production is reduced because of lack of irrigation water. All this feeds into the outmigration trend.

The answer is to allow ground recharge through regeneration of trees in the Chure, zoning to regulate rampant urbanisation, a tax on extraction of deep groundwater, and channeling water from the Karnali and Mahakali rivers to augment supply so there is less reliance on aquifers.

Water shortage drives Surkhet villagers out

The delay in the onset of the monsoon rains in June meant that the village of Rekcha had a severe shortage of water.

Residents started their day as usual, placing pitchers in their straw baskets by the community taps. But instead of heading to the wells to fetch water, they marched to the municipality office to demonstrate.

The village's Water Supply Struggle Committee was led by Ward member Tapendra Chhetri who had to resort to a sit-in outside the municipality out of desperation for water.

Rekcha used to be an ideal place for settlers because of its fertile soil and plentiful water. Even though the 11 wells in the village produced enough water to sustain its families for decades, they have now all dried up.

"Villagers now collect what little water is left on the bottom of the wells, using cloth for filtration," says ward member Chhetri. "This village is dying of thirst."

The extreme water shortage has begun to drive residents out. Until five years ago, Rekcha village had 115 households, but 35 families have migrated elsewhere since. Khagisara Shahi was one of the villagers who walked with her water pitcher to the rural municipality headquarters. Like the rest of her neighbours she is finding it increasingly difficult to survive in Rekcha.

“Our pleas fell on deaf ears, so we walked all the way here with our pitchers to make the leadership aware of our plight,” says Shahi. “We make do at other times, but it is impossible to live without water, especially when it is getting hotter.”

Even when the village’s wells had water, it used to take hours of standing in queue for each household to collect water from their homes. Now that the wells have dried up, the journey to other sources of water is even longer, and the drudgery falls on women.

“There is not enough time in the day to do all the housework, look after the farm and livestock, and fetch water,” says Shahi.

Four years ago, the rural municipality made plans to bring water up to the village from the Karnali river, for which they allocated a budget of Rs17.2 million. However, the project fell through due to difficulties with road access.

Chaukune Rural Municipality Chair Khadka BK says that local government resources alone will not be enough to provide drinking water to Rekcha. “The remoteness of the village means we need federal and provincial support.”

Meanwhile, the villagers look down on the clear blue water of the

snowfed Karnali River below, while their fields are parched and their children are complaining of thirst.

『INPS Japan/Nepali Times』

Indignity, Disease, Death—The Life of a Sewer Worker in Pakistan

BY Zofeen Ebrahim



A sewer worker who is popularly known as Mithoo emerges from the sewer.
Credit: Zofeen T. Ebrahim/IPS

KARACHI (IPS) – A dark head emerges, followed by the torso. The balding man heaves himself up, hands on the sides of the manhole,

as he is helped by two men. Gasping for breath, the man, who seems to be in his late 40s, sits on the edge, wearing just a pair of dark pants, the same color as the putrid swirling water he comes out from.

This is an all-too-familiar sight in Karachi, with its over 20 million residents producing 475 million gallons per day (MGD) of wastewater going into decades-old crumbling sewerage-systems.

After over a hundred dives into the sewers in the last two years, Adil Masih, 22, says, “I have proved to my seniors, I can do the job well.” He hopes to be upgraded from a kachha (not formally employed) to a pucca (permanent) employee at Karachi’s government-owned Karachi Water and Sewerage Company (KWSC), formerly known as the Karachi Water and Sewerage Board and is commonly referred to as the water board, in the next six months.

Earning Rs 25,000 (USD 90) a month, which Adil gets as a lump sum of Rs75,000 (USD 269) every three months, the pay will rise to Rs 32,000 (USD 115), which is the minimum wages in Sindh province set by the government once he becomes pucca.

“The first time is always the most terrifying experience,” recalls



Sewer work is dirty but essential work in a busy city like Karachi. A worker popularly known as Mithoo rests after unblocking sewage. Credit: Zofeen T. Ebrahim/IPS

Amjad Masih, 48, sporting a metallic earring in his left lobe. Among the 2,300 sewer cleaners under the employment of the KWSC, to do manual scavenging to unclog the drains, he claims to have taught Adil the dos and donts of diving into the slush. “You have to be smart to outdo death, which is our companion as we go down,” he says.

It is not the army of cockroaches and the stink that greets you when you open the manhole lid to get in, or the rats swimming in filthy water, but the blades and used syringes floating that are a cause for concern for many as they go down to bring up the rocks and the buckets of filthy silt.

But getting into the sewers is a last resort. “We first try to unclog the line using a long bamboo shaft to prod and loosen the waste, when

that fails, we climb down into the gutters and clean them with our hands,” explains Amjad, employed with the water and sanitation company since 2014, and becoming permanent in 2017.

Toxic cauldron

Although the civic agency claims the workers are provided personal protective equipment to shield them from chemical, physical and microbial hazards, many, like Amjad, refuse to wear it.

“I need to feel the rocks and stones with my feet to be able to bring them up,” he says. “Nothing happens,” adds Adil. “We go to the doctor for treatment and are back at work.”

A former KWSC official, speaking to IPS on condition of anonymity, said there have been several deaths and injuries. “It is up to the supervisors to ensure they only send men down the manhole who comply with safety regulations.” He said the protective gear must include gas masks, ladders, and gloves as the “bare minimum,” as there are definite health risks as well as the risk of losing your life.

More than the physical hazards, it is the invisible danger stalking these men, in the form of gases like methane, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide and nitrous oxide—produced when wastewater contains chlorine bleaches, industrial solvents and gasoline—when mixed with concrete in drainpipes—that have taken the lives of these cleaners.

Earlier in March, two young sanitation workers, Arif Moon Masih, 25, and Shan Masih, 23, died after inhaling toxic fumes in Faisalabad, in the Punjab province. In January, two workers in Karachi met with a similar fate while cleaning sewerage lines.

According to Sweepers Are Superheroes, an advocacy campaign group, around 84 sewage workers have died in 19 districts of Pakistan

over the past five years. In neighboring India, one sewer worker dies every five days, according to a 2018 report by the National Commission for Safai Karamcharis.

“I had almost died once,” recalls Amjad, of how he got “gassed” and passed out. “Luckily for me, I did the job and came up and then collapsed.”

But there have been quite a few of his colleagues, he says, who have died due to inhalation while still inside.

Adil said he has inhaled gases quite a few times too. “My eyes burn, and when I come out, I vomit and drink a bottle of cold fizzy drink and am set again,” he said. But the last time it happened, he had to be hospitalized as he had passed out.

With time, says Amjad, they have learned to take precautions.

“We open the manhole lid to let the gases escape before going in,” he says. A dead rat floating on the surface is a giveaway that there are gases, he adds.

The KWSC cleaners work as a team of four. One is sent down wearing a harness tied to a rope. If something is not right or he’s done the job, he tugs at the rope, and the three men waiting outside immediately pull him out. But the man is pulled out after three to four minutes have elapsed without waiting for the tug “in case he has become unconscious,” explains Amjad. He claims to be able to hold his breath for as long as five minutes because “I have to sometimes go as deep as 30 feet.” Adil is only able to do a maximum of seven feet and hold his breath for no more than two minutes, but the gases are found in shallower drains. Along with buckets of silt, the drains are often clogged with stones and boulders that need to be brought up, to allow the water to flow freely.

Amjad and Adil also take on private work, like the rest of the KWSC sanitation workers. The agency knows but looks the other way. “If they can get earn a little extra, it is ok,” says the officer.

“We are called to open up blocked drains by residents and restaurant management and for a couple hours of work, we are able to earn well,” says Adil.

Janitorial work reserved for Christians

Adil and Amjad are unrelated but carry the same surname—Masih—which points to their religion—both are Christians. According to WaterAid Pakistan, 80 percent of sanitation workers in Pakistan are Christians, despite them making up just 2 percent of the general population according to the 2023 census. The report *Shame and Stigma in Sanitation*, published by the Center for Law & Justice (CLJ) in 2021, connects sanitation work to the age-old caste system prevalent in the Indian sub-continent that attached birth to occupations.

“This ruthless practice has died down to a large extent in Pakistan, but sanitation is probably the only occupation where this traditional caste structure continues,” it points out.

The CLJ’s report carries a survey of the employees of the Water and Sanitation Agency (WASA), which provides drinking water and ensures the smooth working of the sewerage systems, and the Lahore Waste Management Company (LWMC), which is tasked with collecting and disposing of solid waste from households, industries and hospitals in Lahore city, in the Punjab province. WASA has 2,240 sanitation workers, out of which 1,609 are Christians. The LWMC has 9,000 workers and all of them are Christians. 87 percent of the

employees in both organizations believed “janitorial work is only for Christians,” while 72 percent of Christian workers said their Muslim coworkers “believe that this work is not for them.”

The same is true for Karachi as well. Till about five years ago, the KWSC would advertise for the job of sewer cleaners, specifically asking for non-Muslims but stopped after receiving criticism from rights groups.

“We removed this condition and started hiring Muslims for the cleaning of sewers, but they refuse to go down the sewers,” said the KWSC official. In Punjab province, the discriminatory policy of employing only non-Muslims belonging to minorities for janitorial work was struck down in 2016.

With half of Karachi being dug and new drainage lines being laid, much of the work is being carried out by Pathans (Muslims belonging to an ethnic group) and, until last year, by Afghans too. “They are wading in the same filthy water,” says Amjad.

He got a much more lucrative job—working as a sweeper in an apartment building and earning more.

“Being a permanent employee with a government department means lifelong security; the job is for keeps,” he explains. “And on a day-to-day basis too, life is slightly easier. You are not harassed by the police, get sick leave and free healthcare, and there are retirement benefits too, and you cannot be kicked out on any one person’s whim.”

Way Forward

But Amjad and Adil’s work and how they are treated by their employers are in complete contrast to what the Pakistani government has signed under the Sustainable Development Goals, especially Goal 8—of improving the working conditions of sanitation workers. It also seems unlikely that targets 8.5 “full employment and decent work with equal pay” and 8.8 “protect labour rights and promote safe working environments” will be met by 2030.

Farah Zia, the director of the independent Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, talking to IPS, pointed out that Pakistan had made little progress in meeting the criteria for decent work for sanitation workers, considered amongst the most “marginalized labour groups in Pakistan’s workforce.”

Not being “paid a living wage or to live in an environment free of social stigma,” Zia said they were not even provided ample safety equipment and training to protect themselves from occupational hazards. In addition, she pointed out that the 2006 National Sanitation Policy was outdated and fell “short of addressing these concerns.”

The same was observed in Sindh province, where Amjad and Adil live. “Although the Sindh government had adopted a provincial sanitation policy in 2017, it did not address the concerns related to the working and living conditions of these workers in the province,” Zia pointed out

In 2021, in line with SDG 8, WaterAid Pakistan (WAP) worked with the local government in the Punjab province’s Muzaffargarh district to ensure the safety of sanitation workers. Apart from provision of safety equipment and access to clean drinking water, the organization advocated that these “essential workers receive the respect and

dignity they deserve,” said Muhammad Fazal, heading the Strategy and Policy Programme of the WAP.

Naeem Sadiq, a Karachi-based industrial engineer and a social activist who has long been fighting for the rights of these men has calculated the highest and lowest salaries in the public sector.

“The ratio of the salary of a janitor to the senior most bureaucrat in the UK is 1:8, while in Pakistan it is 1:80. The ratio of the salary of a janitor to the senior-most judge in the UK is 1:11, while in Pakistan it is 1:115. The ratio between the salary of a janitor and the heads of the highest-paid public sector organizations in the UK is 1:20, while in Pakistan it is 1:250,” he told IPS.

Sadiq wants a complete ban on manual scavenging. “I don’t know how we let our fellow men enter a sewer bubbling with human waste and poisonous gases,” he tells IPS, adding, “We need machines to do this dirty, dangerous work.”

The KWSC has 128 mobile tanker-like contraptions equipped with suctional jetting machines that remove the water from the sewers so that cleaners can go down a 30-foot manhole without having to dive into it to remove silt, timber and stones that cannot be sucked out and have to be brought up manually,” said the KWSC official.

That is not good enough for Sadiq. A year ago, he and a group of philanthropists came up with a prototype of a simple gutter-cleaning machine (using the motorbike’s skeleton), which he claims is the cheapest one in the world, costing Rs 1.5 million (USD 5,382).

“It can be sent deep into the sewer to bring up stones, rocks, sludge and silt, and a high-pressure jetting contraption to unclog the lines.”

It is now up to the government to use the design and start manufacturing the contraption called Bhalai (kindness, benefit). “We

are absolutely willing to share the design,” said Sadiq.
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Lessons From Youth-Focused ‘Future Action Festival’ Ahead of UN Summit of the Future

BY Joyce Chimbi



Soka Gakkai International representative and member of the organizing committee for the Future Action Festival, Tadashi Nagai, stressed the importance of coalition and movement building and youth engagement to escalate progress towards attainment of the SDGs. Credit: Joyce Chimbi/IPS

NAIROBI (IPS) – The world has crossed the halfway point to the end of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) era amid multiple, unprecedented, and significantly destructive global shocks. Two of the most pressing global challenges are the climate crisis and the threat of nuclear armament. Of serious concern is a severe lack of youth engagement on issues of critical global importance.

Speaking to IPS during the 2024 UN Civil Society Conference, the outcome of which will inform high-level discussions when the UN

hosts hundreds of world leaders, policymakers, experts, and advocates in September at the Summit of the Future in New York, Tadashi Nagai stressed the importance of coalition and movement building and youth engagement to escalate progress towards attainment of the SDGs.

“In March 2024, the Future Action Festival took place in Tokyo, attended by approximately 66,000 people and over half a million viewers via live streaming. The event was a collaborative effort by youth and citizen groups to foster a deeper understanding and proactive stance among young people on nuclear disarmament and climate change solutions as two issues of global concern,” said Nagai, a representative of the Soka Gakkai International organization and the organizing committee of the Future Action Festival at the Nairobi conference.

The organizing committee comprised representatives from six organizations, including GeNuine, Greenpeace Japan, Japan Youth Council, Kakuwaka Hiroshima, Youth for TPNW, and Soka Gakkai International (SGI) Youth. Nagai said the high impact committee is reflective of a tangible, impactful coalition and movement building towards resolving issues of global, national, and local concern in the two major existential threats today—nuclear weapons and the climate crisis.



Future Action Festival Poster.
Photo: Yukie Asagiri,

Nagai spoke of the inalienable link between youth engagement and the delivery of the promise of a peaceful world—a requisite for the attainment of the SDGs and other related global and national commitments. In the lead-up to the Future Action Festival, a youth awareness survey was conducted across Japan from November 2023 to February 2024, targeting individuals ranging from their 10s to their 40s. The survey focused on thematic areas such as society, climate change, nuclear weapons, youth and social systems, and the United Nations.

The survey results were illuminating, providing insights into how the youth perceive these issues and their possible role in resolving them. On the realization of a world free from nuclear weapons for instance, survey results showed that 82 percent of the respondents said nuclear weapons are not needed. Based on a sample size of 119,925 respondents, nuclear abolition is a widely shared vision among young people in Japan.

“We come with lessons from Japan on how civil society organizations represented at the Nairobi conference can build impactful, informative, and life-transforming coalitions and movements to address the most existential threats facing humanity today. This particular conference is unique, historic, and highly critical as it comes ahead of the UN Summit of the Future. The Future Action Festival was an opportunity to collect the voices of young people on issues of critical importance to the global community, in the same way that the outcome of the Nairobi conference will inform the UN Summit later on in September,” Nagai said.

Through the festival, the committee was determined to contribute to UN initiatives and endorse the newly-established UN Youth Office.

Additionally, it aims to create momentum to strengthen international cooperation and solidarity toward a peaceful and sustainable future.

With this in mind, a joint declaration from the Future Action Festival was submitted to the UN to inform, influence, and shape high-level discussions at the Summit towards the production of three international frameworks: the Pact for the Future (available as a zero draft), the Global Digital Compact, and the Declaration on Future Generations. Nagai said that the Pact for the Future must be ambitious, inclusive, and innovative.

Under the theme, Summit of the Future: Multilateral Solutions for a Better Tomorrow, the summit aims to forge a new global consensus on what a collective future should look like and what can be done today to secure it. Enhancing cooperation on critical challenges and addressing gaps in global governance, reaffirming existing commitments, including to the SDGs, towards a reinvigorated multilateral system better placed to positively impact lives. The Summit of the Future will create conditions to help fast-track implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development be more readily attained.

Affirming the critical role of young people in sustainable development, the position of world leaders in the 2030 Agenda is that SDGs would only be attained if they were of the people, by the people, and for the people. The 2030 Agenda invites citizen engagement, especially from young people, to “channel their infinite capacities for activism into the creation of a better world,” Nagai said.

Hence the link between the civil society conference, the summit, and other events such as the Future Action Festival—all geared towards effectively addressing issues of global concern such as climate

change, war, and worsening inequalities. Every proposal offered by the UN Secretary-General for consideration at the UN Summit of the Future will have demonstrable impacts on the achievement of the SDGs.

Ultimately, the Nairobi conference was a process of renewal of trust and solidarity at all levels—between peoples, countries, and generations. Making a case for a fundamental rethink of political, economic, and social systems so that they deliver more fairly and effectively for everyone.

At the closing of the conference, Mithika Mwenda, of the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance, emphasized the need for “boldness and honest conversations” to achieve the radical transformations needed to ensure sustainable development for all, poverty alleviation, and ultimately, an action-oriented Pact for the Future (one of the expected outcomes of the Summit).

Civil society groups and organizations also recommended a corresponding renewal of the multilateral system, with the Summit of the Future as a defining moment to agree on the most critical improvements necessary to deliver a future defined by equality,



António Guterres, Director General of UN/ Public

fairness, and shared prosperity.

Secretary-General António Guterres and Kenyan President William Ruto praised the efforts of civil society and underscored their “indispensable contributions.”

In his address, Guterres said time and again that he had

witnessed the enormous impact of civil society in every corner of the world; easing suffering, pushing for peace and justice, standing for truth, and advancing gender equality and sustainable development, with many working at great personal risk.

Regarding current conflicts, including Gaza, Sudan, and ongoing crises in the Sahel, Great Lakes, and Horn of Africa regions, he said that the UN would not give up on the “push for peace, justice, and human rights.

He recognized that civil society was crucial to addressing many issues in the world, including closing digital divides and revitalizing the collective approach to peace and security.

“We need to be informed by your frontline know-how; We need your can-do attitude to overcome obstacles and find innovative solutions,” said Guterres. “We need you to use your networks, knowledge, and contacts to implement solutions and to persuade governments to act.”

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WHO Africa Advances African Science by Promoting Peer-Reviewed Research

BY Maina Waruru

NAIROBI (IPS) – The World Health Organization’s African regional office and partners published over 25 peer-reviewed articles in scientific journals in 2023 as part of efforts to address the imbalance in global research and ensure that Africa was better represented in the production of health research academic literature, a new report shows.

The office, through its Universal Health Coverage, Communicable and Non-Communicable Diseases (UCN) Cluster, published on a range of health challenges and diseases, including the risk of zoonotic disease in countries ranging from Uganda, Malawi, Tanzania, Ghana, and Nigeria, investigating infectious and non-infectious diseases, and public health approaches to ease Africa’s disease burden.

This research is critical to the continent, says Africa’s Regional Director, Dr. Matshidiso Moeti.

“The WHO African Region arguably bears one of the greatest burdens of disease globally. This has always been exacerbated by poverty, which, in the decade prior to COVID-19, was on the decline. Now, however, these gains have been reversed, not only by COVID-19 but by a series of severe shocks during the 2020–2022 period,” said Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, the Regional Director for Africa,” she told IPS.

“Major threats include climate change, global instability, slowing economic growth, and conflict. This makes it ever more important that we at the WHO Regional Office for Africa focus on the central promise of the 2030 SDG agenda, which is to ‘leave no one behind’, using a



The WHO’s Africa office has published research in 25 peer-reviewed journals in attempt to address the imbalance of research as part of the 2030 SDG agenda, which is to ‘leave no-one behind,’ and a move toward universal health coverage. Credit: WHO

health systems strengthening approach to move towards universal health coverage.”

According to the Ending Disease in Africa: Responding to Communicable and Noncommunicable Diseases 2023 report released in April, WHO scientists were able to publish their work in reputable journals, including the Social Sciences and Humanities Open, supporting Africa’s efforts to raise her scientific research production, estimated at only 2 percent of the world’s total.

The works also found homes in open access journals, including America’s Public Library of Science (PLOS), where they are

accessible for free by the scientific community and the general public.

Besides Africa-based scientific publications such as the Nigerian Journal of Parasitology, highlighting the need to support the role local publications can play in elevating African science and, by extension, helping address imbalances in global research.

“A country’s ability to create, acquire, translate, and apply scientific and technological advancements is a major determinant of its socioeconomic and industrial development. Many of Africa’s current and future health challenges can only be addressed by conducting research on population-based approaches towards effective disease prevention and control, which are then translated into policy and practice,” the report noted in introducing the work.

“Despite Africa’s disproportionate burden of disease, the region produced 0.7 percent of global research in 2000, 1.3 percent in 2014 and an estimated 2 percent more recently. In response, the UCN Cluster and partners published over 25 peer-reviewed articles in scientific journals in 2023 as part of efforts to address the imbalance in global research, and ensure regional representation in academic literature.”

In Ghana, the WHO team conducted a “community-based cross-sectional study” to investigate occurrences of skin ulcers, whose findings showed the importance of integrating multiple skin diseases on a common research platform in findings published by PLOS One, while in Tanzania, a “spatio-temporal modelling” of routine health facility data to better guide community-based malaria interventions on the mainland was done.

Some of the papers the WHO-Africa says were examples of “operational and implementation research,” conducted to identify and ensure the successful adoption and adaptation of evidence-based interventions in both clinical and public health on the continent.

They include findings from an impact assessment of a school-based preventive chemotherapy programme for neglected tropical diseases (NTDs), schistosomiasis, and soil-transmitted helminth control in Angola, where used drugs were found to have little impact in controlling the diseases. These findings were published in PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases.

“This highlighted the need for a comprehensive understanding of individual, community, and environmental factors associated with transmission and consideration for a community-wide control programme,” it concluded.

The Springer Nature’s Malaria Journal published the team’s research on treatment-seeking behavior among parents of children with malaria-related fever in Malawi. It captured the need for targeted health interventions among communities in low socioeconomic settings and those living far from health facilities.

In Nigeria, an article based on experiences in Nigeria using a novel schistosomiasis community data analysis tool, developed by the UCN Cluster, emphasized the usefulness of the tool for strategic planning purposes, allowing the tool to be deployed around Africa for the management of the disease. Blood flukes (trematode worms) from the genus *Schistosoma* are the primary cause of the acute and chronic

parasitic disease schistosomiasis.

Research on health policy and systems, the aim being to better understand how “collective health goals” are reached. This was done through a range of disciplines, including economics, sociology, anthropology, political science, and public health.

One such journal article was published by Elsevier’s Social Sciences and Humanities Open, looking at five decades of infectious disease outbreaks on the continent and recommending that concerted public health action may help reduce outbreaks, as well as drawing important conclusions for disease preparedness and prevention activities.

Quite critically, the experts undertook “knowledge translation” work, the application of knowledge by various actors to deliver the benefits of global and local innovations in strengthening health systems and improving health.

“In the African context, knowledge translation generally includes an aspect of localization, considering local perspectives and approaches and the effects of the social, cultural, political, environmental, and health system context on an intervention’s impact,” the experts explain.

In 2023, the UCN Cluster translated and localized several global knowledge products for use in Africa, including one on oral diseases, a malady suffered by about 44 percent of the population in the region.

Africa, the document observes, has experienced the “steepest rise globally in oral diseases over the last three decades,” even as spending on treatment costs remains “extremely low,” thus the need to share the newest information on their management.

Away from scientific research, the report reveals that Mauritius

became the first country in Africa to fully implement WHO’s package of tobacco control measures, while at the same time WHO-Africa launched an initiative to support better access to breast and cervical cancer detection, treatment, and care services in Côte d’Ivoire, Kenya, and Zimbabwe.

Equally important, WHO Africa, in collaboration with Nigerian authorities, introduced the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine into routine immunization schedules, targeting more than 7 million girls, the largest number in a single round of HPV vaccination in Africa.

Success stories emerged in Algeria, which successfully ‘interrupted’ the transmission of schistosomiasis after reporting zero indigenous cases for the past three years, in January 2024, and in Cape Verde, which became the third country to be certified as malaria-free.

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10 Billion tree project of Pakistan: How politics destroyed the wonderful initiative

BY Dr. Majid Khan



Islamabad (London Post) – The “10 Billion Tree Tsunami” project represented a substantial commitment from Pakistan to tackle environmental degradation through widespread reforestation. Inspired by the global Billion Tree Campaign, this ambitious initiative aimed to plant 10 billion trees across Pakistan, with goals to restore depleted forests, combat climate change, and support biodiversity. Despite its noble aspirations and initial commendations, the project faced considerable challenges, largely due to the complex political landscape of Pakistan.

The 10 Billion Tree Tsunami initiative originated as an expansion of the Billion Tree Tsunami project in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, which had successfully planted one billion trees by early 2018. Encouraged by this achievement and international recognition, the federal government adopted this project on a national scale in 2018,

aiming to plant ten billion trees by 2023. This project was not merely an environmental effort but was also integrated into Pakistan’s broader commitments to international environmental agreements and sustainable development goals (SDGs). It addressed critical issues like deforestation due to timber smuggling, agricultural encroachment, and unsustainable logging, aiming to rejuvenate these devastated landscapes.

The project was structured with multiple objectives focused on environmental rejuvenation and economic stimulation through sustainable practices. A primary environmental goal was to significantly decrease Pakistan’s carbon footprint by increasing forest cover, which would also help combat land degradation and desertification. On the economic front, the initiative aimed to spur growth in rural areas by creating millions of job opportunities in nursery establishments, tree planting, and forest maintenance. This was expected to improve air quality, reduce energy costs, and enhance local biodiversity, thereby promoting ecological balance and restoring natural habitats critical for maintaining Pakistan’s diverse ecosystems.

From its inception, the project quickly showcased significant progress, planting hundreds of millions of trees across various regions of Pakistan. It effectively mobilized local communities, enhancing environmental awareness and promoting sustainable land



management practices. The initiative won international acclaim from environmental groups and governments alike, who praised it as a pioneering model for large-scale environmental conservation. This recognition underscored the project's potential and set a hopeful tone for its continued success.

The political environment in Pakistan, marked by volatility and frequent power shifts, posed significant challenges to the project. Although initiated with strong governmental backing, the project quickly became a point of contention. Opposition parties criticized its execution, transparency, and the genuine intent behind its lofty claims. This political strife was intensified by frequent changes in regional and local administrations, which influenced the continuity and consistency of the project's execution.

The project faced countless challenges ranging from political opposition to logistical and financial hurdles. Politically, the initiative was often perceived as a tool for image-building rather than a genuine environmental effort, attracting accusations of corruption and mismanagement. Logistically, the endeavour to plant such a massive number of trees across Pakistan's diverse geographical and climatic

regions presented significant difficulties. Financial sustainability also emerged as a concern, with the need for consistent funding over many years amidst fluctuating economic conditions and dependency on international aid.

Reactions to the 10 Billion Tree Tsunami were mixed across different spectrums of society. While environmentalists and local communities generally supported the initiative, it faced skepticism and criticism from opposition political groups. The media's role was pivotal in shaping public perception, offering both endorsements and critiques, which highlighted the project's successes and illuminated its shortcomings.

Political interference significantly undermined the project, with frequent policy shifts, reallocation of resources, and bureaucratic obstacles hampering progress. After Prime Minister Imran Khan was removed from office by a no-confidence vote in parliament, Pakistan's massive tree-planting initiative faced a serious setback. Historically climate change has not been a strong hold of the incumbent PM Shahbaz Sharif. Meanwhile climate experts are calling on the government of Shehbaz Sharif to continue Khan's flagship initiative to restore forests.

The politicization of the project's goals and the inconsistency in government priorities led to fragmented implementation and reduced its effectiveness. This interference illustrated the profound impact political instability can have on environmental initiatives, emphasizing the need for stronger governance structures to shield such projects from political disruption.

The incomplete implementation of the project had extensive environmental, economic, and social repercussions. Environmentally, the failure to meet tree planting targets limited the potential benefits

for carbon impounding and biodiversity. Economically, the project fell short of its job creation goals, which hindered economic development in rural areas. Socially, the project's struggles and perceived mismanagement eroded public trust and dampened enthusiasm for government-led initiatives, which are crucial for the success of large-scale conservation efforts.

Despite facing significant challenges, the 10 Billion Tree Tsunami project marks a critical milestone in environmental conservation, offering important lessons on integrating large-scale environmental projects within political frameworks. For future initiatives, ensuring non-partisan support, enhancing transparency, and maintaining robust public engagement are essential. These strategies will not only help achieve environmental objectives but will also strengthen the resilience of these projects against political and economic challenges, enhancing their effectiveness and ensuring long-term sustainability. The 10 Billion Tree Tsunami remains a beacon of what is possible in environmental conservation, symbolizing the potential benefits and the complex challenges such ambitious projects inevitably encounter.

Author: Dr. Majid Khan a PhD Scholar of Media, qualified Journalist, Academic and Writer; have expertise in analyzing and designing strategy of propaganda, Information warfare and Image Building.

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