



SDGs for All

2026 Join Media Project Report

Stories of Action and Hope for a Sustainable Future

Highlighting people, communities, and innovations
working together to leave no one behind
and build a better world for all.



CREDITS

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This multilingual publishing platform and knowledge database connects readers around the world with the lives and voices conveyed in its articles. By encouraging reflection and action in daily life, it helps transform the ideals of peace and coexistence into a living reality.

PREFACE

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



This report presents the latest volume of the Joint Media Project undertaken by International Press Syndicate Japan ([INPS Japan](https://inps-japan.org/)) in partnership with Soka Gakkai International ([SGI](https://sgik.org/)), a nongovernmental organization in consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Covering the period from April 2025 to March 2026, it marks the tenth year of the *SDGs for All* project. It brings together independent journalism examining the urgent challenges involved in building a sustainable, peaceful, and inclusive world within the framework of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their 169 targets. The articles in this volume were written and produced by INPS Japan and its international media partners, including Inter Press Service, the London Post, Nepali Times, and other collaborators, or selected for republication because of their relevance to the project's aims. All were published on SDGs for All, the dedicated website "SDGs for All"

(<https://sdgs-for-all.net/>). Over the past decade, this platform has served as both a repository of knowledge and an instrument of advocacy, connecting readers with global realities through journalism that is independent, accessible, and international in outlook. This year's collection makes clear that the SDGs must not be regarded merely as a technical framework for development policy. More fundamentally, they represent a moral and political commitment to human dignity, social inclusion, ecological responsibility, and peace. The reporting assembled here shows that sustainable development cannot be pursued apart from the lived realities of those most affected by inequality, conflict, environmental breakdown, exclusion, and institutional failure. A defining feature of this year's project is its sustained attention to the interdependence of environmental sustainability and human security. Reporting on ocean governance, biodiversity loss, crop damage linked to climate change, pollution and pests, drought, wildfire, air pollution, sustainable materials, solar innovation, and circular economy initiatives shows that ecological degradation cannot be separated from questions of health, food systems, livelihoods, and resilience.

At the same time, this report foregrounds the voices and experiences of those too often pushed to the margins of public discourse: women and girls, young people, migrants, smallholder farmers, persons with disabilities, religious and ethnic minorities, conflict-affected populations, and communities living under repression or displacement. Yet these individuals and communities are portrayed not solely as victims, but also as agents of resilience, creativity, and transformation. In this way, the articles collected here lend concrete expression to the foundational promise of the 2030 Agenda: that no one should be left behind.

This year's compilation also underscores the enabling conditions without which sustainable development cannot be realized: peace, human rights, ethical governance, and multilateral cooperation. Coverage of armed conflict, expanding military expenditure, famine risks, maternal mortality in war-torn Ukraine, threats to journalism in Afghanistan, AI governance, and the rise of autonomous weapons points to a sobering truth: development cannot advance where violence, impunity, and exclusion are allowed to deepen.

This volume also reflects concern over the fragility of the multilateral system at a moment when international cooperation is urgently needed. Articles addressing the Paris Agreement, United Nations reform, shrinking humanitarian space, the weakening of international institutions, and mounting pressures on global health and development governance demonstrate that progress toward the SDGs cannot be assumed. Without accountability, political will, and an informed public sphere, the goals risk being reduced to rhetoric rather than realized as instruments of justice and shared responsibility. As the 2030 deadline draws nearer, climate instability, widening inequality, armed conflict, displacement, and rapid technological change continue to place mounting pressure on the global development agenda. Under such conditions, the mission of SDGs for All becomes more necessary than ever.

To maximize the project's global reach, all articles have been translated into Japanese, and many into Spanish, Hindi, Portuguese, German, French, Italian, Arabic, Swahili, Russian, Thai, Turkish, Indonesian, Chinese and Korean. By making these perspectives available across languages and regions, we hope to strengthen a global conversation rooted in empathy, historical memory, and shared responsibility.

By offering a common platform through which readers may better grasp the interconnected nature of today's crises, this project seeks to foster reflection, empathy, and informed engagement. Through journalism that is rigorous yet accessible, it helps narrow information gaps and strengthen civic participation in the pursuit of sustainable development. We remain profoundly grateful to Soka Gakkai International for its steadfast support of this joint undertaking. Among SGI members in particular, such support is rooted in one of the organization's central humanistic principles: *Dōku*, a Buddhist concept signifying "shared suffering" or empathetic solidarity. It expresses the resolve to confront the suffering of others not with indifference, but with companionship and action, and thus resonates deeply with the ethical heart of the SDGs' pledge to leave no one behind.

Finally, I extend heartfelt thanks to our correspondents for their invaluable contributions; to Ms. Farhana Haque Rahman, Senior Vice President, IPS and Executive Director IPS North America, for her foreword; and to Mr. Nobuyuki ASAI, Director for Sustainable Development & Humanitarian Affairs at the SGI Peace Center, for his message of support.

It is my hope that this report will deepen awareness of the challenges confronting humanity while also illuminating paths toward cooperation, resilience, and renewal. We believe that the insight, compassion, and commitment of individuals can help form the moral foundation of a more just, peaceful, and sustainable future.

MESSAGE

By Mr. Nobuyuki Asai,
Director for Sustainable Development & Humanitarian Affairs, SGI Peace Center



There are only four years left until the target year of SDGs, which is 2030. Unfortunately, it is considered to be difficult to achieve many of the 169 targets by the year. To make matters worse, some of the political leaders have become negative on SDGs and are even implementing receding policies.

On the other hand, I witnessed that SDGs is still serving as a major guideline for many governments at the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development held at UNESCAP in Bangkok in February of 2026. This forum is held every year to assess progress of some of the selected SDG goals in each country, share good solutions and clarify existing challenges. One of the goals highlighted in this year's forum was Goal 11, which Soka Gakkai and SGI have made efforts for over the years. I attended the forum with support of the Japan Civil Society Network on SDGs which SGI has joined over the decade.

At the forum many government officials shared their progress assessment and relevant efforts in the context of each goal, and interestingly other goals were often referred to in their remarks. For example, one official briefed about improvement of public transportation, which is articulated in Goal 11, and emphasized that it is reducing greenhouse gas emission by cars, which helps to achieve Goal 13. Others mentioned that they were taking gender equality into consideration in their efforts of achieving other goals than Goal 5.

This attitude of keeping multiple goals in their mind was not so often seen at the initial stage after SDGs were adopted. Nowadays, meanwhile, it is already a consensus that achieving one specific goal sacrificing others is not allowed. This is a valuable advancement.

Just for your reference, the Japanese government is keen on this point and promoting a “synergy approach” at the global arena. In line with that, the Institute for Global Environment Strategies, an arm organization of the Ministry of Environment of Japan, raises several policies that are beneficial in achieving multiple targets and other ones that can cause a conflict among targets.

For the past couple of years finance for development is diminishing, and several UN agencies are facing a financial crisis. This tendency seems to continue. Effective and efficient financing or aid is getting all the more important. In this context this media project “SDGs for All” provides us with a broader view on the SDGs and would help readers have a better understanding on the global situation.

Bearing what we learn from this project in mind, we would like to continue our best effort until 2030.

FOREWARD

By Ms. Farhana Haque Rahman

Senior Vice President of IPS Inter Press Service and Executive Director IPS North America



When trader Hawa Hussein Farah watches the temperature rise in her open-air market in Garissa, Kenya, she knows her income will suffer – her stock will spoil and her customers, fearing the heat, will vanish to cooler spots.

Farah is one of the people IPS has profiled in their SDGs for All, a partnership with Soka Gakkai International aimed at monitoring, celebrating and creating awareness about the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – bridging complex policy frameworks and public understanding.

In Farah's case the impacts of extreme heat are not in Garissa County's climate change action plan – which focuses on drought floods and livestock disease – rather than coming up with solutions and provisions for extreme heat – such as adjusted working hours, public cooling spaces or hydration points.

As the world sprints towards 2030 – the date visualised when the UN adopted the 17 goals aimed at making the world a better place for all, on September 25, 2015 – it is widely agreed that while there have been achievements, much needs to be done.

A [stocktake](#) released in 2025 noted strides in access to education, maternal and child health and bridging the digital divide – with effective prevention efforts impacting infectious diseases such as HIV and malaria.

These successes included the story of Tsholofelo Msimango, who, diagnosed with extensively drug-resistant TB (XDR-TB), was unsure that she would survive when she was offered an opportunity to go on a drug trial.

At 21 she became one of 109 participants in the Nix-TB trial of a new drug regimen that ran across three sites in the country between 2015 and 2017.

She survived. Today she is a TB community advocate and educator, and she helps recruit people for medical studies.

Our series also highlighted successes in the global health campaign to eliminate the infectious eye disease trachoma. Two Pacific Islands, Fiji and Papua New Guinea, became two of the [27 nations](#) worldwide declared trachoma-free by the World Health Organization (WHO).

But it calls the progress “fragile and uneven”.

This too has been highlighted by IPS in its series.

At COP30 in Belém, Brazil, in November last year, IPS highlighted the message of Soka Gakkai and others on the continuing impact of fossil fuels on climate and its impact on the achievement of the SDGs.

Extreme weather conditions, along with escalating conflicts, rising inequalities, and soaring debt servicing costs, are holding back further advancements.

At a special session, ‘Faith for Fossil Free Future’, co-sponsored by several organisations, including [Soka Gakkai International \(SGI\)](#), Masahiro Yokoyama of the SGI, reminded us about the intersection between faith and energy transition and why the fossil fuel phase-out cannot wait – it goes beyond being merely technical.

At IPS, we agree that support for the fossil-fuel non-proliferation treaty represents an ethical framework to protect people’s livelihoods and dignity.

So, IPS will continue to play a role in creating awareness, setting the agenda for the achievements of the goals, and telling true stories from frontline communities to keep those with the power to make a difference accountable, while celebrating the SDG achievements.



From Passive Waiting to Active Hope: Religion in the Face of a World on Edge

By Guillermo Ayala Alanis



Credit: Courtesy of Guillermo Ayala Alanis

While religion has at times been used to justify violence or division, it can also serve as a force for peace by promoting dialogue and encouraging societies to take a more active role in conflict resolution.

Mexico City (INPS Japan) – In an international climate shaped by wars involving the United States, Iran and Israel, as well as the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the world appears to be drifting toward a new era of global confrontation, one in which the risk of nuclear

conflict is rising sharply. Beyond the political, strategic and economic dimensions, however, there is another, less visible but still influential factor: religion and its role in building peace.



Photo: Guillermo Ayala Alanis

Although wars were once justified in the name of God, particularly during periods such as the Middle Ages, religions today tend to play a more conciliatory, if less prominent, role in an increasingly secular world, where political decision-making often seems detached from compassion and respect for others.

While religion has sometimes been used as a pretext for attack or self-defense, it can also be a force for peace, fostering dialogue and encouraging societies to take a more active role in demanding that their leaders resolve conflicts at a time when rearmament is gaining momentum.

In this context, José Sols, a specialist in political theology and a professor at the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City, warned that the world has returned to a climate of tension reminiscent of the Cold War. In an interview with INPS Japan, Dr. Sols said that although



Photo: Dr. José Sols, Universidad Iberoamericana. Credit: LinkedIn José Sols

the influence of religion on international politics has diminished, its presence within societies remains significant, allowing messages of peace to continue resonating with millions of believers.

“We must move from passive waiting to active hope... Building peace is a task. Too often, we as citizens think others—politicians or diplomats—will take care of it, but

that is a mistake. Peace begins with coexistence, with human relationships, and is therefore also the responsibility of the church,” he said.

The Importance of Promoting Dialogue for Peace

According to the United Nations, the world’s population now exceeds 8 billion, including some 2 billion Muslims, 1.4 billion Catholics out of a total of 2.4 billion Christians, 500 million Buddhists and more than 15 million Jews—figures that reflect the continued significance of religion in global society.

Examples of this influence can be seen in several countries. Iran defines itself as an Islamic republic; in Israel, some political movements are shaped by religious Zionism; and in the United States, the tradition of taking the presidential oath of office on a Bible remains a powerful symbol.

Since the latter half of the 19th century, interfaith dialogue initiatives—symbolized by the 1893 World’s Parliament of Religions in Chicago—have brought together leaders of the world’s major religious traditions and helped lay the groundwork for peaceful coexistence by fostering mutual understanding among peoples and cultures.

In recent years, the Catholic world has also seen such efforts. The Pontifical Academy for Life has launched an international appeal titled “Scientists for Peace,” arguing that in an age when drones and increasingly sophisticated weapons are being deployed on the battlefield, science and technology should be used not for war but for peace and human dignity. Last October in Rome, [the Community of Sant’Egidio](#) hosted the “International Meeting for Peace: Dialogue and Prayer,” bringing together priests, rabbis, imams, monks, and a wide range of religious leaders and civil society representatives, including representatives of [Soka Gakkai International \(SGI\)](#). At a time when fear, nationalism, and war cast a deep shadow over the world, the gathering renewed a central question: how faith can be linked not to division, but to coexistence and a shared responsibility for peace.

Nuclear Rearmament and a New Challenge: Artificial Intelligence

Reflecting on the growing nuclear threat, Dr. Sols said the rearmament of these weapons of mass destruction now presents an additional danger: the use of artificial intelligence. He warned that AI systems operate automatically and may be unable to account for factors beyond those built into their programming.

“We loaded AI with many algorithms but forgot to include the one that says, ‘Be careful. In this case, do not do that.’ In that way, a nuclear war could begin without human intervention,” he said.

He also warned of the resurgence of imperial rhetoric in international politics, saying it has pushed aside inclusive narratives and seeks to impose the law of the strongest without regard for the human consequences of armed conflict.

“Building a human life takes many years, but destroying it takes only a second,” he said.

The Church as an Ally in Conventional Disarmament

Religious activism in favor of disarmament also seeks to address more immediate local concerns and to draw on the trust many people place in religious institutions. In Mexico, which the civil society organization Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) has described as the fourth most dangerous country in the world, the Catholic Church has worked with the government of President Claudia Sheinbaum on the “Sí al desarme, sí a la paz” (“Yes to Disarmament, Yes to Peace”) program. Under the initiative, church courtyards are made available so that citizens can voluntarily and anonymously hand over firearms to military personnel for destruction in exchange for financial compensation.

The program has been implemented in densely populated areas such as Mexico City and its metropolitan region, as well as in other states



Photo: President Claudia Sheinbaum at the Basilica of Guadalupe overseeing the “Sí al desarme, sí a la paz” program. Credit: mgmnoticias.mx

with high levels of violence, including Baja California, Colima, Guanajuato, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Puebla and Tabasco.

At a time when global rearmament is advancing and the nuclear threat persists, religious communities are seeking to ensure that their conciliatory voice—one that promotes dialogue—continues to resonate with millions of believers, reminding them that peace depends not only on governments, but also on the daily actions of societies.

『INPS Japan』

The limits are imagination: when design looks to bamboo and the. Nopal cactus

By Guillermo Ayala Alanis



Photo: Dr. José Luis Gutiérrez Senties.

Bamboo and nopal cactus fiber have become sustainable alternatives for researchers and entrepreneurs in fields such as industrial design and fashion.



SDGs No. 4

Mexico City (INPS Japan) – Known as “the plant of a thousand uses” for its versatility, which spans fields ranging from food to construction, bamboo is a material that captures the interest of researchers at universities around the world. “If I were stranded on a desert island with nothing but bamboo, I would be

happy... It is a very versatile plant where the only limits are those of the imagination,” says José Luis Gutiérrez Senties, Doctor of Science and Arts for Design, who has been working with this species for more than 15 years at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Xochimilco Campus, [UAM-X](#).

From an industrial design perspective, the academic seeks to promote the use of bamboo in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) such as Quality Education, [SDG 4](#), and Responsible Consumption and Production, [SDG 12](#). Through interdisciplinary research and workshops held at UAM-X, he encourages the student community to develop the ability to create and transform this ancient plant into everyday objects.

“They should learn about bamboo, know that it exists and that it has certain characteristics and properties that can be exploited... that it has a low environmental impact... The issue of the environment is already a cross-cutting theme that we must all follow,” he emphasizes.

The courses are not only attended by industrial design students; this activity has also allowed future designers to connect with students from other disciplines. In these activities, items as varied as bicycles, tables, and kitchen utensils are manufactured. The experience not only strengthens technical skills but also broadens the vision of materials and their innovative potential.



Photo: Bamboo structure. Credit: José Luis Gutiérrez.

Although mainly popularized in Eastern cultures, bamboo belongs to the grass family, just like oats, corn, wheat, and grass. It can measure from a few centimeters to heights as tall as a 12-story building (approximately 40 meters), which allows it to be used to build scaffolding and housing. It also represents an alternative to wood, which helps reduce indiscriminate logging, contributing to [SDG 15](#), Life on Land.

“It helps to generate products without the need to cut down so many trees, thus avoiding problems such as soil erosion and the destruction of forests. Trees are part of an ecosystem, so if you remove the trees, you will destroy the entire ecosystem where all kinds of plants and

animals live,” explains Dr. Gutiérrez.

There are 1,200 species of bamboo on the planet. In the Americas, it is distributed from the United States to Chile. In Mexico, there are 36 woody species and four herbaceous species of bamboo, found in states with tropical climates such as Colima, Oaxaca, Chiapas, Puebla, and Veracruz. Some of these states are home to companies that offer products for the construction industry.

In Mexico, bamboo has traditionally been used in rural areas, where the resource is naturally available. It is commonly used in the construction of homes, as well as in the production of handicrafts, basketry, furniture, and utensils. The Mexican government points out that the cost of building a decent, low-cost home made of “green steel,” as bamboo is also known, can be up to 40 percent lower than that of a home built with traditional materials. At the same time, its use has spread to hotel complexes that seek to integrate this activity with nature.

Interest in alternative materials is not limited to bamboo. Other plants, such as nopal cactus, are also being studied by both the scientific community and Mexican industry. In Guadalajara, for example, a company decided to manufacture T-shirts and sweatshirts made from nopal fiber combined with recycled PET and cotton, in line with [SDG 9](#), Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure.

Álvaro Ruiz Zúñiga, Sales and Marketing Manager at [Mayok](#), points out that the project began four years ago as part of an interest in contributing to reducing environmental impact. The idea took shape

two years ago, and today they are successfully selling their T-shirts and sweatshirts. “We live on Earth and we should be friendly to it. So it’s an extra cost for the manufacturer, it’s an extra cost for the buyer; however, it’s a benefit for everyone, and I think that little by little, many more products with these characteristics will be made,” he says.

In Mexico, clothing made from recycled materials can cost between 25 and 30 percent more than conventional clothing. However, the company believes that the investment is justified because it helps save the planet. Mayork currently has branches in Guadalajara, Sinaloa, Puerto Vallarta, and Mérida, as well as a distribution center that allows them to serve a large part of the country.



Image: Sweatshirt made from nopal fiber, recycled PET, and cotton. Source: MAYORK

Ruiz Zuñiga says that the garments underwent quality testing to observe their performance with different designs and colors. In addition, they worked on a texture that would make them more comfortable, resulting in a large order for sweatshirts linked to international sporting events such as the one Mexico will host in June 2026. “We have confidence in our products. For example, we had a massive purchase of sweatshirts, which I understand is for the World

Cup. There will be customers who will like the designs,” he said.

The United Nations (UN) warns that the textile industry is responsible for 20% of global wastewater and 10% of total carbon emissions. In this context, the use of natural fibers and recycled PET contributes to reducing water pollution.

In Mexico, the textile industry generates around 144 billion tons of waste annually. The use of natural fibers such as nopal cactus and fibers made from recycled PET contributes to the spread of SDG 12, Responsible Production and Consumption.

Both in university workshops and in companies that are committed to recycled materials, the transformation towards a more sustainable life begins with the awareness of individuals. Because if they prove anything, it is that the limit is not in the production materials, but in the imagination.

『INPS Japan』



Image: T-shirt made from nopal cactus fiber, recycled PET, and cotton. Source: MAYORK.

Trachoma: What It Takes to Eliminate a Disease in the Pacific Islands

By Catherine Wilson

SYDNEY (IPS) – Two Pacific Island nations have been applauded for their successes in the global health campaign to eliminate the infectious eye disease, Trachoma.

Better disease data, effective treatment campaigns and improved access to water and hygiene contributed to the major progress now being celebrated as 27 nations worldwide are declared Trachoma-free by the World Health Organization (WHO). But, above all, experts say that the key to the permanent riddance of diseases is a genuine buy-in to the eradication programmes by entire communities.

“Trachoma elimination efforts are most effective when communities understand the disease, trust the interventions and are actively involved in prevention activities,” Dr Anasaini Cama, Pacific Trachoma Technical Lead at The Fred Hollows Foundation, a global non-



Dr Anasaini Cama of the Fred Hollows Foundation conducts tropical disease training in the Solomon Islands. Credit: Shea Flynn/RTI International

government organisation working to eradicate preventable blindness, told IPS.

Finally eliminating Trachoma in countries such as Papua New Guinea is a major achievement when more than 80 percent of people live in rural and remote communities, where the risk of infection is especially high.

“This milestone reflects the power of public health at its best...It is a reminder that equity, visibility and

prevention must be at the heart of our health system,” Elias Kapavore, Minister for Health in PNG, the most populous Pacific Island nation of more than 10 million people, told the media last year.

The infectious eye disease is one of 21 Neglected Tropical Diseases that, under Sustainable Development Goal 3.3, are being targeted for global eradication by 2030. And reports reveal that strides are being made. Between 2002 and 2025, a period of little more than two

decades, the global population at risk of Trachoma fell from 1.5 billion to 97.1 million people, WHO reported in January.

“Trachoma, once a leading cause of blindness in Fiji, was widespread in the 1950s, with prevalence exceeding 20 percent among children in some areas. Today, following sustained national action, the prevalence of active Trachoma has fallen to below 1 percent,” Fiji’s Health Minister, Dr Ratu Antonio Lalabalavu, told local media.

Trachoma is the leading cause of blindness around the world and is found primarily in tropical climate zones and rural communities affected by poverty and lack of basic services. It is caused by a micro-organism, *Chlamydia trachomatis*, known to be carried by flies, with children and those living in overcrowded conditions the most vulnerable. In advanced cases of the disease, there is chronic scarring of the underside of the eyelid, which can then turn inward, resulting in the eyelashes inflicting permanent damage to the eye’s cornea.

Trachoma was first identified in PNG and Fiji when health surveys were conducted in the 1950s. Studies also revealed that it was endemic in the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. More recently, in 2015, extensive studies were carried out in the provinces of Central, Madang, Morobe, East New Britain, Southern Highlands and Western in PNG as part of the Global Trachoma Mapping Project. The prevalence of trachomatous inflammation-follicular (TF) in children aged 1-9 years was found to be between 6 percent and 12.2 percent, exceeding the WHO threshold of 5 percent.

The disease can be debilitating and make it increasingly difficult for a child to attend and participate in school classes and, thus, hinder their development and increase their exposure to poverty and malnutrition.

Changing the conditions and habits through which the disease thrives is, therefore, crucial. And this is a vital part of WHO’s recommended approach, called the SAFE strategy. That is, surgery for patients with an advanced stage of the disease, including blindness, prescribing antibiotics to diminish infection, encouraging facial cleanliness, and environmental improvements.

Today, the development charity Mercy Works is working to boost better health in very remote villages in Kiunga in Western Province, close to the far western border of PNG, by ensuring supplies of clean water. Here, “safe water remains a daily challenge,” Andrew Lowry, Head of Mercy Works’ Programs, told IPS. “Frequent flooding contaminates water sources and damages infrastructure. Many communities have no road access, so materials and tradespeople travel by plane or boat, and often on foot. Schools and health centres often operate without a reliable water supply, making basic hygiene practices difficult to sustain.”

Mercy Works installs rainwater collection and storage systems in schools, health centres, and villages in both the Western Province and the Simbu Province in the Highlands region.

Nearly 4,000 kilometres southeast of PNG in Fiji, Cama has witnessed the impacts of eye diseases and interventions that have been effective. In the north of the country, she visited villages that were kept

clean and neat and it was difficult to see if there was overcrowding in the households. “Generally, extended families living together is considered normal. What we did notice, and similarly in nearby villages, was the water issues, where water was not always available and water trucks would cart water to the village,” Cama told IPS.

In the community, “children were active and did not appear unwell in any way,” she recounted. “It was only when health care workers flipped the child’s eyelids that the inner surface of the eyelid would have follicles that were typical for Trachoma.” Once a child was diagnosed, Tetracycline eye ointment was prescribed to be applied twice a day for six weeks, together with recommended regular face washing.

This year, WHO announced that, for the first time since world records began, the number of people requiring healthcare intervention for Trachoma has fallen below 100 million. Yet the future cannot be one of complacency. Rising climate extremes across the Pacific Islands could reverse this achievement.

“Climate change can impact Trachoma programmes and cause re-emergence of Trachoma, meaning long-term vigilance is required,” Cama emphasised. “Flooding and warmer temperatures can damage sanitation systems that lead to a reduction in environmental hygiene, causing an increase in the presence of flies in the community, which can increase the spread of Trachoma. Through drought and low rainfall, accessibility to water is decreased, making regular face washing and hygiene more challenging.”

Boosting the number of trained health professionals is also critical in countries where national health services battle against limited resources, medical supplies and manpower. “One of the biggest challenges in the Pacific is the shortage of trained eye care specialists,” Cama said.

This is the case in both Fiji and PNG, where “only 8 of 22 provinces actually have an eye doctor”. To overcome this deficit, the Fred Hollows Foundation established the Pacific Eye Institute, the region’s first ophthalmic training institute, in Suva, Fiji. “Our goal is to have at least one eye doctor and a team of eye nurses in every province [in PNG],” she said.

The dividends of extinguishing diseases, such as Trachoma, are profound for people and communities. And aspirations of national development can be realised when health services contend with a diminished burden of illness, more children can finish their education and more people of working age can contribute to their communities and the economy.

『INPS Japan/IPS UN Bureau Report』



Can “Human Fraternity” Move Peace

By Katsuhiro Asagiri



Peace as Rehearsal

Religion and diplomacy are not necessarily competing spheres but potentially complementary ones. Whether that potential holds depends on the resilience of this expanding domain of dialogue. (Photo: INPS)

Participants observe a visual montage linking Abu Dhabi's Zayed Award ceremony, the Sant'Egidio interfaith forum in Rome and the Astana Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions — symbolizing the emerging "rehearsal space" where religion, civil society and state diplomacy converge. (Photo: INPS / Illustrative image)

A New International Space Where Faith and Diplomacy Intersect

ABU DHABI (INPS Japan) – As wars drag on and the international order grows increasingly unstable, Abu Dhabi has been offering a different kind of narrative. It sought to recognize early efforts at reconciliation, bring religious leaders into the same space, and place

former adversaries under the same spotlight. At the heart of the February 4, 2026 Zayed Award for Human Fraternity ceremony was an attempt to make visible, in a public setting, the choice of moving in the direction of easing conflict.

Timed to coincide with the United Nations–designated International Day of Human Fraternity, the ceremony drew heads of state, religious leaders and civil-society representatives. The award traces its origins to the [2019 Document on Human Fraternity](#), signed in Abu Dhabi by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmed Al-Tayeb. The document is widely regarded as a historic declaration that set out a global call for interreligious dialogue and peaceful coexistence.

Seven years on, the international landscape has become even more fragmented. Even so, the organizers have framed the ceremony not merely as an awards event, but as a symbolic platform intended to encourage a minimum measure of restraint when politics turns turbulent.



Pope Francis and Ahmed el-Tayeb sign the Document on Human Fraternity. Credit: Vatican News.

Shoring Up a Fragile Peace

The moment that drew the most attention this year was the recognition of Armenian Prime Minister [Nikol Pashinyan](#) and Azerbaijani President [Ilham Aliyev](#) for their peace agreement. After decades of confrontation, the award functioned as a form of international endorsement for a still-fragile peace process in the South Caucasus.

Peace agreements are often most vulnerable immediately after they are reached. Domestic political backlash and deep-seated mistrust can easily undermine implementation. In that sense, bringing the two leaders onto the same stage was not a declaration that the journey was complete; it was an attempt to “reinforce” diplomatic progress. By recognizing leaders who chose dialogue at an early stage, the award appears aimed at widening the political space for compromise—and at making it harder for opponents to overturn the agreement.

The award, however, extended beyond state leadership. The 2026 laureates also included Afghan girls’ education advocate [Zarqa Yaftali](#) and the Palestinian nonprofit [Taawon](#), honoring efforts to continue humanitarian and development work under conditions of conflict and political instability. It also underscores the award’s intention to bridge “top-down politics,” such as peace agreements, with “bottom-up peacebuilding” that supports communities on the ground. The underlying message is clear: even with treaties and agreements in place, peace cannot take root if the schools, healthcare, and local support systems needed to sustain society remain fragile.

A Dialogue Circuit Linking Rome and Astana

Abu Dhabi’s ceremony is not an isolated event. In October 2025, Rome hosted the annual forum “Religions and Cultures in Dialogue for Peace,” organized by [the Community of Sant’Egidio](#). Inheriting the spirit of the 1986 Assisi gathering, the forum serves as a continuing platform that brings together religious leaders, political figures, and representatives of civil society. [The Holy See](#) (the Vatican) is a central participant, exercising its moral authority to connect ethical appeals with debates in international politics.

Further east, Kazakhstan has institutionalized interfaith engagement through [the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions](#) in Astana. Both the Holy See and [the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar](#) have consistently participated, helping to sustain the congress as a venue



The closing ceremony held against the backdrop of the ancient Roman ruins, the Colosseum. Credit: Community of Sant’Egidio

for structured interreligious dialogue.

Seen in this light, Rome, Astana, and Abu Dhabi are not merely separate events; they emerge as nodal points in a broader space of dialogue that links religion and diplomacy. Put differently, they function like a regular service designed to keep the lines of communication open—ensuring that the ability to meet and talk does not fall silent.

Religious Actors Across Borders

Not only states sustain this network. Like the Holy See and religious leaders from around the world, Hirotsugu Terasaki, Director-General for Peace Affairs of [Soka Gakkai International \(SGI\)](#) — an organization with some 13 million members worldwide — has taken part in dialogue venues in Abu Dhabi, Rome and Astana.

Ahead of the Abu Dhabi ceremony, Terasaki met with [Judge Mohamed Abdelsalam](#), Secretary-General of the award, and delivered a letter from [Minoru Harada](#), President of Soka Gakkai, addressed to Grand Imam Ahmed Al-Tayeb. The two exchanged views on the need to further strengthen “heart-to-heart dialogue” that transcends religious differences.

The stages created by the United Arab Emirates and Kazakhstan—both of which place emphasis on “spiritual diplomacy”—are more than mere events. What gives these settings moral authority and lends them ethical weight as arenas for peacebuilding is a sustained architecture of dialogue, underpinned by relationships that religious and civil-society leaders have cultivated over many years. Put differently, it is a system for meeting regularly and ensuring that lines of communication do not fall silent. Even when interstate relations

grow tense, religious and civil-society networks can keep channels of dialogue open, serving as a buffer against rupture.

The fact that [Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev](#) engaged with



Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev extended his congratulations to Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on being given the Sheikh Zayed Award for Human Fraternity in a video address. Photo credit: Akorda

this year’s award ceremony through a video address, and that Director-General Terasaki has moved across dialogue venues such as Abu Dhabi, Rome, and Astana, quietly suggests the presence of such networks where religion and diplomacy intersect. Likewise, the Holy See has also been one of the actors continuously involved in all three of these settings.

Shared Words, Different Realities

The vocabulary repeatedly invoked in these forums is strikingly consistent: fraternity, coexistence, dialogue, and human dignity. At a time when multilateralism is faltering and traditional channels of mediation are weakening, this language also serves a political purpose—allowing states to signal, at home and abroad, a preference for dialogue over force and to project the image that they are not stoking confrontation, but providing a venue in which tensions can be managed.

Yet the distance between ceremony and reality does not disappear. Celebrating a peace agreement does not necessarily guarantee its implementation. Honoring efforts in girls' education does not automatically reopen classrooms. Proclaiming coexistence does not stop violence overnight. Awards can encourage compromise and bless dialogue, but they are not mechanisms that can compel outcomes.

Even so, governments and religious and civil-society networks continue to engage in these venues—through attendance, public statements, and sustained involvement—because they remain among the few public settings where opposing parties can appear side by side. There are not many spaces where actors in tense relationships can stand in the same room, where restraint is openly affirmed, and where interfaith ties can function as informal diplomatic channels.

A Place to “Rehearse” Peace

The Zayed Award for Human Fraternity, the peace commemorations in Rome, and the interfaith congress in Astana—taken together—reveal the growing reach of a diplomatic approach that advances not through force or pressure, but through convening, dialogue, and the steady maintenance of relationships. It is a framework that can be symbolic at times, yet capable of exerting a quiet influence.

They also point toward the emergence of a new diplomatic domain where religion, civil society and state interests converge.

In today's international environment, it is precisely these small points of contact that can carry real significance. Before peace is institutionalized as policy, there are only limited spaces where its shape can be publicly “rehearsed.” The Abu Dhabi ceremony is one of those rare stages. It did not resolve a conflict, nor did it erase suspicion. Even so, choosing dialogue—and continuing to make that choice visible in the open—constitutes an act in itself: a clear signal, in an age of polarization, of a commitment to restraint over enmity.

『INPS Japan』

Cycling to combat cancer

By Sudiksha Tuladhar



Sudiksha Tuladhar

Cancer survivors and healthcare workers bicycle across Nepal to raise funds for patients needing treatment

Kathumandu (Nepali Times) – Harka Lama felt as though his life was ending when he was diagnosed with bladder cancer in 2020. The treatment was a hard-won battle, with two surgeries and 27 rounds of chemotherapy before he went into remission in 2022.

As harrowing as his journey was, he did not have to worry much about covering the cost of his treatment, thanks to friends and well-wishers,

particularly those overseas, who extended financial support. Lama's fight against cancer was less painful because of this support.

However, throughout his grueling treatment, he could not help but think of those who might not have the support he got.

"I had help from friends, but I saw many cancer patients who could not even afford to be admitted to hospital for treatment," says Lama. "I had to do something to help."

An avid cyclist, Lama had met Bikash Parajuli, an orthopaedist at Dhulikhel Hospital, in 2017 when he participated in the Yak Attack high-altitude mountain bike race in which Parajuli was a medic. When Lama was diagnosed with cancer, Parajuli encouraged him to go for treatment at Dhulikhel.

While brainstorming about ways to raise funds for patients in need, Lama was inspired by Yak Attack to raise money through cross country bicycling. He teamed up with Dhulikhel Hospital and the Cycle Culture Community (CCC), planning to cycle east to west along Nepal's foothills to raise funds.

Five years later this month, bicyclists began their fundraising tour from Panchthar's Chiwabanjyang in eastern Nepal to Baitadi's Jhulaghat in the west, cycling 1,800km across Nepal from 1-27 January.

Lama and Parajuli, along with Kabita Chitrakar, Bhairaja Maharjan, and Keshav KC cycled the full route. Along the way, more than 50 people had joined with their bicycles for parts of the trail.

Lead rider Kabita Chitrakar is currently being treated for breast cancer that was diagnosed four years ago after she had lost both her mother and sister to the disease.

CYCLING, A SAVIOUR

"It was doubly painful to be battling the disease by myself after losing them," says Chitrakar who found out during a radiation therapy session that the cancer had spread to her lungs and the doctor gave her six months to live. "I fell into a depressive spiral. I could not eat or sleep."

Her friends and family encouraged her to take up cycling to keep her spirits up. Her nephew brought her a bicycle with a modified seat so that she could ride comfortably. In time, what had started as a hobby became a passion.

"As I rode through mountains and forests, I began to enjoy cycling, and my heart began to feel lighter. I was no longer sad, cycling changed my whole perspective towards life," she told us, back in Kathmandu. She has gone through eight rounds of chemotherapy and has heard from other women how much her spirit inspired them, too.

"My family was my pillar through my treatment, encouraging me to fight this disease and live my life to the fullest," she says. "I want to encourage other women to who are going through the same thing that I did."

As Lama and Chitrakar cycled up and down mountain trails, the team did not just raise funds, they also held awareness programs in 14 schools across 11 districts about cancers, mobilising local mother's groups.

"We encouraged young girls and women to be aware about the risks of breast and cervical cancer, and go for screening and mammography," says gynecologist Suman Raj Tamrakar, a member of the cycling team. "We met with over 1,700 young girls and women during our journey."

The cycling team has raised Rs2.3 million, and it will be handed over to Dhulikhel Hospital, which has committed to matching the amount raised to cover the cost of treatment for patients in need.

Says Lama: "I am beyond happy to have completed this journey. But even happier that we raised all that money for the cause."

『INPS Japan/Nepali Times』

Extreme Heat Undermines Decent Work in Northeastern Kenya

By Chemtai Kirui



Hawa Hussein Farah, a market trader in Garissa Town, Kenya, says extreme heat has shortened her working hours and reduced her daily earnings. Credit: Chemtai Kirui/IPS

GARISSA, Kenya (IPS) – By 9 a.m. on a Wednesday, Hawa Hussein Farah is already watching the temperature climb. Awake since 6 a.m., she has prepared her three children for school before walking them to class and heading to Suuq Mugdi, an open-air market in Garissa town, to buy the fruit she will sell.

When she settles into her modest stall, built from wooden poles and covered with draped fabric, the heat is already intensifying beneath the canopy.

On a wooden table, yellow bananas rest in neat clusters beside green-

striped watermelons. Mangoes, some blushed red, others golden, are stacked in small pyramids. The shade shields the fruits from direct sunlight, but the air beneath stays warm and dry.

“When it gets this hot, the customers disappear,” Farah says, lifting a bottle of water. “We have to close and go home to rest until it cools.”

Situated in Kenya’s arid northeast, Garissa is in its hottest season. Between January and March, daytime highs typically hover around 36°C (96.8°F).

In early February 2026, temperatures reached 38°C (100.4°F), with “feels-like” readings topping 41°C (107°F), according to Samuel Odhiambo, the county director of meteorological services.

While similar peaks have been recorded in previous years, Odhiambo said recent data show hot conditions are lasting longer, with more consecutive days above seasonal averages. The meteorological agency has issued a biometeorological advisory, warning residents that prolonged exposure increases the risk of heat stress, dehydration, and skin damage.

“If the current pattern continues, temperatures could exceed 40°C (104°F) in March,” he said.

For Farah, these degrees translate into a shorter workday. By noon, exhaustion sets in.

“My body feels weak and I sweat a lot. I drink two or three litres of water in the morning. I don’t even know if it helps.”

She now closes her stall roughly four hours earlier than in cooler months, cutting deeply into her already thin margins.

On cooler days, she brings in about 7,000 shillings (USD 54) in weekly sales. In prolonged heat, that falls to around 4,000 (USD 31), nearly half her usual takings.

Unsold fruit quickly softens, and after two days she lowers prices or sells it to nearby food kiosks for juice to avoid larger losses.

With no fixed salary or protections, each lost hour translates directly into lost income.

As the largest trade hub in northeastern Kenya, Garissa’s economy is anchored by its livestock markets. [Data from the International Livestock Research Institute \(ILRI\)](#) indicate that this economic dependence makes the region uniquely vulnerable: when extreme heat degrades livestock health and keeps buyers away, the resulting financial contagion directly shrinks customer flow for small vendors like Farah.

Emily Ndung’ee, a motorcycle taxi rider, said she is facing similar losses.

Ndung’ee says her daily income has plummeted from 1,500 shillings (USD 11.50) to just 500 (USD 3.80) during the heatwave.

Wearing protective riding gear traps heat against her skin, and she often waits for hours between rides under the relentless sun.

“The heat gives me rashes and I sweat a lot,” Ndung’ee says. “But I have to be out here. This is the work I depend on to feed my children.” She describes the heat as devastating for both her income and her health. With few shaded areas along the roadside, she moves between scattered tree canopies, waiting for the next client.

Even after sunset, the heat lingers in Garissa’s concrete homes and corrugated roofs, offering little relief to those who have spent the day working outdoors.

Patricia Nying’uro, a climate scientist at the Kenya Meteorological Department who serves as the national focal point for the UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), says that hotter nights strip away the body’s ability to recover between hot days.

“When temperatures approach 39°C, or even lower in humid conditions, the risk to outdoor workers increases sharply, particularly with prolonged exposure,” Nying’uro said.

Concerns over rising temperatures in Garissa have previously reached Parliament.

In 2022, Aden Duale, then the Garissa Township lawmaker, formally petitioned the Ministry of Environment regarding ‘public concerns’ over rising temperatures. The ministry acknowledged above-average temperatures linked to climate change. In Garissa’s markets, those shifts now translate into extreme heat events that disrupt daily survival.

Duale now serves as Cabinet Secretary for Health and in October 2025 presided over the launch of [Kenya’s Climate Change and Health Strategy \(2024–2029\)](#), marking the first time heat-related mortality is formally tracked at the national level.

Yet, responsibility for addressing the impacts of extreme heat remains limited.

[Garissa has a County Climate Change Action Plan \(2023–2028\)](#), but it focuses largely on drought, floods and livestock disease. Specific provisions for extreme heat, such as adjusted working hours, public cooling spaces or hydration points – are absent.

The National Drought Management Authority said its mandate centres on drought-related risks, adding that extreme heat on its own does not fall within its response frameworks. Officials directed heat-related enquiries to the Kenya Meteorological Department.

For Farah, that gap is tangible.

“We don’t get any help from the government. We need shade because we suffer in the heat,” she said. “I still pay taxes to the county, but the loss is mine to bear.”

Across Kenya, informal workers like Farah account for roughly 80 percent of the workforce. [According to a July 2024 report by the International Labour Organization \(ILO\)](#), Africa now faces the world’s highest heat exposure, affecting 92.9 percent of its workers.

The agency warns that labour capacity can decline by up to 50 percent under extreme heat—a productivity drain contributing to projected global losses of USD 2.4 trillion by 2030.

Extreme heat poses a direct challenge to United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8.8, which mandates safe working environments for all.

Without safeguards against extreme heat, this promise remains unfulfilled, exposing a critical gap in Kenya’s climate strategy and undermining SDG 13’s call for national resilience.

The current [National Climate Change Action Plan \(NCCAP\)](#) prioritises large-scale agriculture and energy infrastructure. It offers few explicit protections for informal market labour.

While the heat is universal, its toll is gendered. Researchers say that women in Garissa face a “double exposure”, navigating extreme temperatures at the stall and then managing the unpaid care of children and seniors in overheated, unventilated homes, facing nearly a 24-hour cycle of stress.

[A study](#) by the The Atlantic Council’s Climate Resilience Center found that heat increases a woman’s total work burden by 260 percent when domestic labour is included.

“It’s a regressive tax,” says Kathy Baughman McLeod, CEO of Climate



Emily Ndung'e, a motorcycle taxi rider in Garissa Town, northeastern Kenya, says prolonged high temperatures are affecting her income as fewer customers travel during the hottest hours. Credit: Chemtai Kirui/IPS

Resilience for All (CRA), citing research in cities like Freetown, Sierra Leone, where informal market women can lose up to 60% of their income during heat-driven disruptions.

“The body perpetually believes it’s under attack,” McLeod adds, “without tools like ‘heat insurance’, currently being piloted in India but absent in Kenya, the crisis erodes both income and physical recovery.”

Sierra Leone was the first country in Africa to adopt a national Heat Action Plan (HAP), which is a comprehensive policy framework designed to prepare for, respond to, and mitigate the health and

economic impacts of extreme heat.

According to Dr Joyce Kimutai, who co-authored [the State of the Climate Kenya 2024 report](#) alongside Nying'uro, establishing localised Heat Action Plans is now the “most urgent task” for national adaptation.

“Heat continues to be a silent killer,” Kimutai said, adding that because the economic impacts remain poorly quantified, policy responses continue to lag behind the rising mercury.

Nairobi County is currently piloting a draft heat-response framework that would allow authorities to trigger adjusted working hours and open public cooling spaces during extreme conditions.

The proposal has not yet been formally adopted, but Kimutai says she hopes it could serve as a model for other counties.

As temperatures in Garissa edge toward 40°C, Farah’s adaptation strategy remains a solitary one. She packs her unsold, softening fruit, shuts her stall four hours early, and absorbs the financial blow.

For now, there is no policy to shield her livelihood, only the heat.

『INPS Japan/IPS UN Bureau Report』



A bakery that challenges labor exploitation and promotes environmental protection in every dessert

By Guillermo Ayala



Image: Patricia Figueroa. Credit: Guillermo Ayala.

Drawing on her experience of exploitation in restaurants, Patricia Figueroa has built a project that is committed to decent working conditions and environmental friendliness

Mexico City (INPS Japan) - Pastry making is often thought of as an activity where creativity and passion are essential ingredients that cannot be missing from the recipe for any good dessert; however, little

is said about the working conditions in this industry, which sometimes involves excessive working hours, low wages, and denied rights.

Six years ago, Patricia Figueroa, a pastry chef with more than a decade of experience in haute cuisine restaurants in France and Mexico, embarked on a socio-environmental home delivery pastry project that is committed to using 100% Mexican ingredients and is governed by principles such as decent work and economic growth, in line with Sustainable Development Goal 8 ([SDG 8](#)); as well as responsible production and consumption ([SDG 12](#)).

“Nam was born during the COVID19 pandemic. I was the pastry chef at a restaurant and they made me sign my resignation. Throughout my working history, I was denied many rights, exploited for long hours and poorly paid. That made me wonder: Why should something I love so much be like this? If I have the privilege to do something to change it, I’m going to do it,” said Patricia Figueroa.

That experience was the turning point that led her to rethink not only how she produced her goods, but also how she related to her work. When the order load increases, Patricia hires staff under formal arrangements. “I have them sign their contract and explain everything

that has to be done within the law,” she says, as part of her commitment to not reproducing the chain of labor exploitation.

Cakes and pastries with 100% Mexican flavor

The ethical approach of the project is also reflected in its culinary offerings. Ñam offers desserts made to order, which prevents food waste and guarantees freshness. The menu features flavors such as strawberry, white chocolate, and hibiscus flower cake; pink guava cheesecake with red wine; and mango mousse with basil, combinations that leave a lasting impression on the palate of those who try them.



Mango and Basil Tart. Credit: Paulina Figueroa Garduño (@p_fig_)

These creations are complemented by desserts with a strong Mexican identity, such as horchata cake—made with rice, cinnamon, sugar,

milk, and water—conceived as an alternative for national holidays (September), or pan de muerto, which is offered during the Day of the Dead season (November).

The bakery’s socio-environmental concept also extends to its relationship with its suppliers. Patricia promotes an economic chain based on shared benefits. “I trust my product and the impact it has, so the people who buy from me support me and I support other people; and these mutually beneficial relationships are very good because, in the end, people are going to eat a dessert that tastes delicious and their purchase is making other people happy too,” she explained in an interview with INPS Japan.

Currently, around 70% of the ingredients he uses are agroecological and come from different regions of the country. From Totonacapan, Veracruz, she obtains cinnamon, sesame seeds, and tangerines, while the rice and pink guava he uses to make some of his desserts come from Tlayacapan, Morelos. This direct link with local producers helps to strengthen regional economies.

Model of responsible production, consumption, and on-demand manufacturing

In addition to promoting community value chains, Ñam focuses on responsible production and consumption practices, in line with Sustainable Development Goal 12 (SDG 12). The made-to-order model helps reduce food waste, gas and water consumption, and unnecessary use of packaging, a structural problem in the restaurant

industry. According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Food Waste Index 2024, 13.4 million tons of food are discarded each year in Mexico, making the country one of the leading generators of waste in the Americas.

The name of the project comes from the expression “ñam,” used in Spanish to describe something that tastes delicious, equivalent to “yummy” in English. Currently, Ñam operates mainly through its website and Instagram, where it promotes both its dessert offerings and the story behind the venture.

Alongside her business in Mexico City, Patricia Figueroa is studying for a Master’s degree in Socio-Environmental Business Administration and plans, in the medium term, to transform her business model into a physical space where people can consume instantly and live by the principles that have guided her project: decent work and responsible production.



Range of desserts Ñam desserts. Credit: Paulina Figueroa Garduño (@p_fig_)

『INPS Japan』



Karnali Aquatic Reserve

By Shristi Karki in Kailali

Nepal's first fish sanctuary is an initiative of local governments and indigenous communities

KATHUMANDU (Nepali Times) – The wide [Karnali River](#) looks like the sea here in the Tarai, and thick fog makes it impossible to see the other shore. Farmers melt into the mist as they head off to their farms.

A weak sun filters through mid-morning. Pigs nap in their pens, goats are dressed in cardigans fashioned out of jute sacks for warmth, hens peck listlessly at the mud courtyards. Ducks waddle across the country roads, and cars swerve to avoid them.

The indigenous Tharu and Sonaha communities here have deeply-rooted socio-cultural ties to the river. They have fished in it for generations, and fish is associated with births, deaths, and weddings. As their name suggests, the Sonaha have also traditionally panned for gold in the sand along the banks.



Sakhi Fish Sanctuary is the first conservation effort of its kind in Nepal, led by the local governments and communities of Kailali's Tikapur and Bardia's Rajapur municipalities. Photo: SNEHA TAMRAKAR / WWF NEPAL

But in recent decades, over-fishing, pollution and infrastructure have led to a decline in the Karnali's fish population.

Last week, near the Satti bridge connecting Sudurpaschim and Lumbini Provinces, the fog lifted to reveal the blue-green Karnali glimmering in the sun. Hundreds of people from Kailali's Tikapur and Bardia's Rajapur gathered for the inauguration of the Sakhi Fish Sanctuary — the first conservation effort of its kind in Nepal.

The sanctuary covers nearly 4 sq km of the Lower Karnali that falls within

the two municipalities, and is ecologically significant since it serves as critical breeding, spawning, and nursery habitats for endangered fish, reptiles and mammals. Here are found the rare Gangetic River Dolphin (*Platanista gangetica*), the [Gharial](#) (*Gavialis gangeticus*) fish-eating crocodile, and [Smooth-coated Otter](#) (*Lutrogale perspicillata*). In addition, there are 197 species of fish

in the Karnali, of which 136 are found here in the Tarai section of the river. The pebbled riverbed is a breeding ground for fish when the river is low, while the oxbow lakes and loops created by the nearby Satti bridge are nursing grounds for fish. This is what makes this section of the Karnali ideal to be declared a sanctuary.

But what makes the conservation effort really unique is that it is an initiative of the two local municipalities, the local Tharu, Sonaha and other indigenous communities.

The sanctuary will support the river's aquatic biodiversity, and is supported by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the Dolphin Conservation Centre, Freed Kamaiya Women Development Forum, Small Mammals Conservation and Research Foundation, and the Sonaha Bikas Samaj.

MEKONG LESSONS

The mayors of Tikapur and Rajapur visited fish conservation zones in Laos along the Mekong River to learn about their conservation practices.

"We have indiscriminately killed the fish in the Karnali during the breeding and nursing season," said Rajapur Mayor Dipesh Tharu at the inauguration. "We felt that if this continued there would be no fish left."

Tharu is aware that some locals are wary of conservation initiatives, fearing that it will ban fishing altogether. The sanctuary will allow sustainable fishing but ban the use of dynamite and poison to kill fish.

"The sanctuary will contribute to the conservation of not just fish species, but also the mammals and reptiles that live here," explained ichthyologist Suresh Wagle. "It will protect the spawning and nursing grounds, restore the natural habitat of fish and ensure their genetic continuation."

Tikapur's mayor Ram Lal Dangaura Tharu recalled his own childhood spent fishing in the Karnali: "Even two decades ago there used to be plenty of fish here, we used to bring baskets full of them home. Now, it is looking like there will be no fish left. This is why the sanctuary is important."

Local governments taking the lead in conservation allows them to have ownership, and help citizens understand the importance of protecting the riverine ecosystem better.

"The commitment of the local government towards resource conservation, management and sustainable development is what makes this sanctuary so unique," says Ghana Gurung of WWF Nepal. "In Nepal and across the world, we are seeing indigenous culture and traditions disappear with the biodiversity. This initiative will not just protect freshwater aquatic species but also the culture and heritage of indigenous groups linked to the river."

Komal Sonaha grew up fishing and panning for gold along the banks of the Karnali. The fish provided food, and the gold brought additional income.

Sonaha also remembers Karnali brimming with fish when she was young. "But now, there are hardly any left," she said.

Sonaha is also a WWF Otter Champion, and part of the community-run river conservation groups that mobilise local communities for awareness.

“Initially there was anger and suspicion among local communities, but now, there is a realisation that the sanctuary is the best thing that could have happened here,” Sonaha added.

Sonaha and her family still pan for gold, but with the fish scarce, their primary means of livelihood has shifted to livestock like many other families in Tikapur and Rajapur, supported by national and local institutions.

Ashmita Tharu and Pratima Tharu also used to depend on fish, but now have shifted to vegetable farming in Rajapur. This time of year, there is spinach, cucumber, and cauliflower ready to be sold to nearby markets. The women are now financially independent and actively contribute to their household expenses and their children’s education. Said Pratima: “We used to fish in this river without thinking about the consequences. We had no idea how important conservation was.”

Ashmita nods in agreement. “Now, we are self-employed and so busy with our vegetables that we do not even have time to fish anymore,” she said. With Tikapur and Rajapur municipalities leading the charge, conservationists hope that other local governments and communities along other rivers in Nepal will follow suit to preserve aquatic biodiversity.



Local communities whose livelihoods are linked with the Karnali river have been supported by organisations like WWF Nepal and other national and local organisations to set up alternative means of income generation.

“This initiative from the two municipalities is a milestone in conservation,” said Bijay Shrestha of the Dolphin Conservation Centre. “This will serve as a model and can be replicated across the country to conserve our freshwater habitat and the people who rely on them.”

Local officials also hope that the sanctuary will provide an opportunity to explore options like fishing tourism.

Said Tikapur Mayor Ram Lal Dangaura Tharu: “The Karnali, with its biodiversity, is a river of opportunity and possibility, we are determined to protect it, and make what this river has to offer known to Nepal and the world.” 『INPS Japan/Nepali Times』

People, Naturally

By Kunda Dixit



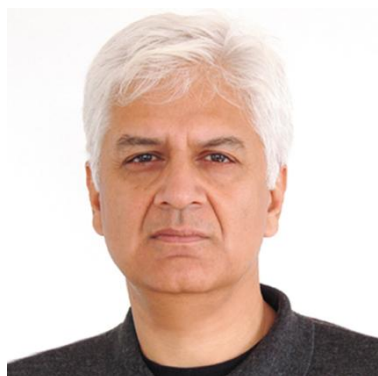
Photos: KUNDA DIXIT

7,893m-high Himalchuli right across Nepal, 150km away.

Upstream, the Trisuli, Seti and Kali Gandaki join to form the Narayani in a catchment stretching 46,300 sq km from Dhaulagiri to Langtang — spanning one-third of Nepal's area.

Glaciers up in those mountains, and even a part of the Tibetan Plateau, feed the Narayani. To see the snows and river together underscores the need to regard the Himalaya not just as a mountain range, but as a composite watershed. This delicate balance between mountains and plains is now destabilised by climate breakdown.

“The climate crisis is a water issue. It is not just about this river, but the mountains and the glaciers we can see from,” said Adil Najam, President of the World Wildlife Fund International during a visit to Chitwan last week. “Water is going to be a frontline climate issue not only for Nepal but for the world itself. This crisis is not long-term, it is immediate term.”



KUNDA Dixit

Local communities in the buffer zones of Chitwan National Park play vital role in conservation

Chitwan (Nepali Times) – The Narayani River in Chitwan National Park is at only 180m above sea level, but on a rare clear day last week visitors could see the summit of

Water from the Narayani, Rapti and other rivers have been vital in shaping the conservation success story of Chitwan National Park. But Nepal's oldest nature reserve now suffers from either too much water during monsoon floods, or too little in the dry season as a result of extreme weather caused by climate breakdown.

Insufficient recharge of aquifers and over-extraction of groundwater

have caused oxbow lakes and wildlife watering holes inside the Park to dry up, and solar-powered pumps have been installed to replenish some of them.

Nepal tripled its tiger population to nearly 400 in the past 14 years, [rhino numbers have rebounded to 752](#) with near-zero poaching for the past decade, and vulture species have been rescued from the brink of extinction — all this largely due to the [efforts of local communities in the buffer zones](#) of parks like Chitwan.

“The biodiversity here was protected because conservation has been collaborative,” said [Birendra Mahato](#), an elected member of the Ratnanagar ward adjacent to the Park. “This [involvement of people in the buffer zone](#), including us from the indigenous communities, has [helped reduce poaching and human-wildlife conflict](#).”

The [Tharu, Bote and Musahar indigenous groups that used to live inside what is now the national park](#) followed traditional practices that took into account the behaviour of tigers, rhinos and wild elephants. There were few fatal wildlife attacks.

“We need to revive that traditional knowledge so there is human-wildlife coexistence, not conflict,” Mahato added.

And communities living in the buffer zone will only protect wildlife if they see a benefit from saving them. The proven way to ensure that coexistence is through well-managed and sustainable tourism that lifts local living standards.

The village of Amaltari along the Narayani river has several high-end resorts that employ local people as nature guides, hotel staff and cultural groups performing for tourists. Besides these, the village has 35 women-led homestays where visitors can experience indigenous culture, food and lifestyle.

“Lifting living standards is the most effective way to ensure nature conservation, and this means protecting authentic local heritage to generate income from tourism,” Adil Najam said (Interview, below).

Tourists come to the buffer zone in the western edge of Chitwan National Park in Amaltari for safaris to see tigers, rhinos, the vulture conservation site, or to float down the river to watch the gharial, crocodiles and migratory birds. Chitwan National Park saw 300,000 visitors last year, with Nepalis now outnumbering foreign tourists.

Gita Mahato runs one of the Amaltari homestays and admits that it was not easy in the beginning to ensure that the quality of service was up to mark, and business suffered during and after the pandemic. “But now we have more experience and confidence, our incomes have gone up, and it has restored pride in our culture and helped protect nature,” she added. “It is like a fairy tale.”

Improved living standards have impacted other social aspects:



Vulture feeding at Jatayu which has rescued the raptors from the brink of extinction.

there are schools, children have better nutrition, child marriage has gone down, no one is stealing electricity with hooks anymore, and there are now three beauty parlours in Amaltari.

WWF Nepal helped with seed money to set up the local Hamar Cooperative, which ploughs tourism income into a savings scheme that lends to members. There are no defaulters, and the indigenous [Musahar](#), [Bote](#) and [Tharu](#) households now have savings.

The municipality has built electric fences to protect the rice and mustard fields from wildlife, and this has eliminated fatalities here from tiger attacks. The community's Anti-poaching Youth Group and the Park's military have increased vigilance after the jailbreak of notorious wildlife traffickers in September.

Chitwan and other [national parks and buffer zones](#) across Nepal are conducting a massive tiger census this week, installing 1,100 camera traps. The cameras also help to curb poaching, and the total tiger population is expected to exceed 400.

Says Ghana Gurung from WWF Nepal: "This is the best example that protecting one charismatic species that is at the top of the food chain helps to protect biodiversity and the entire ecosystems."

"Water is the frontline climate issue"



Adil Najam with young Buffer Zone forest guides.

World Wildlife Fund International President Adil Najam was in Chitwan last week, and spoke to Ghana Gurung of WWF Nepal.

Ghana Gurung: What are your impressions after visiting Chitwan National Park?

Adil Najam: I always knew Nepal was special, and the work of WWF Nepal was special, but I just didn't realise how special. Seeing the work first hand in Chitwan with species protection, zero-poaching and, most importantly, how to work with communities, particularly with indigenous communities so that we turn this rhetoric of nature vs people into truly a bridge of nature and people. Meeting members of

indigenous communities and conservation officials, seeing their sense of pride about what has been achieved was very motivating.

So much of what you are doing here in Nepal is relevant to the UN's SDG goals and WWF's own 2030 roadmap — especially our core work on species. The challenges are great, but we do not take enough time to appreciate the achievements. We haven't got to where we want to yet, but we are much further down the road.

Tigers have almost tripled, rhinos more than tripled, zero poaching for many years, and all of this with a grassroots approach working with communities. It is not always easy, their concerns are real, but working with them as partners shows that conservation and people do not need to be contradictions.

You mention challenges. What are some of the difficulties ahead?

When you are working at a high level, the first challenge is keeping it at that level. Unfortunately global challenges like climate change, biodiversity loss are now so great that we have to multiply our efforts multiple times.

Nepal also needs to share what you do here with the rest of the world. Unless we learn from each other, we are not going to solve the planetary crises. I was very happy to see how much the youth are involved in Nepal's conservation effort, but the challenge will be how

to get young people excited about conservation with an aspiration to do more.

Yes, we try to work more with the youth. What were some of the other highlights of the trip?

Clearly, one of the outstanding highlights was the visit to the homestay collective run by indigenous communities, particularly that they are women-led and they have become entrepreneurial, learning new ways to work with nature, designing new livelihoods, by having guests who enjoy nature. The homestay program in Nepal really has ownership and links nature and people.

Nepal is one of the most climate vulnerable countries in the world. What were some of the impacts you noticed?

I think every country now is climate vulnerable. For the developing world, it is a compounded challenge not only because they were not responsible for the problem, but also because we now face its consequences. Because the world has not done very much on mitigation, the challenges have become more difficult. Besides carbon mitigation, we need to focus on adaptation and address the issue of water.

Climate in the age of adaptation essentially becomes a water issue, and Chitwan has done well to protect its fresh water habitats. It is not just about these rivers, but the mountains and the glaciers we can see from here that feed them. We have compartmentalised problems: this

is climate, this is biodiversity, that is plastic. That is not how nature works. There is no solution to the climate challenge without dealing with nature, and vice versa. So, water is going to be a frontline climate issue not only for Nepal but for the world itself. Leadership on climate will have to rest with countries like Nepal in demonstrating ways to build climate resilience. And resilience resides in people.

Given this, what are the strategies we need going forward?

We are seeing resource constraints, and that is not news. But beyond that many of the biggest challenges of our time are at threshold or beyond threshold level — whether they are climate related, loss of nature, or water stress, etc. We are at this pivotal point, and I hope we will invent better ways on how to deal with these crises. As you already do in Nepal, we have to look at ecosystems as integrated and connected, where doing good for one thing has a positive impact on another. We know that with species here in Chitwan — if one species does well, a whole bunch of others also benefit.

And like you do here, we have to work in partnerships with communities, conservation people, other international organisations, the private sector. This is not the time for finding your corner and hiding in it. This is a planetary problem, and we need a 8 billion people solution.

And the writing on the wall in Nepal and elsewhere is that young people are the key to the present and the future. It is really their world. We have to create an environment in which they can thrive to reach

their own potential. And we have to give them the sense that although things are difficult, if we do the right things there are solutions.

『INPS Japan/Nepali Times』



Credit: UN Photo

Education for Sustainable Development: Achieving SDG 4 in Sub-Saharan Africa

By Winnie Kamau



Photography by PERRIN BANKS

Image Credit: awf.org

Nairobi, Kenya (London Post) – Sub-Saharan Africa, home to the world's youngest and fastest-growing population, faces profound educational challenges amid rapid demographic shifts, economic pressures, and escalating climate threats. Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) calls for inclusive, equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030. As we approach the end of 2025, progress remains uneven: while enrollment has expanded over decades, quality, relevance, and equity lag, perpetuating cycles of poverty and vulnerability. Education for Sustainable Development

(ESD), embedded in SDG Target 4.7, provides a vital framework by equipping learners with knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes to address sustainability challenges—environmental integrity, economic viability, and social justice. In a region on the frontlines of climate change, food insecurity, and inequality, ESD transforms education from rote learning into a tool for resilience and empowerment.

The current state of education in Sub-Saharan Africa reveals stark disparities. Recent UNESCO and UN reports indicate approximately 118 million children, adolescents, and youth out of school across Africa, with Sub-Saharan Africa bearing the brunt—over half the global total. Pre-primary participation rates stand at about 48.6%, far below global averages, undermining early foundations. Primary completion hovers around 62-65% on time, with lower rates for secondary levels. Learning outcomes are critically low: in many countries, fewer than 10-58% of children achieve minimum proficiency in reading and mathematics by primary's end. Teacher shortages are acute, with Sub-Saharan Africa needing an estimated 15 million new educators by 2030; around 40% of primary teachers lack national qualifications, and trained teacher ratios are the lowest globally at about 65%.

Gender disparities persist, narrowing at primary but widening at secondary and tertiary, especially in STEM. Poverty, child labor, early marriage, conflict, and cultural norms disproportionately affect girls.

Infrastructure improvements—such as drinking water and sanitation—have advanced by over 10 percentage points in some areas since 2016, yet basic services remain inadequate in many schools.



Image Credit: africanrelief.org.

ESD reorients education toward transformative learning, fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, and action for sustainability. Defined by UNESCO’s ESD for 2030 framework, it empowers informed decisions for a just society. In Sub-Saharan Africa, where climate impacts disrupt schooling—extreme weather caused millions of lost school days in 2024—ESD integrates local issues like drought-resistant farming, biodiversity conservation, and community resilience. Initiatives in 2025, such as regional workshops in Senegal for West and Central Africa, advance ESD mainstreaming through multisectoral approaches. Programs in Botswana, South Africa, and the Sahel promote teacher training embedding

sustainability, linking classrooms to real-world challenges like agroecology and green economies. ESD supports interconnected SDGs: climate action (13), gender equality (5), and reduced inequalities (10).

Structural barriers impede progress. Financing gaps are massive: Sub-Saharan Africa shoulders much of the global \$97-100 billion annual shortfall for SDG 4, exacerbated by debt burdens where governments spend more on servicing than education. Many fall short of the 4-6% GDP benchmark. Curriculum overload, rigid exam-focused systems, and inadequate teacher preparation marginalize ESD. Conflicts, displacement, and climate events—floods, droughts—disrupt learning, pushing millions out of school. Digital divides and resource scarcity hinder inclusive, innovative approaches. Cultural barriers require localizing ESD with indigenous knowledge.

African educationalists emphasize context-sensitive solutions. Dr. Julius Atuhurra highlights shifting from quantity to “quality along with quantity,” studying “positive deviance” in high-performing teachers for scalable practices. Professor Jude Chikadibia Onwunyirimadu calls universities hubs for teacher production, pedagogical research, and community literacy. Others, like Dr. Amina K. Mutesi, stress rooting ESD in local systems—sustainable agriculture, water conservation—for relevance. Prof. Thabo Ndlovu advocates transformative pedagogy, empowering teachers to foster innovation and adaptation.

Pathways forward demand bold action. Increase targeted financing through innovative models like debt-for-education swaps (e.g., Côte d’Ivoire’s 2024 success) and partnerships like the Global Partnership

for Education. Reform curricula for competency-based, ESD-integrated learning across subjects. Empower teachers via massive recruitment, continuous development, and better conditions. Address inequities with inclusive policies—scholarships, school feeding, safe infrastructure—for girls, rural children, and crisis-affected groups. Leverage regional collaboration: African Union Agenda 2063, Sahel



Image Credit: africa.iclei.org

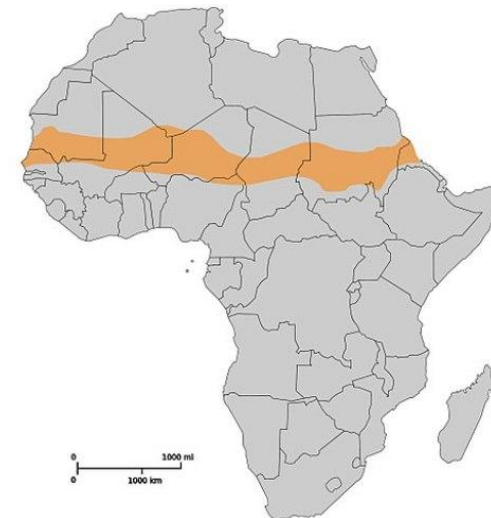
Teacher Initiatives, and platforms like Imaginecole for shared resources. Strengthen data monitoring and embrace digital tools responsibly. Build climate-resilient schools and community-based learning.

Technology offers opportunities: mobile platforms and radio education

expand reach, but equitable deployment is key to avoid deepening divides. ESD ensures innovation supports human-centered, sustainable learning.

As 2025 closes, Sub-Saharan Africa stands at a crossroads with five years to 2030. ESD bridges access to meaningful, transformative education, equipping youth to navigate climate crises, drive green economies, and build equitable societies. Grounded in local realities, teacher-driven, and systemically supported, ESD can make SDG 4 achievable—fostering resilient futures for Africa's generations and the planet.

『INPS Japan/ London Post』



Sub-Saharan Africa Credit:Wikimedia Commons

Rescued from Fire: the World in 2025

By Farhana Haque Rahman



TORONTO, Canada (IPS) – Our traditional “year-ender” usually kicks off with a grim litany of world disasters and crises over the past 12 months, highlights IPS partners and contributors and culminates in a more positive-sounding finale. This time I’d like to begin on a more personal note intended also as a metaphor.

Farhana Haque Rahman On November 20 when the UN climate talks COP30 in Belem, Brazil, looked set to spill over into extra time as delegates harassed by fossil fuel lobbyists haggled over a concluding text, fire broke out in the conference centre. Cue flames and panic.

As thousands looked for the nearest exit, a young Bangladeshi diplomat saw me and instead of joining the mass scramble, he gallantly led me through the crowds to safety. Thank you Aminul Islam Zisan for demonstrating when in crisis people can come together in unique ways.

Thankfully no one was killed in the fire; talks resumed and the Conference of Parties process survived in the form of a concluding document that could be interpreted as a small step forward in the global battle to stem the climate crisis, even while making only an [oblique reference](#) to the fossil fuels that are largely creating it.

COP’s survival was not assured given the US boycott ordered by President Donald Trump who dismissed climate change as “the greatest con job” in addressing the UN General Assembly in September.

The US absence from Belem in fact inflicted more damage to the US in terms of its global standing, just as Trump’s decision to shun the G20 talks running parallel in Johannesburg only deepened its reputational harm. Salt was diplomatically rubbed into its self-inflicted wounds by the dignity of G20 host President Cyril Ramaphosa who ignored US opposition from afar and steered adoption of a declaration addressing global challenges, notably the climate crisis.



Donald Trump credit: White House

Looking back, perhaps this was the week that quietly brought the curtain down on the Age of America. Unpredictability, chaos, violence and institutionalised cruelty are the early symptoms of the dramatic shift in 2025 towards unilateralism and protectionism.

Hundreds of Palestinians, including scores of children, have been killed since the US-brokered “truce” between Israel and Hamas began on October 11. Russian air strikes against Ukrainian civilian targets have also regularly punctuated Trump’s flip-flopping efforts to end a war he said he could finish on day one of his presidency.

Sharp cuts in US aid ordered by Trump in January have “fuelled a global humanitarian catastrophe”, according to a statement by the UN Human Rights Council on July 31. Citing two independent experts on poverty, food and human rights, the Council said: “More than 350,000 deaths stemming from the aid cuts have already been estimated, including more than 200,000 children.”

Famine is spreading with the conflict in western Sudan, and lack of finance has also led to cuts in vital UN aid to South Sudan. Over one million people caught in Myanmar’s largely forgotten civil war had their lifesaving support cut by the UN World Food Programme because of funding shortfalls.

Civicus, a global alliance of civil society organizations and activists working to strengthen citizen action, says these multiple and connected crises – conflict, climate breakdown and democratic regression – are overwhelming the international institutions designed

to address the problems that states can’t or won’t resolve. US withdrawal from global bodies threatens to worsen this crisis in international cooperation.

But as CIVICUS’s [2025 State of Civil Society Report](#) outlines, civil society has ideas about how to save the UN by putting people at its heart: a theme embraced at COP30 by Open Society Foundations President Binaifer Nowrojee who endorsed Brazil’s democratic leadership for elevating Indigenous and Afro-descendant voices and bringing human rights back to the centre of climate action.

In this rapidly shifting world order, Nowrojee sees the Global South stepping forward with new ideas and a new vision rooted in dignity, fairness, and protection of the planet.

Arguably the most important agreement emerging from COP30 was the Just Transition Mechanism which aims to ensure fair development of a global green economy, protecting the rights of all people, including workers, women and Indigenous people.

Coral Pasisi, Director of Climate Change and Sustainability for the Pacific Community (SPC), highlighted at COP30 how critical the situation has become for island nations experiencing accelerating climate impacts and hoping for meaningful breakthroughs in Belem. She raised the need for stronger support from developed countries for Loss and Damage.

The Gen Z demonstrators who have rocked regimes in South Asia and Africa are certainly stepping up with their visions for fairer futures for all, their protests aimed against nepotism and corruption among entrenched elites. They have been met with bullets in Bangladesh last year, and in Nepal – where the government was forced to resign in September – as well as Tanzania where hundreds were reported killed. Gen Z protests this year also rocked Indonesia, the Philippines and Morocco.

As Jan Lundius, a Swedish researcher, [wrote in IPS](#): “Even though specific incidents triggered these upheavals, they were all due to long-term, shared grievances evolving from stark wealth gaps, rampant nepotism, and unlimited corruption. Above all, youngsters protested against members of powerful dynasties, favouring a wealthy and discredited political elite.”

A combination of conflict and climate disasters can have disastrous long-term consequences, particularly for [children's education](#). Initiatives supported by IPS like [Education Cannot Wait \(ECW\)](#) and the [Safe Schools Declaration](#) focus on providing quality, inclusive education to crisis-affected children to prevent long-term cycles of poverty and instability.

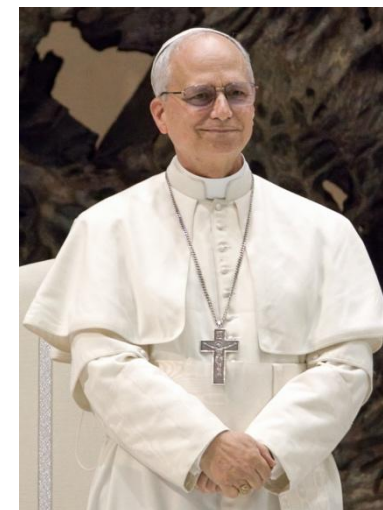
Hurricane Melissa which swept through the Caribbean in October served as a harsh reminder that 5.9 million children and adolescents in Latin America and the Caribbean could be pushed into poverty by 2030 due to loss of education as a result of climate change if governments do not intervene soon, according to UNICEF.

The World Bank estimated the physical damage inflicted by Hurricane Melissa on Jamaica at some \$8.8 billion, or 41% of the country's 2024 GDP.

However the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) has also warned governments that they are underestimating or ignoring the inextricable links between climate change, nature loss and food security. Its latest assessment, approved by nearly 150 countries meeting in Windhoek, Namibia, warned that biodiversity is declining everywhere, largely as a result of human actions.

CGIAR, a global research partnership focused on food security, is facing a very different world from when it was founded nearly 50 years ago in terms of having to address climate change, biodiversity loss, and new conflicts, according to CGIAR Chief Scientist Dr Sandra Milach. A major focus is on equipping 500 million small-scale producers for climate resilience to protect their livelihoods and increase stable incomes.

A year-ender wouldn't be complete in the run-up to festive celebrations without at least a mention of the major religious figures to



*Pope Leo XIV during a meeting with the media on May 12, 2025
By Edgar Beltrán, The Pillar, CC BY-SA 4.0,*

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『INPS Japan/IPS UN Bureau Report』



Inter Press Service

Gender Equality and SDG 5 in the Middle East: Progress, Policies, and Cultural Barriers

By Nabil Tahir

Karachi, Pakistan
(London Post) -

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5, to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls by 2030, is universally recognised as one of the most transformative yet most elusive of the 17 SDGs. Nowhere is this paradox more evident than in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the region that continues to post the world's widest gender gaps in economic participation, political empowerment, and legal rights according to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2024, the UNDP Gender Inequality Index 2025, and the World Bank's Women, Business and the Law index. Yet the same region has, over the past decade,

SDG5 – Gender Equality

Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.



Image Credit: UKM.my

recorded some of the fastest relative gains in female education, enacted bold legislative reforms, and seen the emergence of a digitally native, feminist youth movement that is reshaping public discourse. Since the adoption of the SDGs in 2015, female labour-

force participation in MENA has risen from a global low of 19 % to approximately 24 % in 2025 (ILO data), with the most dramatic increases in the Gulf. Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 has driven women's workforce participation from 18 % in 2016 to nearly 36 % today; women now make up over 40 % of the public-sector workforce in

Qatar and the UAE. Landmark legal breakthroughs, the 2018 lifting of the driving ban and the 2019–2023 progressive dismantling of the male guardianship system in Saudi Arabia, the introduction of paid paternity leave and anti-harassment laws in the UAE and Bahrain, Tunisia’s pioneering 2017 law against violence against women, and Lebanon’s 2024 reform allowing women to pass nationality to their children, have removed some of the most visible barriers to women’s autonomy.

Education remains the brightest success story. Gender parity in primary and secondary enrolment now exceeds 0.97 across most Arab countries, and in tertiary education women outnumber men in Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Tunisia, Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, and the UAE. In several states, female literacy among the under-30 cohort is effectively universal. These achievements directly support SDG targets 5.4 (recognising unpaid care work) and 5.5 (ensuring women’s full and effective participation), yet they have not translated proportionally into economic or political power.

Important legal gaps persist. Ten jurisdictions still require a woman to obtain a guardian’s permission to marry. Seven retain highly unequal inheritance laws rooted in traditional interpretations of Islamic jurisprudence. Marital rape is not fully criminalised everywhere, and personal-status codes in most Gulf countries continue to institutionalise male authority over divorce, custody, and freedom of movement.

The most binding constraints, however, are cultural rather than strictly legal. Concepts of family honour (sharaf) and female chastity (‘ird) continue to regulate behaviour more effectively than statutes. Socially enforced expectations that women remain primary caregivers are nearly universal; even where maternity leave is generous, paternity leave is minimal or non-existent, reinforcing childcare as “women’s work.” An Arab Barometer 2024 survey across ten countries found that 62 % of respondents, down only nine points since 2011, still believe a woman’s most important role is caring for home and family.

Progressive reforms have provoked conservative backlash that frames gender equality as a Western import incompatible with Islamic values. Yet an increasingly confident generation of Muslim feminist scholars and activists, through movements such as Musawah and progressive fatwas from Al-Azhar (2023) and Algeria’s Supreme Islamic Council (2024), successfully argue that egalitarian interpretations of inheritance, polygamy, guardianship, and domestic violence are theologically legitimate and align with the higher objectives of Islamic law (maqasid al-sharia).

The decisive variable for the coming decade is the region’s youth bulge and its digital nativeness. Women under 30 are the most active demographic on Instagram, TikTok, and X in every Arab country. Campaigns such as Lebanon’s #LanSaktut, Tunisia’s #Undress522, and Saudi Arabia’s #IAmMyOwnGuardian have moved feminist discourse from elite NGOs into mainstream youth culture. Paradoxically, the intense online harassment these activists face has only amplified their reach.

Economic necessity is proving a more powerful driver than ideology alone. Gulf states recognise that excluding half their national talent pool is no longer sustainable; McKinsey estimates that closing the gender employment gap could add \$2.7 trillion to regional GDP by 2030. Jordan, Morocco, and Egypt have introduced gender-responsive budgeting and corporate-board quotas (Morocco 30 %, UAE 20 %). These measures are motivated less by social justice than by the realisation that gender inequality has become a competitive disadvantage in a knowledge economy.

To accelerate progress toward SDG 5 by 2030, governments and international partners should prioritise six mutually reinforcing actions: abolish remaining guardianship rules and equalise inheritance and nationality laws; criminalise marital rape everywhere; invest heavily in subsidised childcare, eldercare, and generous shared parental leave; reform school curricula to dismantle stereotypes from primary level upward; scale digital and financial-literacy programmes for rural and low-income women; and amplify religious reformist voices who frame gender equality as an Islamic imperative rather than a foreign imposition. The League of Arab States could usefully establish binding regional benchmarks with annual public reporting.

The Middle East is neither the unchanging patriarchal fortress of stereotype nor on the verge of Nordic-style parity. It is a region in rapid, uneven transition. The same societies that rank last in global gender-gap indices have produced the fastest relative gains in female education and some of the boldest legal reforms of the past decade. The central paradox of SDG 5 in MENA is that cultural transformation

now lags behind both legislative change and women's own aspirations. Closing that gap will demand sustained policy reform, massive investment in care infrastructure, and a deliberate cultural strategy that engages religious leaders, schools, media, and, above all, the digital-native generation already rewriting the rules in real time.

By 2030 the region will not achieve full gender equality, but the trajectory is clearer and more hopeful than at any point in modern history. The question is no longer whether change is coming, but whether governments, religious institutions, and societies will harness the energy of their young women fast enough to meet the economic, demographic, and moral imperatives of the twenty-first century.

『INPS Japan/London Post』



Global warning bell in Belem

By Sonia Awale

Energy diversification, climate finance, and carbon credit remain priorities for Nepal at COP30

Kathumandu (Nepali Times) – At the opening plenary of COP30, which stands for the convolutedly named 30th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), in Belém on Tuesday, Nepal brought up the threats to the Himalayan watershed.

Nepal's delegate Rajendra Prasad Mishra, Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, also spoke on behalf of Bhutan and Bangladesh after the three countries formally called for tripling grant-based adaptation financing from 2015 levels to at least \$120 billion per year by 2030, and to ensure a more simplified, scaled-up access to finance their National Determined Contributions (NDCs) to reduce emissions and adapt to climate impacts.

“Bhutan has already graduated from Least Developed Country (LDC) status, while Bangladesh and Nepal are in the process of graduation,” said Mishra. “Graduation reflects development progress, but does not reduce our climate vulnerability nor the scale of support required to safeguard development gains.”



Photo: GOPEN RAI

The Loss & Damage Fund is also finally coming into effect, so countries can now apply for \$5-20 million to make up for damage from climate impact. But claiming damage and linking disasters to climate breakdown has not been an easy process.

“When a 200MW hydropower plant is destroyed by a glacial flood, it is a big loss for Nepal's GDP. Every megawatt costs us \$20 million to build,” says energy entrepreneur Kushal Gurung. “Our lobbying should be top-notch, and hydropower can make a good case for us.”

Belém marks the tenth anniversary of the Paris Agreement that brought the world together to pledge to keep global average temperature to 'well below' 2°C above pre-industrial levels and limit it to 1.5°C.

COP has also returned to Brazil after 30 years of the Rio Conference in 1995. Since then there have been numerous summits, which have been criticised for being just hot air and being hosted by fossil-fuel exporting countries like UAE and Azerbaijan. Belém was selected because it is a gateway to the Amazon, but Brazil has now also become a major oil producer after new offshore finds.

A recent report shows that compared to 2019, the world is set to reduce its emissions by 12% in 2035 if countries are to implement their Nationally Determined Contributions even though the figure needs to go up to 40% to meet temperature targets.

There has been progress. Before the Paris Agreement the world was on a path for 4°C increase during this century, and this has now come down to 2.5°C because of the clean energy transition. But a lot more needs to be done to meet the Paris 1.5°C target.

“This progress is proof that multilateralism is working, it is delivering,” Manjeet Dhakal of the Climate Analytics South Asia told us from Belém. “Having said that, it is simply not enough. Emissions need to go down much further, and a lot of it is tied to developed countries providing climate finance to do so.”

Many developing countries have adopted 'conditional NDCs' which means their emission reduction targets cannot be met without international climate finance. In its third NDC, Nepal set a target of a 17.1% reduction in net greenhouse gas emissions and 26.8% by 2035. But achieving that has a price tag of \$73.74 billion, with much of it from international climate finance.

UNDERFINANCED

However, the climate for climate finance is getting worse. The United States has exited from the Paris Agreement for the second time under President Trump, and there are cutbacks in foreign aid by European funders.

Even so, the EU has committed to reducing its emissions by 90% in the next 15 years, 85% of which will be domestic emission cuts.

The silver lining in all this is that the leadership in climate action is increasingly being taken by Nepal's neighbours China and India with both investing heavily in renewable energy. China is the world leader in solar panels, wind turbines and electric vehicles, and Nepal has already taken strategic advantage of this.

With expensive hydropower plants increasingly at risk from glacial lake outburst floods, experts say Nepal must diversify its energy mix and invest in solar power which has 10 times more potential than hydropower at 432 gigawatts with over 300 days of sunshine a year.

Solar farms can also power pump storage, which are cheaper and quicker to build.

China has drastically reduced the cost of photovoltaic cells, making such schemes more feasible. Nepal just needs to ease up its restrictive domestic energy policies, boost investment and resist geopolitical pressure on electricity generation.

“First, we need to increase the cap on solar energy from 10% to 30%, and next, the bidding process should be made easier, or just have the first past the post system like that for hydropower,” says Kushal Gurung.

The disadvantage of solar power is that it generates only daytime energy, but this can be solved with grid-scale battery storage or pump storage. But first, the government needs to fix the rate for solar purchase so that entrepreneurs are incentivised.

“This is not happening because our government officials and engineers are comfortable dealing with hydropower, and are not just updated about the latest advances,” says Gurung. “As a result, we have no clear policies when it comes to solar.”

Hydropower has become one of the biggest industries in Nepal with an installed capacity of over 3,400MW and the government’s target is to produce 28,500MW in the next ten years. But the recent climate disasters have made it clear that relying only on hydropower alone is too risky.

The Nepal-Tibet glacial flood in July destroyed and damaged four hydropower plants and substations along the Bhote Kosi, and last September’s floods slashed the country’s total generation by half.

Nepal now needs to build on the widespread adoption of battery-powered vehicles by extending it to electric public transport and for household appliances like stoves, rice cookers and refrigerators. Not only would this reduce Nepal’s per capita carbon footprint, but it would also reduce the country’s annual Rs300 billion petroleum import bill.

At global platforms like UNFCCC, it is easy even for individual developed countries to get lost without an alliance. Now that Nepal is graduating from LDC status, it needs to have strong partners with a common goal to move forward in international negotiations.

Says Kushal Gurung: “We won’t have privilege that came with LDC status anymore, which means climate finance will be even more limited. But there are a few things we can urgently do on our own like regulating the carbon credit market.”

『INPS Japan/Nepali Times』



Newe Shalom/Wahat al-Salam: an untold story of a shared Jewish-Arab society

By Roman Yanushevsky



Photo credit: Roman Yanushevsky

Newe Shalom / Wahat al-Salam - Hebrew and Arabic for “Oasis of Peace” — is a unique intentional community in Israel where Jewish and Arab citizens live together on the basis of complete equality, shared ownership, and a joint cultural and educational life. It is one of the most widely studied and symbolically important coexistence projects in the region.

Jerusalem (INPS Japan) –

According to the data published by the Central Bureau of Statistics in Israel (CBS) in late September 2025, out of 10 million of people living in Israel, Jews comprise 7.76 million residents, or some 78.5% of the total population. Arab

Israeli citizens number approximately 2.13 million (21.5%). The majority of them are Muslim, while Christians make up 6.9% of the total Arab population.



Roman Yanushevsky

It means that the Arab population plays a significant role in Israel. You can find Arab Israelis as lawyers, doctors, pharmacists and teachers. Many of them work in the construction field and agriculture, retail and wholesale, transportation, services and hospitality. There are Arab Israeli politicians (Knesset members), Supreme court judges, etc.

There are a number of mixed cities and localities where Jews and Arabs live side by side, but there is only one example of a planned shared Jewish-Arab community.

It is called Neve Shalom / Wahat al-Salam. It's a small village just 20 minutes away from Jerusalem with a very unique story. It was made with the goal of creating a mixed Jewish–Arab community living together by choice, not by administrative accident.

Several UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are closely connected to the story, mission, and practical work of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam:

SDG 4 — Quality Education

SDG 10 — Reduced Inequalities

SDG 11 — Sustainable Cities and Communities

SDG 16 — Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

SDG 17 — Partnerships for the Goals

One monk's vision (early 1970s)

The idea to create such a community came from Father Bruno Hussar, a Dominican monk of Jewish origin who was deeply troubled by the Israeli-Arab conflict. After the Six-Day War, he imagined a place where Jews, Muslims, and Christians could live together not in theory, but in daily life.

In 1972, the community was founded on a barren hill next to the Latrun area, on land leased from the Abu Ghosh village. There were no houses, no infrastructure, and only a few pioneers.

The name was chosen deliberately in both languages:

- Neve Shalom (Hebrew),
- Wahat al-Salam (Arabic).

Both mean “Oasis of Peace.”

Slow start (1970s–1980s)

The first families — Jewish and Arab — began arriving in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Every aspect of life had to be negotiated from scratch:

- How to run a bilingual community,
- How to celebrate holidays,
- How to educate children in two languages,
- How to make decisions equally

They adopted a consensus-based system, where Jews and Arabs each hold equal power.

In the early years, the project attracted both admiration and skepticism. Some Israelis and Palestinians saw it as a naïve experiment. Others saw it as a model for a shared society.



Photo credit: Roman Yanushevsky

A Bilingual School That Made History (1984 onward)

Perhaps the community's biggest accomplishment is the bilingual, binational primary school, founded in 1984 — the first of its kind in Israel.

Key features:

- Half Jewish, half Arab students,
- Two homeroom teachers in each class (one Hebrew-speaking, one Arabic-speaking),

- The curriculum includes both Israeli and Palestinian narratives.

The school later expanded into the first integrated bilingual junior high school in Israel.

Its influence has been enormous: today more than half a dozen bilingual Arab–Jewish schools in Israel were inspired by this model.

The “School for Peace” (1980s–today)

Another major institution in the village is the School for Peace, founded in 1979.

It offers: conflict-resolution seminars, encounter programs for youth and adults, workshops for professionals (teachers, psychologists, activists). Tens of thousands of people — Israelis, Palestinians, international students — have gone through these programs. Many report that it changed how they view the conflict.

Growth and Global Recognition (1990s–2000s)

By the 1990s and early 2000s, the village became world-famous.

It received:

- The UNESCO Prize for Peace Education (2001),
- Numerous international delegations and journalists,
- Support from peace organizations abroad

The community grew slowly but steadily. Families join through a long selection process, since the village must maintain equal numbers of Jews and Arabs. The population today is roughly 70–80 families (it fluctuates).

Controversies and Internal Tensions

Despite its hopeful image, the village has not been free from internal struggles.

Even inside a coexistence community, Jewish and Arab residents disagree on:

- How to talk about the Nakba,
- The meaning of Zionism,
- National symbols,
- Military service (most Jewish residents serve; Arab residents do not),
- Land and bureaucratic battles

For decades, the community struggled to get official master plans, secure building permits, expand housing, and political pressures. During times of heightened conflict (e.g., the Second Intifada, wars in Gaza), tensions inside the village rose sharply. Some residents left, feeling overwhelmed or disillusioned. However, the community has consistently survived, rebuilt trust, and continued to grow.

Newe Shalom / Wahat al-Salam Today

As of 2025, the community includes Jews, Muslims, and Christians. It continues to run the bilingual school, the School for Peace, a spiritual center called the Pluritrilistic Spiritual Centre. It attracts visitors, researchers, journalists, and delegations.

While small in numbers, its symbolic importance is large: it demonstrates that Jewish–Arab cooperation is possible as a lived reality, not only as a political dream.

Newe Shalom / Wahat al-Salam is not meant to be a utopia. Life there is often difficult, emotional, and political. But it remains one of the few places where Jews and Arabs share equal governance, equal education, and equal community life.

A model studied in conflict-resolution programs worldwide. It is a living example of what a shared Israeli-Palestinian society could look like.

Why is Newe Shalom / Wahat al-Salam unique?

There are a number of cities and towns with mixed populations in Israel. Such as Jerusalem, Tel Aviv (Jaffa), Haifa, Acre, Lod and others. But if compared to Neve Shalom / Wahat al-Salam, critical differences remain.

- In most mixed cities, Arabs and Jews live largely in segregated neighborhoods, not in a unified “village-community”.
- Shared institutions — bilingual schools, joint self-governance, community-wide decisions — are rare to non-existent.
- Therefore, even if there is “coexistence by chance” (living in the same city), there’s little that matches the intentional, shared-society character of NS/WaS.

This is why the example of Newe Shalom / Wahat al-Salam is very inspiring and it proves that Jewish/Arab coexistence by choice is possible.



Credit: UN photo

『INPS Japan』

Sunrise in a Kayak: Xochimilco paddles towards a shared economy model

By Guillermo Ayala Alanis



Photo: Sunrise in Xochimilco. Credit: Guillermo Ayala Alanis.

Mexico City (INPS Japan) - Kayaking has become an alternative to conventional [trajineras](#) for exploring the canals of Xochimilco, while also playing an important role in a shared economy model in the community that generates decent work and economic growth.

As dawn breaks, the canals of Xochimilco reveal a side that few visitors know. The mist, illuminated by the first rays of sunlight, dominates the landscape between the canals and [chinampas](#), harmonizing with the barely perceptible sound of the paddles propelling the kayaks.

Kayaking has become an alternative to the traditional trajinera tour for exploring the canals and enjoying the sunrise or sunset from a more intimate perspective. It is a way to explore the chinampa area quietly and respectfully, as it generates no waste, coexists without stress with the local fauna, and can navigate shallow areas where large boats cannot access.

Rodrigo Nava is one of the young guides who organize group tours so that visitors can enjoy the activity to the fullest and in a safe way...
“What we want is for them to take away the connection they can have with nature, with the water, with the sun, with the sunrise, which is

something that is not so easy to describe until you experience it and understand what it is like to be here... to have a moment of tranquility, of peace, in which you are one with nature,” said Rodrigo, who has been working on these activities for two years, together with a group of friends. They founded the company [Kayak Adventures](#), which offers tours in new, safe, and easy-to-handle boats.

Lizbeth, who is a doctor by profession, took advantage of her day off to enjoy the experience... From a kayak, she could see the first rays of light emerging behind Iztaccíhuatl, one of Mexico’s most iconic volcanoes... “We live in a chaotic city, and constant stress every day becomes normal... It’s always a warm feeling to see the sun and its rays again,” said Lizbeth, who attended with one of her friends and colleagues at the hospital, Esmeralda, who described seeing the sunrise as “something very magical.” “My friend Lizbeth invited me, and I just had to say yes and wake up at 4 o’clock in the morning.”

Kayak Adventures organizes tours 365 days a year. Its services have gone international: they have welcomed tourists from Cuba, Colombia, the United States, and Venezuela. They also have guides who can communicate in languages such as English and Japanese. They are also specialists in accompanying beginners and nervous people... “They often tell us that they are anxious, afraid of sinking, and we help and accompany them through the process. We have had people who lose that nervousness or phobia of water or some anxiety problem,” said Rodrigo.

Kayaking trips are not a passing fad: they are part of a shared economy model in which local businesses, chinampa farming families, and young guides organize themselves to offer experiences that align with Sustainable Development Goal 8, Decent Work and Economic Growth. Through kayaking, the aim is to promote continuous, inclusive, and sustainable growth, fostering full and productive employment with work that is intertwined with care for the environment, the community, and local culture.

One example is the [Ajolotario Apantli](#), which helps preserve the Mexican salamander (*Ambystoma mexicanum*), a species endemic to



Photo: Golden axolotl and Alejandro Correa, Ajolotario Apantli. Credit: Guillermo Ayala.

Xochimilco. Alejandro Correa, one of its managers, started the project with his family 25 years ago. His goal is to preserve this species and introduce new generations to the care and study of salamanders, as he has done. “It is an emblematic species in pre-Hispanic culture, which was used for food and medicine. People no longer knew about axolotls, but today it is a better-known species; more research is being done on it for its conservation and cultural dissemination... To me, it looked like a little water monster and, to a certain extent, it scared me.”

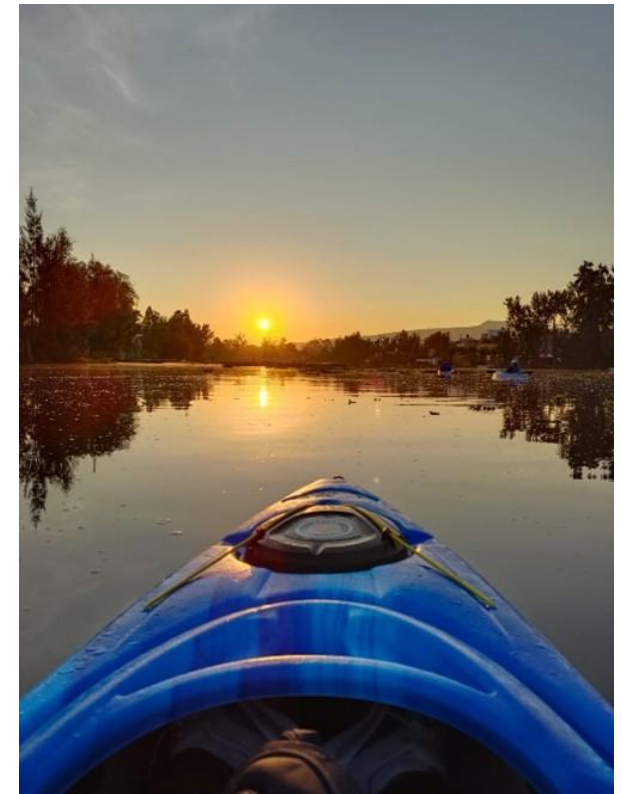
On the top floor of his house, Alejandro built a selective breeding center where he also researches different types of lineages and phenotypes of axolotls, such as black, pink, leucistic, and xanthophore, a type of golden axolotl.

The effort of getting up early, rowing, and visiting the axolotl farm whets the appetite. For this reason, Karen Pérez offers typical Mexican foods in her restaurant, made with products grown in local chinampas, such as corn, beets, carrots, spinach, and cactus. Karen explained that the benefits of collective work have driven joint progress. “Before, we worked individually, but looking at it closely, it’s better to work together because we go with the flower producers, with the kayakers, and they come with me... it’s a chain between us all and it strengthens us as a group.” Karen’s restaurant also serves as a venue for social events such as weddings and birthdays, or complements activities such as romantic dates or marriage proposals aboard a kayak.

Shared economy projects benefit the community by integrating different local businesses into a single service chain and seek to counteract intensive exploitation models in which investors acquire chinampas at low prices to convert them into places for mass cultivation or convert them into recreational spaces that generate noise, garbage, and waste, threatening the ecological balance of this area declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1987.

Bad practices not only threaten the community and Sustainable Development Goal 8, Decent Work and Economic Growth, but also affect Goal 11, Sustainable Cities and Communities, and Goal 15, Life on Land.

『INPS Japan』



*Photo: Sunrise aboard a kayak in Xochimilco.
Credit: Guillermo Ayala Alanis.*

Vulnerable Populations Will Suffer With UNAIDS Early Closure

By Ed Holt

BRATISLAVA (IPS) – “It’s like adding fuel to an already burning fire,” says Aditia Taslim.

“We have not recovered from the impact of the US funding cuts earlier this year, and closing down UNAIDS prematurely will only make things worse, especially for key populations and other criminalized groups, including people who use drugs,” Taslim, who is Advocacy Lead at the International Network of People Who Use Drugs (INPUD), tells IPS.

Her view is shared widely by HIV activists around the world who were stunned by a proposal from UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in September, included in a [report](#) on progress on UN reforms, to shut down the UN’s main agency to fight HIV/AIDS next year.



UNAIDS campaigns have dominated the global effort to end HIV/Aids as a public threat since 1999. Credit: UNAIDS

UNAIDS, the civil society groups that sit on its board, experts, and national governments across the globe had already been working on a transformation plan for the agency, which would see it end in its present form around 2030 when current HIV targets expire.

And many still do not understand exactly

why closure next year is now being planned.

“There is a lot of confusion around this right now. We’re not sure why 2026 was chosen. Perhaps it was because we were in fact already in a process of transformation,” Angeli Achrekar, Deputy Executive Director of the Programme Branch at UNAIDS, told IPS.

But the proposal has been met with vociferous pushback—a call from the [UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board \(PCB\) NGO Delegation](#) to the Secretary General urging him to reconsider was endorsed by more than 1 000 NGOs.

Many of those same groups have warned that if the early closure does go ahead, gains in fighting the disease will be at risk, and, some are certain, lives will be lost unnecessarily.

“If this happens, the world will be much less effective in preventing and treating HIV, which means more people dying from a disease that is completely preventable and treatable. There’s no doubt in my mind that closing UNAIDS will lead to more HIV infections and deaths,” Julia Lukomnik, Strategic Advisor at Dutch organization Aidsfonds, told IPS.

UNAIDS, which started operations in 1996, is unique among UN structures in that its governing board actually includes civil society groups. This, experts say, has meant that in all its work, those on the ground working directly with the communities affected by the disease – not just people living with HIV (PLHIV), but also key populations most at risk, including drug users, sex workers, members of the LGBT+ community, and others—have had a crucial say in developing its policy and implementing its work.

Indeed, while the agency’s activities include treatment projects, in many countries it is seen as a vital bridge, directly and through

partnerships with local NGOs, between communities and local, regional, and national authorities.

“If UNAIDS were to close in 2026, the impact would be significant, particularly in countries like Vietnam where community-led organizations depend on UNAIDS for data, technical guidance, coordination, and engagement space. UNAIDS has played a critical bridging role, connecting governments, donors, and civil society in Vietnam,” Doan Thanh Tung, Executive Director at Lighthouse Vietnam, one of the largest LGBTQ+ organizations in Vietnam, told IPS.



UNAIDS workers provide support to communities in need of their services. The organization and its workers have been badly affected by the impact of a sudden acceleration of cuts to international HIV financing. Credit: UNAIDS

This is of particular concern at a time when [marginalization and criminalization](#) of key populations and PLHIV in many countries is worsening.

UNAIDS has played a crucial role in advocating for the rights of key populations and PLHIV, including helping bring in landmark legislation enshrining some rights and access to services.

Campaigners fear that without UNAIDS presence, some communities would very quickly face increased marginalization or criminalization, without anyone to speak up for them.

“We’re in a context of increasing criminalization of key populations for the HIV epidemic. We know—in part because of UNAIDS—that violating the rights of key populations leads to increased HIV cases. When you criminalize gay and trans people, you increase HIV cases. When you criminalize sex workers, you increase HIV cases. When you criminalize safe injection sites, you increase HIV cases,” said Lukomnik.

“Closing the UN body that most strongly advocates for the human rights of these groups at the very time when these rights are increasingly threatened will almost certainly increase both rights violations *and* HIV cases,” she added.

Within UNAIDS, officials are aware this could be a problem.

“The question is where can advocacy for key populations be maintained [without UNAIDS] in countries. UNAIDS can raise issues to do with key populations with governments. Will other organizations be able to do that?” Eammon Murphy, UNAIDS Director, Regional Support Teams for the Asia Pacific and Eastern Europe and Central Asia regions, told IPS.

“One of the critical functions we perform is being the voice of communities. The voice of the community must be safeguarded at the local, regional and global levels,” Achrekar said.

As well as allowing it to advocate for communities, the trust that communities have with the agency means it can have a better view of an epidemic in a given country than state authorities might have, say experts.

They highlight UNAIDS’ vital role in collecting and evaluating data on the disease in specific communities and using data to develop effective interventions and national policies and set HIV targets. If that monitoring and evaluation capacity is lost suddenly with no time to replace it properly, the impact on authorities’ efforts to fight an HIV epidemic could be devastating, they argue.

“UNAIDS set the targets for the global AIDS response that has given countries the ability to shape their strategic plans to respond to HIV and AIDS. Those targets and strategic plans ensured high-impact interventions that led to a reduction of new HIV infections, addressing inequalities, gender-based violence and stigma and discrimination

against people with HIV or AIDS,” Tendayi Westerhof, National Director, Pan African Positive Women’s Coalition-Zimbabwe, told IPS.

“It was responsible for the Global AIDS Programme report that monitored progress of the AIDS response by countries. If UNAIDS is closed, this will have a huge impact on the monitoring of progress by countries in fighting AIDS,” she added.

The proposed closure of the agency also comes at a time when HIV groups are still reeling from recent upheavals in global aid funding.

The withdrawal of US aid at the start of this year, which had previously accounted for 73 percent of international HIV/AIDS financing, has already had a devastating effect on the fight against the disease, forcing many organizations on the frontline of the HIV response to close.

UNAIDS modeling forecasts the funding cuts could lead to an additional 6.6 million new HIV infections and 4.2 million AIDS-related deaths by 2029.

Closing UNAIDS against this backdrop could further imperil the sustainability of the HIV response in some places, especially in those where services for key populations are already underfunded.

“We have seen the impact of the abrupt funding cuts from the US, which have crippled a lot of harm reduction services and forced many

drug user-led networks and organizations to close their operations. Harm reduction has also been severely underfunded. Closing down UNAIDS will only create reasons for governments to close down services and programmes, as well as funding for people who use drugs,” said Taslim.

“In most low- and middle-income countries, services and programmes for people who use drugs... are still heavily dependent on international donors. Closing UNAIDS prematurely means that services and programmes for our community will be the first to be removed from national priorities. There is no sustainability strategy in place for services and programmes for people who use drugs and other key populations, as well as other criminalized and marginalized communities,” he added.

Tung warned that dismantling UNAIDS at a time when global funding for HIV is shrinking “would likely erode global-to-local solidarity, reduce community engagement in the HIV response, and weaken independent data systems, which could further exacerbate the epidemic and undo decades of progress in HIV prevention and control that would be extremely difficult to recover.”

But while activists warn of the potential for a 2026 closure of UNAIDS to profoundly impact the world’s HIV response, they also point out that so far it is only a proposal and that there is some hope it may not come to pass.

“The proposal to end UNAIDS in 2026 was made by the UN Secretary General, but it’s really up to the UNAIDS PCB to make this call,” said Lukomnik.

UNAIDS officials point out that the agency had already begun a process of transforming itself.

Earlier this year, the PCB set out its plan to restructure between 2025 – 2027, and then review its structure and mandate again in 2027. It had been expected that after that, a transition period would see key UNAIDS functions shifted to other parts of the UN system or other actors involved in the HIV response by 2030.

The first phase of this restructuring involved the agency this year beginning a huge reduction in the number of its staff and offices around the world—both are to be cut by more than 50 percent.

Achrekar said the transformation was in part a response to global funding changes but also to reflect moves towards greater sustainability in the global HIV response.

“Our transformation is partly because of the current funding volatility, but it was already underway before that. We are focused on ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030 and even before the General Secretary’s proposal, we at UNAIDS knew that we had to transform for where the HIV response was shifting to in the future—that as countries start to approach 2030 HIV targets, the HIV response would need to be sustainable after 2030. Our transformation means we can

be fit for when the HIV response needs to become sustainably supported by countries,” said Achrekar.

“We are not certain if this SG proposal can be turned back. But we believe there could be a way to bring some coherence to what the SG has proposed and the transition we had already planned. UNAIDS is not afraid of transforming,” she added.

However, if the proposal does come to pass and UNAIDS closes next year, the organization is hoping others involved in the global HIV response will be able to step up, to some extent, to help maintain the response.

“We are just one player in the HIV response and all the others have critical roles too. The global solidarity in the HIV response must be maintained in future and we have to be able to safeguard what is critical in the HIV response and the people affected by HIV,” Achrekar said.

『INPS Japan/ IPS UN Bureau Report』



Faith Leaders Endorse Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty at COP30

By Joyce Chimbit

Some of you might be shocked that even though fossil fuels are 86 percent of the cause of climate change, it took 28 years before the words 'fossil fuels' could even be mentioned in the COP document. It is as absurd as Alcoholics Anonymous holding 28 years of conferences before they get the backbone to mention alcohol in an outcome document. —Kumi Naidoo, President of the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty

BELÉM, Brazil (IPS) – Decades ago, a little girl was born in a place called Cleveland, Ohio, in the heart of the United States of America. Born to a woman from the deep South, the place of Martin Luther King, her mother left her ancestral lands for the economic opportunities in the north.

“Off she went, making it all the way to the east side of Cleveland,” says Rev. Dr. Angelique Walker-Smith. “To the place where most people who look like me lived, and still live, and are subjected to policies of injustice, race and gender.”

Here, she found a more pressing issue.

“I couldn’t breathe, my mother couldn’t breathe, and we all couldn’t breathe,” she narrates.



Kumi Naidoo with Brazilian First Lady Janja Lula da Silva and Brazilian Cultural Minister Margareth Menezes and others at a panel called “Narratives and Storytelling to Face the Climate Crisis” during the 30th Conference of the Parties (COP30). Credit: Aline Massuda/COP30

This urbanization, driven by fossil fuels, occurred in Cleveland, Ohio, where her mother relocated and where her relatives still live today. During the Great Migration, over six million people of African descent traveled from the South, believing that economic opportunities would be better in the North.

“Upon our arrival, we discovered that we just couldn’t breathe.”

As one of eight regional presidents representing the World Council of Churches, Walker-Smith says for the World Council of Churches in over 105 countries, over 350 million adherents, and over 350 national churches all over the world, supporting the [Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty](#) “is all about the issue of injustice, life and life more abundantly.”

“We are saying yes to the transition from fossil fuels to renewable life-giving energy.”

Kumi Naidoo, a prominent South African human rights and environmental justice activist and the President of the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty, says if the goal is renewable life-giving energy, the world has been going the wrong way for the past 30 years.

“If you come home from work and see water coming from the bathroom, you pick up the mop. But then you realized you left the tap running and the sink stopper on. What will you do first? Of course! You’ll turn off the water and pull the stopper. You will not start mopping the floor first.”

“For 30 years since the time science told us we need to change our energy system and many of our other systems, what we’ve been doing is mopping up the floor. If fossil fuels—oil, coal, and gas—account for 86 percent of what drives climate change, then we must turn off the tap.”

Naidoo was speaking at an event titled ‘Faith for Fossil Free Future’ co-sponsored by several organizations, including [Soka Gakkai International \(SGI\)](#), [Laudato Si’ Movement](#), [GreenFaith](#)—a global interfaith environmental coalition and EcoJudaism, a Jewish charity leading the UK Jewish Community’s response to the climate and nature crisis.

He spoke about the contradiction of the climate talks at the doorsteps of the Amazon, while licensing for drilling is still ongoing in the Amazon even as the people in the Amazon protest, calling for a fossil-free Amazon.

Continuing with the thread of contradictions, Naidoo said, “Some of you might be shocked that even though fossil fuels are 86 percent of the cause of climate change, it took 28 years before the words ‘fossil fuels’ could even be mentioned in the COP document. It is as absurd as Alcoholics Anonymous holding 28 years of conferences before they get the backbone to mention alcohol in an outcome document.

If we continue on this path, we’ll warm up the planet to the point where we destroy our soil and water, and it becomes so hot we can’t plant food. The end result is that we’ll be gone. The planet will still be here. And the good news is, once we become extinct as a species, the forests will grow back, and the oceans will recover.

“And actually, staying with that analogy, can you imagine how absurd it is that the largest delegation to this COP this year, last year, and every year is not even the host country?

“It’s not even Brazil—for every 25 delegates that are attending the COP, one of them is from the fossil fuel industry. That’s the equivalent of Alcoholics Anonymous having the largest delegation to its conference annually from the alcohol industry.”

People, groups and movements of different faiths and consciousness are increasingly raising their voices in robust support of a rapid fossil fuel phase-out, a massive and equitable upsurge in renewable energy, and the resources to make it happen—in the form of a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Naidoo says the treaty is “a critical success ingredient for us not (only) to save the planet, but to secure our children and their children’s future, reminding ourselves that the planet does not need any saving.

“If we continue on this path, we warm up the planet to the point where we destroy our soil and water, and it becomes so hot we can’t plant food. The end result is that we’ll be gone. The planet will still be here. And the good news is, once we become extinct as a species, the forests will grow back, and the oceans will recover.”

This treaty is a proposed global agreement to halt the expansion of new fossil fuel exploration and production and to phase out existing sources like coal, oil, and gas in a just and equitable manner.

The initiative seeks to provide a legal framework to complement the [Paris Agreement](#) by directly addressing the supply side of fossil fuels.



Its ultimate goal is to support a global transition to renewable energy and is supported by a growing coalition of countries, cities, organizations, scientists, and activists. More importantly, it has multi-faith support.

Masahiro Yokoyama of the SGI, which is a diverse global community of individuals in 192 countries and territories who practice Nichiren Buddhism, spoke about the intersection between faith and energy transition and why the fossil fuel phase-out cannot wait.

“The just transition is also about how young people in faith can be the driving force to transformations.”



Masahiro Yokoyama was speaking at an event titled *Faith for a Fossil-Free Future* co-sponsored by Soka Gakkai International. Credit: Joyce Chimbi/IPS

“So, a fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty, in my view, is not only about phasing out other fossil fuels but it also represents an ethical framework.”

“It’s a way to move forward while protecting people’s livelihoods and dignity within the context of the environment and also the local business and economies. So, a just transition is not merely a technical issue but a question of ethics, inclusion and solidarity,” Masahiro Yokoyama said.

The most pressing issue at hand is how to implement the treaty in the current environmental context.

“The pathway that we are following is a pathway that has been followed before. We are not going to negotiate this treaty within the COP or within the United Nations system. We’re going to do what the Landmine Treaty did.

“The landmine treaty was negotiated by 44 countries outside of the UN system and then brought to the UN General Assembly for ratification. The second question that people ask, justifiably, is, what about the powerful exporting countries, for example?” Naidoo asked.

“They’re not going to sign it. And to that we find answers in the landmine treaty. Up to today, the United States, Russia and China have not signed the Landmine treaty. But once the treaty was signed, the social license to continue as business as usual was taken away. And you saw a drastic change.”

『INPS Japan/ IPS UN Bureau Report』



At Rome's Colosseum, Faith Leaders Confront a World at War – and Dare to Speak of Peace

By Katsuhiro Asagiri

ROME/TOKYO (INPS Japan)- In the shadow of Rome's Colosseum — once a monument to imperial violence — religious leaders from across the world gathered this week to deliver a message that felt both ancient and urgent: peace must once again become humanity's sacred duty.

The occasion was “*Dare Peace*,” the International Meeting for Peace: Religions and Cultures in Dialogue, hosted by the [Community of Sant'Egidio](#). For three days, priests, rabbis, imams, monks and scholars debated what it means to uphold faith in an era defined by fear, nationalism and war.



The closing ceremony held against the backdrop of the ancient Roman ruins, the Colosseum Credit: Community of Sant'Egidio

The meeting concluded Tuesday evening with Pope Leo XIV presiding over a ceremony that was equal parts prayer service and political statement.

“WAR IS NEVER HOLY,” THE POPE SAID. “ONLY PEACE IS HOLY — BECAUSE IT IS WILLED BY GOD.”**A Call for Moral Courage**

Speaking beneath the Arch of Constantine, Pope Leo urged governments and

believers alike to resist what he called “the arrogance of power.”



Hirotugu Terasaki, vice president of Soka Gakkai with Pope Leo XIV.
Credit: Vatican News

“THE WORLD THIRSTS FOR PEACE,” HE SAID. “WE CANNOT ALLOW PEOPLE TO GROW ACCUSTOMED TO WAR AS A NORMAL PART OF HUMAN HISTORY. ENOUGH — THIS IS THE CRY OF THE POOR AND THE CRY OF THE EARTH.”

The crowd, several thousand strong, included representatives of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism. Among them was Hirotugu Terasaki, vice president of [Soka Gakkai](#), a Buddhist organization with a long record of peace advocacy.

They stood together in silence as candles were lit around the ancient amphitheater — small lights flickering against the stone, symbolic of a shared prayer for reconciliation.

Faith and Accountability

The pope’s speech drew a clear line between faith and political responsibility.

“PEACE MUST BE THE PRIORITY OF EVERY POLICY,” HE SAID. “GOD WILL HOLD ACCOUNTABLE THOSE WHO FAILED TO SEEK PEACE — FOR EVERY DAY, MONTH AND YEAR OF WAR.”

Those words, delivered as fighting continues in Ukraine and Gaza, carried a deliberate edge. The Vatican under Leo XIV has increasingly positioned itself as a moral counterweight to political paralysis on global crises — speaking of peace not as abstraction but as obligation.

Lessons from Assisi

This year’s meeting marked nearly four decades since John Paul II convened the first interreligious gathering for peace in Assisi in 1986. Since then, the Sant’Egidio Community has maintained that dialogue among faiths can temper political divides.



Pope John Paul II Credit: Gregorini Demetrio, CC BY-SA 3.0

“WE HAVE DARED TO SPEAK OF PEACE IN A WORLD THAT SPEAKS THE LANGUAGE OF WAR,” SAID MARCO IMPAGLIAZZO, THE GROUP’S PRESIDENT. “TO CLOSE THE PATHS OF DIALOGUE IS MADNESS. AS POPE FRANCIS SAID, THE WORLD SUFFOCATES WITHOUT DIALOGUE.”

Session on the Dignity of Life

Earlier Tuesday, Soka Gakkai delegation took part in Session 22 titled *“Justice Does Not Kill: Abolishing the Death Penalty,”* held at the Austrian Cultural Forum.

Professor Enza Pellecchia of the University of Pisa, representing Soka Gakkai, took the stage and spoke about the movement’s efforts to abolish the death penalty, referring to the words of its founder, President Daisaku Ikeda, from his dialogue with the British historian Dr. Arnold Toynbee.

“THE SANCTITY OF LIFE CANNOT BE JUDGED BY GUILT OR MERIT — ALL LIVES ARE EQUAL. THEREFORE, NO ONE HAS THE RIGHT TO TAKE A LIFE, EVEN IN THE NAME OF JUSTICE. ACCEPTING THE DEATH PENALTY IS A FORM OF INSTITUTIONALIZED VIOLENCE THAT ASSIGNS DIFFERENT VALUES TO HUMAN LIFE, AND PRESIDENT IKEDA HAS DESCRIBED IT AS ‘A MANIFESTATION OF THE PREVAILING TENDENCY IN MODERN TIMES TO DEVALUE LIFE’” .

Professor Pellecchia said that President Ikeda’s humanistic philosophy deeply resonates with Pope Leo XIV’s recent statement that “one cannot claim to be pro-life while accepting the death penalty or any form of violence.” Both, she noted, confront the same moral error — the belief that some lives are expendable.

When Religion Refuses Silence



Professor Enza Pellecchia of the University of Pisa, representing Soka Gakkai, delivering her speech during the Forum titled “Justice Does Not Kill: Abolishing the Death Penalty,” held at the Austrian Cultural Forum. Credit: Seikyo Shimbun

For decades, the Colosseum has hosted symbolic gatherings for peace. Yet this year’s ceremony, participants said, carried a sharper

urgency. The wars in Europe and the Middle East, the displacement of millions, and rising authoritarianism have all given moral language new weight.

“PEACE BEGINS WITH THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE HUMAN HEART,” SAID TERASAKI OF SGI. “INTERFAITH COOPERATION IS NOT SYMBOLIC — IT’S A METHOD FOR CHANGING HISTORY.”

A Plea That Still Echoes

As night fell, the trumpeter Paolo Fresu performed a mournful solo. Children stepped forward to deliver a *Peace Appeal* to diplomats and officials — a reminder that the next generation will inherit the choices made now.

The pope’s final words were brief, almost whispered:

“GOD WANTS A WORLD WITHOUT WAR. HE WILL FREE US FROM THIS EVIL.”

The candles continued to burn as the crowd dispersed — a fragile constellation of light against the ruins of Roman empire, and a quiet act of defiance in a world still learning to dare peace.

『INPS Japan』



Colosseo Credit: Kevin Lin, INPS Japan

XDR-TB Drug Trial Participants Continue to Celebrate its Success

By Ed Holt



Tsholofelo Msimango pictured at her home in Brakpan, near Johannesburg. Credit: TB Alliance/Jonathan Torgovnik

BRATISLAVA (IPS) – When Tsholofelo Msimango joined a small trial of a new drug regimen for tuberculosis (TB) treatment a decade ago, she had no idea whether the medicines she was about to be given would help her.

But having already spent six months in hospital after developing extensively drug-resistant TB (XDR-TB), the most lethal form of the disease, which at the time was barely curable—three-quarters of people with XDR-TB were thought to die before they even received a diagnosis and only a third of those who got treatment survived—Msimango decided she had little to lose.

“I had my doubts, of course, as to whether it would have any success,” she tells IPS. “But to be honest, at that point all I could think about was that it might make me better, that I might be able to get out of hospital and go home. I was ready to take that chance. I’m glad I did. That trial saved my life—I am sure of it,” she says.

Msimango, who was 21 at the time, from Brakpan in South Africa, was one of 109 participants in the Nix-TB trial of a new drug regimen that ran across three sites in the country between 2015 and 2017.

Until then, typical treatment for the most severe drug-resistant forms of TB would involve patients taking daily doses of a potent cocktail of pills—dozens in some cases—as well as injections for sometimes as long as two years.

The side effects of such regimens can be horrific—deafness, kidney failure and psychosis have been reported—and there are high rates of treatment drop-out, leading not only to a worsening of the patient’s own condition but also to the further spread of the worst strains of the disease among communities.

The Nix-TB trial tested an all-oral six-month drug regimen, which was a combination of the drugs pretomanid, bedaquiline and linezolid (BPaL).

Its results—the regimen had a 90 percent treatment success rate — were hailed as groundbreaking by experts, and the trial proved to be a landmark moment in the fight against the world’s most deadly infectious disease.

Msimango says that until she joined the trial, she had been taking “lots of pills and having injections.” The latter, she says, had stopped working against the disease.

But not long into the trial, she noticed a change. Before the trial she had struggled to keep weight on because of her illness and treatment.

“It was when I started to gain weight that I began to think that the treatment was working. We had check-ups, including for weight, every week and when I saw myself putting on weight, I knew then that I was getting better,” she says.

By the end of the trial, she says she felt like a different person.

Tests showed she was free of TB.

“Of course I was excited about the fact that I could finally stop taking medicines, and because I was then healthy and free of TB and could live a normal life again, but I was also excited about the fact that I was going to be able to finally leave hospital after a year and go home.

“I had already been in hospital for seven months before the trial started, and then another six months for the trial, and it was hard being away from home for a year. The hospital was a long way from where I lived so it was very hard for my mother to come and visit me and bring me things,” she says.

Tsholofelo Msimango and her son at her home in Brakpan, near Johannesburg. Credit: TB Alliance/Jonathan Torgovnik
Tsholofelo Msimango and her son at her home in Brakpan, near Johannesburg. Credit: TB Alliance/Jonathan Torgovnik

But while now healthy and free of TB, the disease has continued to play a large role in Msimango’s life.

She decided she wanted to help others affected by TB. Today she is a TB community advocate and educator and helps to recruit people for medical studies.

“I would recommend to anyone that if they get the chance to take part in a study like the one that I got to take part in, that they should go for it,” she says.

Now a mother to a young boy, she says she speaks to him about what she went through and about TB so that he understands about the disease and the risks it poses.

“I talk to my son about what happened to me, why I was in hospital and why I now work in the TB community. I tell my son and his friends about TB and what can be done to stop its spread and how they can help, for instance, by covering their mouths when they cough,” she says.

“Actually, I tell my story a lot because I hope it might help other people,” she adds.

Another participant in the trial, Bongiswa Mdaka, says the same.

“I talk to people all the time about TB and my experience with it—I’m very open about it. If I see someone has been coughing for more than two weeks, I tell them about the disease and about getting tested and treated as early as possible,” she told IPS.



Tsholofelo Msimango's late mother, Zeldah Nkosi. She says her mother was a "pillar of support" during her time when she had TB. Credit: TB Alliance

Speaking from her home in Vereeniging, Gauteng, Mdaka, who was 27 when she started the trial, said that, like Msimango, it changed her life.

“The trial was a lifesaver for me. It not only changed my life but saved it. It gave me a second chance. Ten years ago, before the trial, the situation for people with XDR-TB was not good. I was diagnosed with MDR-TB and when my condition continued to get worse, I was hospitalized. I was in the hospital for three days and they told me that no, I don’t have MDR-TB; I have XDR-TB, the worst I could have. It was like hearing a death sentence.

“So when the people doing the trial came to me, it seemed like a godsend. I had no major expectations, I just hoped that I would get

better. Today I am healthy and free of TB. I'm strong. I have a family and a normal life. Life is good," she said.

Speaking to experts who were involved in the trial, it becomes clear that going into it, no one knew how important it would eventually prove to be in the future of TB treatment.

Dr. Pauline Howell managed the patients during the Nix-TB trial at the Sizwe Tropical Diseases Hospital in Johannesburg, where Msimango was a patient.

"Prior to the Nix trial we knew that treatment was too long, too toxic, worked in less than half of people afflicted with TB, and in those diagnosed with XDR TB (per the pre-2021 definition), only 20 percent were still alive after 5 years. I was still junior in clinical trials in 2015, but it was clear to everyone that knew anything about XDR-TB that replacing the extended treatment, which included at least 6 months of injectables, and all the other drugs (the kitchen sink approach) with just three drugs made us more than a little anxious," she told IPS.

But like many of the trial's participants, she saw relatively quickly how well the treatment was working.

"When trial participants started telling newly admitted patients about this trial and brought them to the research site before we had had a chance to speak with them, that was speaking loudly. When certain patients, who had been admitted for over two years, were suddenly starting to respond to TB treatment and culture convert, it was

wonderful to celebrate with them, Howell, who is now Clinical Research Site Leader at Sizwe Tropical Disease Hospital, said.

"When patients were relocating from the Eastern Cape to Gauteng just to get access to the trial, we knew this was the treatment we'd also want for ourselves and our loved ones."

"There are definitely a few [trial participants] who may not have survived without this treatment, but for the majority, they were able to get back to their lives faster, potentially cause fewer onward infections and suffer less loneliness and other repercussions of having drug-resistant TB," she added.

However, while the trial had an immediate effect on its participants, its results, which suggested the enormous potential of the regimen, paved the way for BPAL to revolutionize TB treatment.

"I had no idea that this trial would be the first step towards changing the treatment for drug-resistant tuberculosis worldwide," Howell said.

"It's good to remember that although TB is deadly, it is curable, and the side effects of the BPAL/M regimen are common but predictable and manageable. A decade ago, patients put an end to rental agreements for their homes, quit their jobs, told their partners to move on and their families took out funeral policies. These days, patients sit in front of me and say, 'I have been here for two weeks already! I need to get home and back to my life'. It makes my head spin how much has changed, partially due to the Nix trial," she added.

In 2022, the World Health Organization (WHO) endorsed BPaL with or without another drug, moxifloxacin (M), and BPaL(M) is today the preferred treatment option for drug-resistant TB.

According to data from the TB Alliance, the nonprofit group that developed pretomanid, BPaL and BPaL-based regimens, they treat about 75 percent of the overall number of drug-resistant TB cases treated annually. This number is projected to soon reach 90 percent.

Meanwhile, the group says, the regimens have already saved more than 11,000 lives and USD 100 million for health systems globally and by 2034 are expected to save an additional 192,000 lives and health systems almost USD 1.3 billion.

In some countries classed as having high-burden TB epidemics, they have already altered the TB landscape significantly.

“In South Africa, which adopted the BPaL/M guidelines in Sep 2023, we are seeing a single-digit percentage lost to follow-up for the first time in the history of our TB programme,” she says.

But the regimen’s potential may be in danger of not being fully fulfilled as richer nations cut foreign aid budgets, impacting funding that has traditionally helped support disease and other healthcare programmes in poor countries.

“The eternal challenge with TB is how closely it is tied to lack of access, poverty, substance use, being undomiciled and general lack of funding to overcome these challenges... Unfortunately, as long as there is poverty and lack of access, political will and funding, TB will continue to live side by side with us,” said Howell.

“Some people now can’t get their medications because of these cuts,” said Msimango. “They’re costing people’s lives.”

『INPS Japan/ IPS UN Bureau Report』



SDGs Goal No. 3

Toxic Air in Tanzania's Port City Threatens Millions, Researchers Warn

By Kizito Makoye



A throng of people at the Kariakoo business hub in Dar es Salaam, where air pollution is rampant. Credit: Kizito Makoye Shigela/IPS

DAR ES SALAAM, Tanzania (IPS) – On a hot afternoon in Kariakoo, Dar es Salaam's bustling commercial hub, the air is a swirling mix of diesel exhaust, charcoal smoke and dust kicked up by the shuffle of feet. Traders tie handkerchiefs over their noses to deter haze from drifting into their throats and lungs.

"There are just too many cars—the toxic smoke makes it hard to

breathe," says Abdul Hassan, a vegetable vendor who has worked in the market for 19 years.

A new [study](#) by the Dar es Salaam Institute of Technology and the Stockholm Environment Institute, published in *Clean Air Journal*, has confirmed what many city dwellers already know: the air is toxic. Real-time data collected from 14 monitoring stations across Dar es Salaam between May 2021 and February 2022 showed concentrations of particulate matter—PM2.5 and PM10 — consistently exceeded World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines. At their peak, daily PM2.5 levels reached 130 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, more than eight times the WHO's recommended limit.

These findings place Dar es Salaam firmly within the global air pollution crisis, underscoring the urgent need to deliver on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 3.9.1, which calls for a substantial reduction in deaths and illnesses from hazardous air.

"Air pollution is not an invisible issue—you can smell it and feel it in your lungs," said Neema John, a street cook who works near Kariakoo market. "My children cough all night when the smoke from burning dumps drifts into our house."

A Silent Killer

The study shows that people living near dumpsites, busy roads, and industrial zones face the greatest risks. At the Pugu Dampo landfill, particulate concentrations reached staggering levels—up to 2,762 µg/m³ for PM₁₀—during months of uncontrolled waste burning. In Ilala and Kinondoni, home to factories and major intersections, daily averages were consistently above safe limits.

Health experts warn that such exposure is linked to asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), heart failure, and premature deaths. In Tanzania, respiratory infections are a leading cause of hospital visits and child mortality.

“This is a public health emergency hiding in plain sight,” said Linus Chuwa, a Dar es Salaam–based public health specialist.

“When PM_{2.5} levels exceed WHO standards by such margins, they potentially inflict long-term damage to people’s health.”

Energy Poverty and Dirty Fuels

But the problem does not only stem from traffic and industry. According to the study, Dar es Salaam consumes nearly half of Tanzania’s total charcoal each year. With only 34 percent of the country’s electricity generated from clean hydropower, most households rely on charcoal and firewood.

This reliance on dirty fuels undermines SDG target 7.1.2, which aims to ensure access to clean energy for cooking and heating.

“For families, charcoal is cheaper and more accessible, but the smoke fills homes with toxic particles,” said Fatma Suleiman, who lives in the densely populated suburb of Mbagala. “We know it’s dangerous, but it is the only cheaper alternative?”

The Urban Sustainability Challenge

Dar es Salaam is one of Africa’s fastest-growing cities, its population now above six million. Its rapid sprawl, unregulated industries, and congested roads make it a typical example of the challenges captured under SDG target 11.6.2: reducing the environmental impact of cities by improving air quality.

The study found that during peak hours—6 a.m. to 11 a.m. and 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.—air pollution levels in traffic and industrial zones spiked sharply. Conversely, concentrations dropped during holidays, highlighting how transport and industrial activities drive emissions.

Policy efforts exist: the Bus Rapid Transit system and Standard Gauge Railway aim to reduce vehicle emissions, while Tanzania has signed onto regional and global clean air initiatives. Yet enforcement of air quality standards remains weak. The 2007 Air Quality Regulations are rarely applied, and monitoring remains limited.

A Boiling Cauldron

The warnings resonate most on Kongo Street, Kariakoo’s most notorious artery. Here, thousands push through a maze of wooden stalls while hawkers bellow prices, competing with the roar of motorbikes and rattling carts.

“You breathe smoke, dust, and even the stench from garbage that never seems to get collected,” said Mwanaidi Salum, a mother of three. “When I blow my nose, it’s black from dust and smoke.”

Although the study has identified other hotspots for air pollution, the combination of heavy traffic, open-air cooking fires, and uncollected waste makes it a microcosm of the city’s pollution crisis.

Navigating Chaos, Swallowing Fumes

Cars and motorbikes lurch forward, horns blaring, leaving behind thick plumes of exhaust. Pedestrians leap aside, clutching bags to their chests. Wooden carts piled high with rice, bananas, and bales of used clothing block every path.

Researchers warn that children, street vendors, and the elderly are especially vulnerable to respiratory and cardiovascular diseases. Jacqueline Senyagwa, a research fellow at the Stockholm Environment Institute, said the findings from Dar es Salaam expose risks that are far from abstract.

“While our study did not collect medical data, the air quality records we obtained from 14 monitoring stations clearly showed very high concentrations of PM2.5 and PM10—several times above the World Health Organization’s safe limits,” she explained. “Globally, long-term exposure to such particles is linked to respiratory and cardiovascular conditions, particularly among children and the elderly. We are talking about asthma, lung diseases, heart failure, and chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases.

She noted that air pollution has become one of the biggest drivers of non-communicable diseases worldwide. “According to the WHO, it is the second-highest cause of non-communicable diseases globally. That should be a wake-up call for Tanzania.”

Yet despite these dangers, Senyagwa said Tanzania still lacks a robust national framework for air quality monitoring. “There are several reasons. First, there is limited awareness of the health impacts of air pollution among the public, policymakers, and regulators,” she said. “Solid waste is visible, and people demand action. But air pollution is invisible, and its effects take years to show, so action is often delayed.”

Technical capacity and resources are also a challenge.

“There are very few air quality experts in Tanzania, and most monitoring equipment has to be imported,” she noted. “Institutions like the Dar es Salaam Institute of Technology have only recently started fabricating local monitors. On top of that, the mandates of public agencies are fragmented. NEMC, for example, is responsible for regulating air quality, but with limited human and financial resources, enforcement has been minimal.”

According to Senyagwa, even the data itself is scarce. “The 14 stations we installed represent some of the very first ambient air monitoring efforts in the country,” she said. “Without reliable data, many decision-makers underestimate the scale of the problem.”

Her team identified clear hotspots. “At the Pugu Dampo dumpsite, the main source is open waste burning, which produces dangerously high levels of particulates,” she said. “In Vingunguti, the pollution largely comes from industries and road traffic. And in Magomeni and other crowded residential areas, vehicle emissions are the biggest culprit.”

Still, she pointed out that practical interventions do exist.

“The government’s investment in the Bus Rapid Transit system is a positive step because reducing traffic will cut emissions,” she said. “We’ve also carried out awareness campaigns with local communities—from advising waste pickers at Pugu to wear masks and stop random fires to working with schoolchildren in Vingunguti alongside partners like Save the Children Tanzania and Muhimbili College of Health Sciences.”

Dar es Salaam’s air quality crisis, she stressed, is not unique. “When we compare our results with Kampala, Nairobi, and Addis Ababa, the pattern is very similar. PM2.5 and PM10 levels across these cities also exceed WHO limits,” Senyagwa said.

Still, Tanzania can learn from regional peers. “Nairobi has gone further by passing a County Air Quality Act in 2022 and rolling out low-cost sensors across the city,” she said. “In Uganda, Kampala University has started fabricating its own sensors, while the Kampala Capital City Authority has already developed a clean air action plan. Addis Ababa is moving towards tougher vehicle emission standards.”

“These examples show that solutions are possible,” Senyagwa added. “But Tanzania must first recognize air pollution as a major public health threat—and act with the urgency it deserves.”

Plan of Action

The authors recommend a robust national monitoring framework, stronger enforcement of emission standards, and investment in waste recycling and composting to reduce open burning. Public awareness campaigns on air pollution’s health risks, they argue, are equally vital.

For the city’s dwellers, however, the need is urgent and personal. “We can’t keep raising children in an environment where every breath is dangerous,” said Hassan.

Unless Tanzania addresses dirty energy and unchecked urban pollution, its economic gains risk being overshadowed by rising health costs and declining quality of life.

Yet despite the looming health risks, life goes on at Kariakoo, even as the air grows harder to breathe.

『INPS Japan/ IPS UN Bureau Report』



Dialogue Must Outlast Today's Crises, Says Soka Gakkai Leader

By Nagima Abuova



Mr. Yoshiyuki Nagaoka (2nd from right) at the plenary session of the 8th Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions. Photo Credit: Akorda

ASTANA (INPS Japan/The Astana Times)

– Interfaith dialogue remains essential for lasting peace, said Yoshiyuki Nagaoka, Executive Director, Office of International Affairs, Soka Gakkai, in an interview with The Astana Times. Ahead of the eighth Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions in Astana on Sept. 17–18, he reflected on Soka Gakkai's congress experience, Kazakhstan's peace efforts, and why young voices should take the lead in building dialogue across traditions.

Established in the 1930s, Soka Gakkai, the Japan-based lay Buddhist movement, is rooted in the teachings of 13th-century monk Nichiren, which emphasize individual empowerment and the dignity of life. Since then, it has grown into one of Japan's largest religious organizations, promoting education, culture, and community engagement.

In 1975, its global network was formally established as Soka Gakkai International (SGI), which now connects millions of practitioners in more than 190 countries and territories, with a focus on peacebuilding, interfaith [dialogue](#), and human rights.

Expanding connections through the congress



Yoshiyuki Nagaoka, Executive Director, Office of International Affairs, Soka Gakkai. Photo credit: Soka Gakkai

Nagaoka said the Soka Gakkai's participation in the sixth congress in 2018 marked a turning point in broadening its interfaith engagement. For the Japan-based movement, the forum offered rare encounters with faith traditions not widely represented at home.

"Among the numerous religions taking part in the congress are those that most Japanese are not familiar with. And because the [Muslim](#) community in Japan is quite small, the congress has enabled us to meet and exchange views with quite a number of Islamic organizations that we have never had the privilege of encountering before," said Nagaoka.

"Our engagement with other religious leaders has opened new vistas in our shared pursuit of peace, making it possible to further expand solidarity in a very measurable and meaningful way," he said.

He also emphasized Kazakhstan's meaningful role as a partner in [peace building](#), noting the country's decision to renounce nuclear weapons in 1991 and its efforts to promote the Central Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty. He recalled that in 2019, a Soka Gakkai delegation visited Semei in eastern Kazakhstan and met with poet Olzhas Suleimenov, founder of the Nevada-Semipalatinsk movement.

**"WE ARE ALSO VERY GRATEFUL TO YOUR COUNTRY FOR
STANDING WITH JAPAN OVER THE TRAGIC ATOMIC
BOMBINGS OF HIROSHIMA AND NAGASAKI, KNOWING
KAZAKHSTAN'S SOVIET-ERA HISTORY AT SEMIPALATINSK,"
SAID NAGAOKA.**

He highlighted that as a UN-accredited NGO, Soka Gakkai has partnered with Kazakhstan on awareness initiatives and seeks to deepen cooperation in nuclear abolition.

Young voices in the digital age

The upcoming congress will feature the Forum of Young Religious Leaders. Nagaoka emphasized that younger generations bring new dynamics to dialogue because of rapid technological change.

“With the explosive development of the internet, smartphones and other IT technologies, the way people of the older generations think and live have begun to diversify markedly from the younger generations,” said Nagaoka.

“It is wonderful that tech-savvy young people today are able to readily access information on the cultures and lifestyles of other countries. Increasing opportunities to familiarize yourself with the history or cultures beyond your own represents a first major step toward mutual understanding and appreciation,” he said.

However, he also noted that exposure to other cultures alone does not guarantee tolerance.

“IN FACT, THAT KNOWLEDGE COULD VERY WELL FUEL THE KIND OF XENOPHOBIC EXCLUSIVISM WE SEE TODAY. AMONG OUR COMMITMENTS AT THE SOKA GAKKAI, BASED ON OUR RELIGIOUS CONVICTION THAT EVERY PERSON IS OWED THE

RESPECT THEIR INNER DIGNITY COMMANDS, IS TO FOSTER YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE, AT THE BARE MINIMUM, RESPECTFUL AND, HOPEFULLY, APPRECIATIVE OF OTHER PEOPLE AND OTHER CULTURES,” SAID NAGAOKA.

He stressed that Soka Gakkai’s cosmopolitan nature encourages openness. The movement organizes global and regional activities where young people meet peers across faiths.

“SGI President Daisaku Ikeda has long prioritized the fostering of global citizens, which is why he founded an array of educational institutions from kindergartens to universities worldwide. And many of their graduates have gone on to join international agencies such as the UN to encourage and advance mutual understanding wherever they may serve,” he said.

Encounters that shaped a global outlook

Nagaoka’s experience as a correspondent in the United States for Seikyo Shimbun, Soka Gakkai’s daily newspaper, shaped his approach to interfaith dialogue. He recalled interviews with faith leaders and academics whose work underscored the need for solidarity across traditions.

“There was Dr. Lawrence E. Carter Sr., the dean of Morehouse College’s Martin Luther King Jr. International Chapel, who dedicated a lifetime to carrying forward the civil rights leader’s legacy. He was an ordained Baptist preacher who developed a keen interest in Buddhist

thought after encountering the philosophy of SGI President Daisaku Ikeda,” said Nagaoka.

He also encountered Professor Nur Yalman of Harvard University,



Photo: Daisaku Ikeda. Credit: Seikyo Shimbun.

who saw the potential role of Buddhists as intermediaries to bridge divides between Christianity and Islam.

“These and many more encounters with people who are truly concerned about the future of human society have fostered within me a profound sense of tolerance for others and expanded my worldview,” said Nagaoka.

Patience in dialogue, perseverance in action

The congress takes place against a backdrop of urgent crises, raising questions about whether dialogue can deliver timely solutions. Nagaoka noted the tension but stressed that patience and perseverance are key to achieving that goal.

He recalled Ikeda’s dialogues with historian Arnold J. Toynbee, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, and Harvard economist John Kenneth Galbraith, which addressed challenges from the Cold War to the environment.

“He understood that a one-time dialogue cannot bring about a major transformation, and he always emphasized patience and perseverance,” said Nagaoka.

He added that religious leaders cannot replace political decision-makers, but their consistent dialogue helps expand understanding across communities.

“RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN RELIGION AND POLITICS, AS WELL AS RELIGION’S INTERACTION WITH POLITICS, VARY SIGNIFICANTLY FROM COUNTRY TO COUNTRY, FROM COMMUNITY TO COMMUNITY. THEREFORE, HOW A SPIRITUAL LEADER CAN ENGAGE WITH PRESSING ISSUES WILL LIKEWISE VARY FROM COUNTRY TO COUNTRY, COMMUNITY TO COMMUNITY,” SAID NAGAOKA.

Prayer and empathy as universal practices

Looking ahead to the congress's outcome, Nagaoka said the most valuable contribution of religious leaders lies in spiritual practice and framing coexistence as a shared responsibility.

“The fundamental practice of religion lies in prayer. No matter how society may evolve, prayer will remain as humankind’s most pristine and intrinsic act, one indispensable in nurturing human spirituality,” said Nagaoka.

He said differences in theology should not be seen as sources of division, but as reflections of human [diversity](#). By sharing empathy instead of confrontation, he believes interfaith forums can contribute to peace in ways that may not always make headlines but steadily build connections that matter.

“The interfaith dialogue that takes place at this congress may not be reported by media outlets with the same hype as press conferences held by political leaders,” said Nagaoka.



Group photo of delegates. Photo credit: Akorda

“Nevertheless, I am convinced that this congress will lead to steady progress in guiding humanity toward peace by forging genuinely meaningful connections among and between people everywhere,” he added.

『INPS Japan/ The Astana Times』



Here comes the sun

By Vishad Raj Onta



Photos: GHAMPOWER

Solar energy is suddenly looking much more attractive after recent floods destroyed hydropower plants

Kathmandu (Nepali Times) - The [Bhote Kosi flood](#) this month was a stark warning of the increased risk to Nepal's hydropower plants due to [climate breakdown](#), and the disaster has prompted a rethinking into solar energy options.

Nepal has pursued an energy strategy that relies almost totally on [hydroelectricity](#), but grid-scale solar power is becoming cheaper and offers a viable alternative.

Solar energy accounts for a mere 0.1% of Nepal's total installed generation of nearly 3,800MW. The rest of the world can now afford solar power because of China's production. The price of [solar panels](#) has gone down by up to 90% in the past decade.

“One advantage of solar over hydro is the speed at which projects can be set up,” says Kushal Gurung of WindPower, “a 100MW hydro might take ten years to build, while a solar plant of the same capacity can be set up in six months.”

[Landslides, floods and earthquakes](#) frequently damage hydropower stations. The Rasuwa flood last week affected 230MW of generation capacity from four plants along the Trisuli. Last September’s flood badly damaged the 456MW Upper Tama Kosi.

The [Nepal Electricity Authority \(NEA\)](#) and private power producers lost much revenue, and Nepal had to stop exporting monsoon [surplus electricity](#) to India last year. Damaged solar projects, on the other hand, can be up and running after repairs within a few weeks.

“The main limitation of solar is land,” explains Gurung. “While a relatively small hydro project can generate 5-10MW pretty easily, a 1MW solar plant requires 500 m² of land.”

Where the plant is situated matters as well. The best region is [Mustang](#), because it gets the most solar radiation per unit area over a specific period. The Tarai may get a lot of sun but cloud cover, fog and pollution makes it less ‘irradiated’. The efficiency of a photovoltaic cell also drops, the higher the ambient temperature.

“A 1kW panel in Mustang might give you 6-7 units per day, while the same panel in the Tarai would give you half that,” says Gurung.

Another advantage for [solar in Nepal](#) is how decentralised it can be. An unreliable grid and difficult terrain make it hard to build [hydropower stations](#) and transmission lines, but home solar systems can be set up easily and provide reliable energy especially when paired with batteries for morning and the night.

Hydropower dams submerge large tracts of fertile valleys, impact ecosystems and displace people. But NEA and energy producers are locked into hydro, and are reluctant to shift to solar.

[GhamPower](#) is moving into solar in a big way, offering strategic funding to make panels available to poorer communities, and setting up solar microgrids.

The company was one of ten winners, out of 2,500 applicants, of the \$50,000 Keeling Curve Prize which honours high-impact [clean energy solutions](#).

The company sets up solar water pumps for farmers so that they can access water from boring wells year-round. It also set up solar systems that can power equipment needed during and after birthing such as baby warmers, incubators, sterilisers in [remote health posts](#).

“Industries generally have large, unused rooftop spaces ideal for solar systems that can help reduce [electricity bills](#),” says Pradip Humagain at Gham Power but points out a flaw in national policy, which caps the capacity of a solar power plant for a particular industry at 1MW. “This

limitation makes no sense, and removing it would actually help the NEA by making them better able to provide electricity to industry.”

Nepal’s energy mix should be expanded to other [renewables](#) like solar, wind and even geothermal to reduce the risk of catastrophic damage to hydropower generation in [future glacial floods](#). Reverse metering would allow solar producers to sell electricity to the grid, and time-of-day tariff would balance load.

“Our energy policy is heavily biased: 90% hydro, and 10% ‘other,’” says Gurung, “we should aim for at least 30% solar.”

Net metering involves [solar rooftop systems](#) that are connected to the grid, which would allow people to ‘export’ surplus energy generated during the day. This would offset the price of electricity the household uses at other times of the day, and the grid would essentially be like a battery.

But NEA is fixated on hydro and has opposed net metering for decades, seeing it as a threat. The government actually passed a net metering policy in 2018, but the NEA never properly adopted it.

In fact, despite hardly any solar energy systems that allow net metering having been installed, the NEA changed it to a ‘net billing’ system that makes exported energy cheaper than energy used in the home instead of a 1:1 offset.

Then the NEA quietly dropped all net metering in July 2022. This blindsided consumers and developers who had implemented such systems, the distrust scared away [potential future investors](#).

The technology is affordable, but solar energy needs political will in Nepal. The policy should be to generate as much renewable energy as possible, instead of making solar and hydro compete.

Even more efficient than solar energy is wind power. In terms of area needed, wind is even more cost-effective, and much easier to set up than hydro.

India and China are already the biggest producers of wind turbine blades. Even though Nepal lacks coastlines where wind power is most efficient, there are places in the trans-Himalaya where it is viable. The only problem is the lack of roads, says Gurung.

『INPS Japan/Nepali Times』



Start-Up Nation for Good: Israel Tech Innovations Addressing Global Challenges Aligned with SDGs

By Roman Yanushevsky



Photo credit: Wikimedia Commons / Netafim, Watergen, SolarEdge Technologies

Israel, often called the “Start-Up Nation,” is one of the world’s leaders in finding technical innovative solutions to tackle pressing global challenges—most notably water scarcity and the need for renewable energy—making significant contributions to multiple UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Tel Aviv (INPS Japan) – Israel has earned the title of “Start-Up Nation” thanks to its vibrant innovation ecosystem, but in recent years many Israeli ventures have shifted their focus toward solving some of the world’s most pressing challenges. Rather than limiting their scope to profit-driven technologies, a growing number of start-ups are aligning their products with the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), tackling global issues such as water scarcity, food security, and renewable energy. This evolution underscores how Israeli entrepreneurship is expanding its impact far beyond the borders of the country.

Watergen

One prominent area of innovation is water technology. Companies like Watergen, which developed devices capable of generating clean drinking water from air, directly address SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation).

Founded in 2009 by entrepreneur Arye Kohavi, Watergen develops atmospheric water generators (AWG) that extract potable water from air—using just 250 Wh per liter. Originally designed to supply troops, technology has expanded to civilian use in regions suffering water

shortages, including disaster zones and remote areas across the Americas, Asia, and Africa.

These solutions offer immediate relief in regions where access to safe water remains scarce. Such initiatives show how Israeli innovation can transform local humanitarian conditions while contributing to long-term resilience.

In 2020, Watergen deployed a unit in a Gaza pediatric hospital in collaboration with local utilities, demonstrating the applicability of its technology in humanitarian crises.

Netafim

Netafim, founded in Israel in 1965, is widely recognized as the pioneer of modern drip irrigation technology. The company was born in the Negev desert, where water scarcity pushed engineers and farmers to search for smarter ways to grow crops with minimal resources.

Their invention of drip irrigation—delivering precise amounts of water and nutrients directly to the plant's root zone—revolutionized agriculture, setting a new standard for efficient farming practices worldwide.

The technology developed by Netafim helps farmers save up to 60% of water compared to traditional irrigation methods, while also increasing crop yields significantly. By reducing water loss from evaporation and runoff, drip irrigation ensures that every drop counts. This approach directly supports sustainable agriculture, especially in

regions facing drought and climate change, where water is one of the scarcest resources.

The company operates in over 110 countries and works with smallholder farmers as well as large agricultural enterprises. In India, Netafim has partnered with government programs to provide affordable drip irrigation systems to millions of farmers, helping them grow more food on less land. In Africa, their technologies have been deployed to support food security projects, allowing farmers in Kenya and South Africa to cultivate crops even in semi-arid conditions.

In Latin America, countries such as Brazil and Mexico have adopted Netafim's systems to support the cultivation of coffee, sugarcane, and vegetables, where efficient irrigation is critical for both productivity and sustainability. Similarly, in Australia and the United States, Netafim's technology has been applied to vineyards and orchards, helping growers improve the quality of grapes, citrus fruits, and nuts while conserving scarce water resources.

Today, Netafim is considered a global leader in smart irrigation solutions, aligning its mission with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation). By providing tools that empower farmers worldwide to grow more with less, the company not only addresses food security but also promotes sustainable water management. Netafim's legacy demonstrates how Israeli innovation continues to shape the future of agriculture for the benefit of communities across the globe.

Tethys Solar Desalination (TSD)

This Israeli start-up company has developed a breakthrough technology that uses **solar energy to desalinate seawater** in an affordable, sustainable, and scalable way. Unlike traditional desalination plants, which rely on fossil fuels and are costly to maintain, TSD's system runs entirely on renewable energy, reducing both operational costs and carbon emissions.

At the core of TSD's innovation is its **solar-powered desalination module**, which mimics natural evaporation and condensation. Sunlight heats seawater in a specially designed unit, causing it to evaporate. The vapor then condenses into fresh, drinkable water, while the remaining brine is safely discharged. This low-cost, off-grid technology can be deployed in coastal communities and arid regions where access to clean water is scarce and infrastructure is limited.

The company's solution is particularly relevant for **developing countries** that face severe water stress but lack the financial resources for conventional desalination. TSD systems are modular and scalable, meaning they can serve anything from a small fishing village to a large municipality. For example, the technology has been tested in regions of Africa and Asia, where water shortages impact both households and agriculture. By providing a decentralized, affordable source of fresh water, TSD helps communities achieve greater self-sufficiency.

TSD's impact aligns with several **UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, including SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG 7

(Affordable and Clean Energy), and SDG 13 (Climate Action). By using the sun as a free and abundant resource, the company not only reduces dependence on fossil fuels but also addresses climate resilience in areas most vulnerable to droughts and water scarcity.

SolarEdge

SolarEdge, founded in 2006 in Israel, has become a global leader in smart energy technology, best known for its innovative solar inverters and energy management systems. The company revolutionized the solar industry by introducing the **DC-optimized inverter system**, which allows each solar panel to operate independently at maximum efficiency. This breakthrough solved one of the biggest challenges in solar power—energy loss caused by shading or panel mismatch.

Beyond inverters, SolarEdge has expanded into a full suite of **clean energy solutions**, including energy storage, electric vehicle (EV) charging, backup power, and smart home energy management. By integrating hardware and software, SolarEdge enables households, businesses, and utilities to monitor and control their energy production and consumption in real time. This contributes to reducing electricity costs while increasing energy independence and resilience.

Globally, SolarEdge technology is deployed in over **130 countries**, from large solar farms in Europe and the United States to residential rooftops in Asia and Africa. In the United States, SolarEdge is a top provider of residential solar inverters, helping millions of households lower their carbon footprint. In Europe, its systems power commercial buildings and schools, while in developing regions the company

supports rural electrification projects, bringing clean energy to communities with limited grid access.

SolarEdge also plays a vital role in **advancing renewable energy integration into power grids**. With smart energy management and grid services, the company helps utilities stabilize electricity networks and manage growing renewable energy flows. This is especially critical as countries aim to meet climate targets and transition away from fossil fuels. By supporting grid flexibility, SolarEdge contributes directly to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) and SDG 13 (Climate Action).

Looking ahead, SolarEdge continues to invest in **digitalization and AI-driven energy solutions**. Its vision is not just to generate renewable energy but to create an intelligent ecosystem where solar, storage, EVs, and smart devices work together seamlessly. Through innovation and global reach, SolarEdge is making clean energy more efficient, accessible, and reliable—helping drive the world toward a sustainable future.

H2Pro

H2Pro is an Israeli company revolutionizing the production of green hydrogen, a clean energy source that can play a critical role in the global transition away from fossil fuels. Founded in 2019 as a spin-off from the Technion – Israel Institute of Technology, H2Pro developed an innovative technology called **E-TAC (Electrochemical-Thermally Activated Chemical water splitting)**, which makes hydrogen

production significantly more efficient and cost-effective compared to traditional electrolysis.

Unlike conventional electrolysis, which splits water into hydrogen and oxygen simultaneously, H2Pro's E-TAC process separates the two stages. This unique approach improves efficiency, lowers electricity consumption, and reduces costs, all while ensuring greater safety by avoiding the immediate mixing of gases. As a result, H2Pro is able to produce green hydrogen at a price competitive with fossil-fuel-based alternatives, making the technology highly attractive for large-scale adoption.

Green hydrogen produced by H2Pro has the potential to **decarbonize multiple industries**, including transportation, heavy manufacturing, and energy storage. It can serve as a clean fuel for trucks, ships, and airplanes, as well as a critical component in producing green steel and fertilizers. By offering a scalable and affordable solution, H2Pro contributes directly to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and supporting the global shift to net-zero economies.

With strong backing from investors such as Bill Gates, Hyundai, and ArcelorMittal, H2Pro is already expanding partnerships worldwide. Its technology is being tested in Europe, Asia, and North America, where governments and industries are prioritizing hydrogen as part of their renewable energy strategies.

By combining Israeli innovation with global demand for clean solutions, H2Pro positions itself at the forefront of the hydrogen

economy, aligning with UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) such as affordable clean energy, climate action, and sustainable industry.

Summary

Overall Israel hosts nearly 1,300 climate-oriented companies, including 946 startups focused on clean energy, water infrastructure, eco-agriculture, sustainable mobility, novel materials, and more. Government grants, programs like PLANETech, and academic investments totaling over \$130 million further reinforce innovation and environmental sustainability.

Israeli startups are advancing critical global initiatives—addressing SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) and SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy)—through tangible, scalable technologies. From extracting water from air and powering micro-grids to producing green hydrogen and innovative energy storage, Israel’s “Start-Up Nation” is contributing meaningful solutions to complex global challenges, forging pathways toward a more sustainable future.

『INPS Japan』



UN SDGs Logo

Fiji's Truth and Reconciliation Commission Aims To Restore Trust and Peace After Decades of Political Crises

By Catherine Wilson



Fiji is a Pacific Island nation renowned for its tourism industry, but it has also endured four-armed coups and 38 years of political instability. Credit: Julie Lyn

SYDNEY (IPS) – Fiji, a nation located west of Tonga in the central Pacific, is renowned for its natural beauty and beach resorts. But for 38 years it has endured a political rollercoaster of instability with four armed coups that overturned

democratically elected governments and eroded human rights. Now, following a peaceful transition of power at the last 2022 election, Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka and his coalition government want to deal with the past with a [Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#) (TRC) to pave the way for a more peaceful and resilient future.

The commission will “facilitate open and free engagement in truth-telling regarding the political upheavals during the coup periods and promote closure and healing for the survivors,” Rabuka, who led the

first coup, told parliament before supporting legislation that was passed in December last year. Now he has pledged to oversee the country’s reconciliation and return to democratic norms.

The TRC is tasked with investigating what happened during the coups d’état of 1987, 2000 and 2006, related human rights abuses and the grievances that have driven the relentless struggle for power between Fiji’s indigenous and Indo-Fijian communities. Its focus is on truth-telling and preventing a repetition of conflict; it will not prosecute perpetrators of abuses or provide reparations to victims.

“This commission aims to serve the people of Fiji to come to terms with your own history... the purpose is not to put blame and to deepen the trauma and the difficulties, but to help the people of Fiji to move on for a better future for everyone,” Dr. Marcus Brand, the TRC chairman, who has extensive experience with transitional justice initiatives and held senior roles in the United Nations and European Union, said in January.

He is joined by four Fijian commissioners, namely former High Court Judge Sekove Naqiolevu, former TV journalist Rachna Nath, former Fiji Airways Captain Rajendra Dass, and leadership expert Ana

Laqeretabua.

Florence Swamy, Executive Director of the Pacific Centre for Peacebuilding, a non-governmental organization based in the capital, Suva, told IPS that the TRC is important to building trust in the country, where many people still experience fear and anxiety about the violence they witnessed.

“As a first step, it is creating a safe space for people to talk about what happened to them,” she emphasized.

Fiji’s political turmoil has roots in the past. British colonization in the nineteenth century was accompanied by policies that were intended to strengthen indigenous land rights and prevent dispossession, rights that were reinforced in Fiji’s first constitution at Independence in 1970.

But, at the same time, Fijian society was irrevocably changed by the organized immigration of Indians to work on sugar plantations and boost development of the colony. By the mid-twentieth century, the Indo-Fijian population was larger than the indigenous community and their demands for equal rights increased.

“Fijian Indians were brought to the country, in many cases, under the false pretense of better work and wage opportunities, to develop the economy of Fiji...while indigenous Fijians were hardly consulted about such a momentous decision,” Dr. Shailendra Singh, Head of Journalism at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji, told IPS.

Soon the country’s politics were mired in a fierce contest for power. And in 1987, Rabuka, then an officer in the Fiji military, led the overthrow of the first elected Indo-Fijian government under Prime Minister Timoci Bavadra.

Rabuka then became Prime Minister from 1992 to 1999 before another Indo-Fijian government, led by Mahendra Chaudhry, was voted in. This triggered a second coup instigated by nationalist George Speight in 2000 in which the government was held hostage in the nation’s parliament for weeks. Then, in 2006, Frank Bainimarama, head of the armed forces, orchestrated the third coup, which he claimed was necessary to eliminate corruption and divisive policies in the government of the day presided over by Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase. For the next eight years he oversaw an authoritarian military government until democratic elections were held again in 2014. The coups inflicted a significant human cost. Lawlessness, inter-community violence, military and police brutality, and arrests and torture of people critical of the regime occurred increasingly after 2006.

Three years later, Amnesty International called for “an immediate halt to all human rights violations by members of the security forces and government officials, including the arbitrary arrests, intimidation and threats, and assaults and detentions of journalists, government critics and others.” It also called for the repeal of the Public Emergency Regulations imposed by the government in 2009 that led to impunity for state officials involved in abuses.

Today, the demographic balance has shifted again in the wake of an outward exodus of Indo-Fijians, who now comprise about 33 percent of Fiji's population of about 900,000, while Melanesians constitute about 56 percent. But societal divisions remain entrenched and the past has not been forgotten.

The commission is now preparing to hold hearings over the next 18 months. And Rabuka has promised to be one of the first to testify of his involvement in the political upheavals.

I will swear to say everything, the truth... I want to continue to live with a clear conscience. I want people to know that at least they understand my reasons for doing it," he told the media in January. But the TRC also promises to place victims and survivors at the center of its mission, claiming that "their lived experiences are vital to fostering accountability, encouraging healing and building a more united and compassionate society."

However, there are voices of caution, too, warning of the risks of reviving memories of conflict and pain and the need to prevent this from inflaming divisions.

While experts in the country speak of the need to go beyond the TRC and tackle structural issues of inequality and disenfranchisement, which have driven community grievances, "to make everyone feel a sense of belonging and loyalty to the country of their birth," Singh said. In particular, "indigenous fears concerning political dominance in Fiji" and "Indo-Fijians' feeling of being marginalized by the state and not treated as equal citizens" need to be addressed, she continued.

The Fijian armed forces, which played a decisive role in executing the

coups, often justifying their actions in protecting Fiji's internal order, are also critical to the success of the country's return to democratic governance.

In 2023 an internal reconciliation process began, aimed at ending military intervention in the country's politics and elections. In April, during an official meeting with the TRC, the military leadership pledged 'to ensure that past mistakes are not repeated, and that its role as a guardian of Fiji's constitutional order remains anchored in service to all citizens, regardless of ethnicity, background or political belief.'

After the commission has concluded its estimated two years of work, it will make recommendations in its final report for public measures and policy reforms to support the country's social cohesion. Here Swamy emphasizes that it is crucial the recommendations do not remain on paper but are acted on.

"In terms of the recommendations, who will be responsible for them? Will they ensure that the recommendations are implemented? And what mechanisms will be put in place to make sure that institutions are held accountable?" she declared.

Looking into the future, Swamy said that she would like to see her country become one "where everyone feels safe, where there is equal opportunity... a country where everyone can realize their potential."

『INPS Japan/ IPS UN Bureau Report』

Global water bankruptcy and Iran's Crisis

By Shabnam Delfani

London (London Post) – While global attention fixates on political unrest and military conflicts, a silent catastrophe unfolds: water bankruptcy, a crisis where demand irreversibly outstrips supply, threatening ecosystems and human survival. Iran stands at the epicenter of this disaster, but the issue reverberates worldwide, from parched river basins to overexploited aquifers.

In Iran, over 85% of renewable freshwater resources are depleted, far exceeding the United Nations' sustainability thresholds. Lake Urmia, once the Middle East's largest saltwater lake, has lost 90% of its volume, reduced to a cracked expanse of salt. The Zayandeh-Rood river, a lifeline for ancient cities, now lies dry for months, igniting protests in Isfahan. Across 28 of Iran's 31 provinces, 90 million people grapple with severe water stress, facing drought, food insecurity, and ecological collapse.

Over 1.2 million illegal wells drain aquifers formed over centuries, accelerating desertification. This is not merely an environmental failure

but a human rights emergency, as water and food security—enshrined in UN Resolution 64/292 and Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—are eroded. Globally, water bankruptcy manifests in diverse yet parallel crises.

In 2018, Cape Town, South Africa, narrowly averted “Day Zero,” when taps would run dry, after years of drought and overconsumption.

Australia's Murray-Darling Basin, a critical agricultural hub, suffers from overallocation and climate-driven droughts, reducing river flows and devastating ecosystems. In California, USA, over-pumped aquifers have caused land subsidence, with groundwater levels dropping up to 100 feet in some areas.



London Post

India's Punjab region, a breadbasket, faces groundwater depletion from intensive irrigation, with 78% of wells classified as overexploited.

In Mexico City, over-extraction has caused the city to sink by up to 10 meters, while the Colorado River, shared by the US and Mexico, often fails to reach its delta due to upstream diversions. These cases underscore a global pattern: mismanagement, climate change, and unchecked demand are pushing water systems toward collapse.

In Iran, domestic mismanagement amplifies natural scarcity. Decades of poor governance have prioritized water-intensive crops like rice and sugarcane in arid regions, straining scarce resources. Inter-basin water transfers and outdated irrigation practices, with 90% of agricultural water lost to inefficiency, exacerbate the crisis. A "dam construction mafia" has built poorly planned dams, disrupting river flows and displacing communities. Environmental experts are sidelined, their warnings ignored. Meanwhile, international sanctions compound the disaster by blocking access to modern water treatment technologies, irrigation innovations, and climate finance. While sanctions don't target the environment explicitly, their impact is undeniable: stalled restoration projects, halted research, and paralyzed sustainable development efforts leave Iran ill-equipped to adapt.

Women in rural Iran bear a disproportionate burden. As primary managers of household water and food production, they face grueling treks to collect water, soaring food prices, and heightened domestic stress when resources vanish. Yet, they are largely excluded from

water governance, a systemic oversight that undermines solutions. Empowering women's knowledge and leadership is not just just—it's essential. Iran's crisis ripples beyond its borders, threatening regional stability. The drying of shared rivers like the Helmand, Tigris, and Aras risks escalating tensions with Afghanistan, Iraq, and Turkey. Internal displacement from rural to urban areas strains cities, fueling unrest and reshaping demographics. Without action, food shortages and climate migration could destabilize the Middle East, with global repercussions. The world cannot ignore these stakes.

Globally, transboundary water disputes are rising. The Nile River's Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam has sparked tensions with Egypt and Sudan, who fear reduced flows. In Central Asia, the Amu Darya's overuse threatens livelihoods in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. These conflicts highlight the need for cooperative water management; a lesson Iran's neighbors must heed. Addressing water bankruptcy demands urgent, coordinated action.

In Iran, the government must declare a national water emergency to unlock international support and fast-track reforms. Agricultural practices need overhaul: replacing 30% of water-intensive crops with drought-resilient varieties, modernizing irrigation across 5 million hectares, and funding regenerative farming could save billions of cubic meters annually. Illegal water extraction must stop, using satellite monitoring to seal unauthorized wells and enforce provincial groundwater quotas. Empowering women and youth is critical—ensuring 30% female representation on water boards and launching a

Youth Climate Corps for data collection and innovation would harness untapped potential.

Water diplomacy must be revived through regional treaties and independent oversight to manage shared rivers equitably. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Iran must shift from symbolic projects to a transparent, justice-focused role, prioritizing climate resilience over metrics. Globally, similar measures are needed.

Australia's Murray-Darling Basin Authority has introduced water buybacks to curb overallocation, a model for sustainable allocation. Israel's drip irrigation systems, which save 60% of water compared to traditional methods, offer a blueprint for efficiency. Jordan's water harvesting initiatives demonstrate low-cost solutions for arid regions. These successes show that solutions exist but require political will and investment.

Water is not a political weapon, nor is food a sanctionable commodity. Environmental justice is non-negotiable, rooted in the UN Charter, the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and international human rights frameworks. SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) and SDG 13 (Climate Action) cannot be achieved if water security is politicized or ignored.

Iran's collapse is not a distant warning—it's a present reality. Globally, 2 billion people live in water-stressed regions, a number projected to rise to 3.5 billion by 2050. The UN estimates that 40% of the world's

population faces water scarcity, with 700 million at risk of displacement by 2030 due to drought. These numbers are not abstract—they represent lives, livelihoods, and ecosystems on the brink. The international community's silence on Iran's crisis is complicity. Bureaucratic delays and political caution must yield to bold action. The UN, governments, and civil society must prioritize water as a human right, not a bargaining chip.

In Iran, the government, UNDP, and global partners must act swiftly to avert further collapse. Globally, nations must learn from Iran's plight, investing in sustainable water management before their own systems fail. The principles of peace, dignity, and justice—enshrined in the UN Charter—depend on water security. The world cannot afford to wait until the last river runs dry to act. Iran's water bankruptcy is a moral and regional failure, a stark reminder that inaction has consequences. Let us act now, before the global water crisis becomes humanity's undoing.

『INPS Japan/ London Post』



SDGs No. 6

Waste not, want not

By Sonia Awale



Nepal generated 42,000 tons of electrical and electronic waste in 2023, up from 13,000 tons in 2013. All photos: SUMAN NEPALI

Government policies to drive recycling are crucial for electrical and electronic waste management in Nepal

Kathumandu (Nepali Times) – A [New York Times report this week](#) on Nepal's electric vehicle boom was widely shared. The world is finally taking notice of the country's energy transition. But the success story also brings new problems. Nepal will soon be facing a crisis in managing the lithium-ion of battery-powered cars,

scooters and three-wheelers. Then there are mobile phone batteries, heavy metals and rare earths.

“It used to be just laptops and mobiles, so people didn't care so much, but one electric car can mean up to 500kg of waste, it will be beyond our control once they start piling up,” warns Pankaj Panjiyar of [Doko Recyclers](#), an electrical and electronic waste management company in Kathmandu.

He adds: “We were on track to generate 3,500 tons of lithium battery waste a year after 2027, but given the [increased market of EVs](#) the actual figure will now be much bigger.”

Besides lithium, there are also heavy metals such as cobalt, nickel, and manganese that can contaminate the air, soil, and water, as well as rare earths. Nepal imported nearly 1.9 million mobile phones in the past year, a 40% growth from the previous — and that was only through official channels. With 76% of new car sales [being fully battery-powered](#), Nepal is second only to Norway.

Lithium-ion battery waste from electric cars, mobile phones, toys, solar panels and the 9,000 telecommunication towers all over the country already makes up a sizeable chunk of electronic waste.

Recycling lithium-ion batteries is possible but expensive, while the recovery rate of heavy metals, including gold, is at 95% or more. China is leading the game with more than half of the global recycling capacity of heavy metals at about 500,000 metric tons a year, much ahead of the United States and Europe.

Nepal does not have recycling infrastructure for lithium-ion batteries. In fact, there is no recycling plant for lead-acid batteries either: the acid is usually just dumped while lead, other metals and plastic are extracted by the informal sector or sent to India.

“Battery recycling is textbook engineering, it is not difficult, we should be able to do it ourselves,” energy economist Dipak Gyawali told a recent climate discussion. “But when there is no market, the standard law of political economy is that the state has to create one, that is how it happened in the US, the UK and China.”

Doko Recyclers had tried to set up a recycling infrastructure for lithium-ion batteries, and had nearly got a Rs40 million investment from Singapore-based Total Environment Solutions (TES). But Nepal’s lack of e-waste policy and investment guidelines meant the company was not assured of a return on investment and pulled out.

Nepal also does not have Extended Producer’s Responsibility (EPR), wherein manufacturers and distributors are responsible for disposal and pay for the [recycling of the waste](#) generated by their product, including batteries.



Staff at Doko Recyclers in Kathmandu working on sorting electrical waste this week.

“It is only a matter of technology transfer when it comes to lithium-ion recycling, but it requires investment backed by government policies such as EPR,” explains Panjiyar. “But there must also be provisions for extracted raw materials like lithium. We don’t manufacture batteries in Nepal, so we have to export them. But who is going to pay for that?”

Lithium, heavy metals and rare earths also draw much criticism for unethical mining and environmental cost. One ton of mined lithium emits nearly 15 tons of CO₂. Lithium is either extracted from briny water or hard rock minerals, and is often associated with contamination of water as well as loss of water sources. Nickel and cobalt mining comes with massive ecological cost and labour

exploitation.

Sodium-ion batteries which are a safer, cheaper and more sustainable alternative. Battery-powered transportation could also be just a stepping stone to green hydrogen fuel of the future.

“If we are using these metals, at the very least deploy them for the benefit of the larger public, like by promoting electric buses,” says Shilshila Acharys of Avni Center for Sustainability which recycles plastic and other waste. “Ultimately, it comes down to our consumption patterns. It is much easier to use one less mobile phone or a car which wasn’t even necessary, than recycling.”

What happens to your phone when it dies

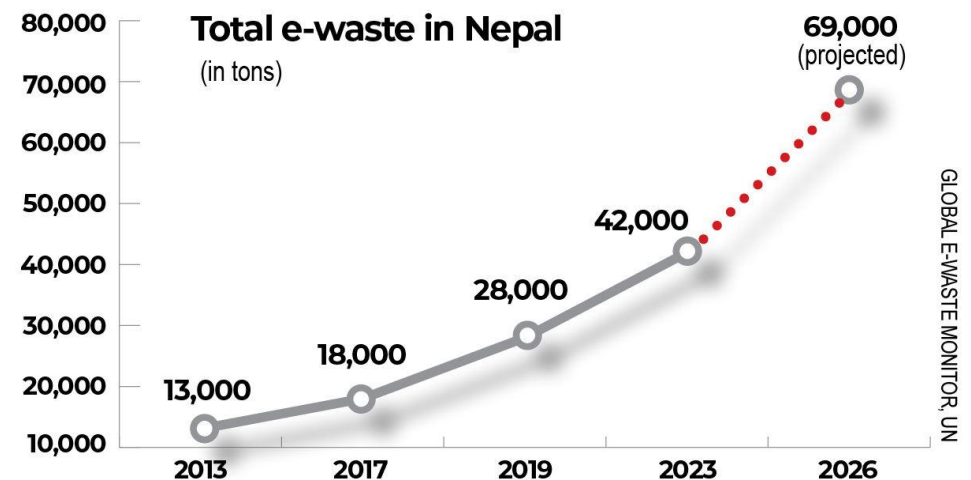
Nepal generated 42,000 tons of e-waste in 2024, up from just 13,000 ten years ago, according to a worldwide survey by Global E-waste Monitor. The figure for Nepal is projected to reach 69,000 tons in 2026.

While this is modest compared to most other countries, the growth and lack of recycling facilities are worrying.

Household appliances such as washing machines, refrigerators, cooking stoves and ovens still make up nearly half of [electrical and electronic waste in Nepal](#), while phones, laptops, tablets, hard drives, routers and modems come next at 9%. Consumer electronics made up 17% of e-waste, followed by lighting equipment at 14%, screen and monitors at 8% and toys at 9%.

“The nature of e-waste has changed in the last decade or so, we now have less CRT monitors and CFL bulbs but more devices, solar panels, optic fibre which actually has a negative recycling value and now EV batteries,” says Pankaj Panjiyar of the Doko Recyclers.

The nature of e-waste is also guided by changing consumption patterns where people upgrade to newer gadgets every couple of years, not necessarily because they are at the end of their lives.



The average lifespan for mobile phones in Nepal is only two years, four years for laptops, eight years for televisions and computers, and ten years for refrigerators and washing machines. Just last fiscal year, Nepal imported nearly 1.9 million smartphones worth Rs24 billion.

“Businesses today, especially electronics, have exchange offers wherein customers can exchange even well-functioning goods for a

newer version. By not using electronic goods to the end of their lives, we are creating a problem that wasn't there to begin with," says Shilshila Acharya of Avni Center for Sustainability. "Electronic use has increased dramatically, but our e-waste management capacity remains the same."

When municipal governments have failed to even manage biodegradable waste, they have not even started thinking about e-waste. Which is why electronic and electrical waste is left to the informal sector.

There are some 1,200 scrap dealers in Kathmandu and 20% of e-waste is thought to be recycled despite the lack of proper formal channels, and most of it ends up in India.

This means limited extraction of plastic parts as well as metals such as aluminium and copper, but removal of precious and heavy elements is not yet carried out in Nepal. Liquid waste, such as acid from lead batteries, is disposed of in the dumping sites, poisoning ground water and rivers.

There is also a small but growing market to refurbish used electronic goods led by the likes of Sabko Phone which buys second-hand smartphones and reconditioning them to an almost new cheaper device.

"It was very difficult for us in the beginning to get people behind this campaign, but over the last couple of years, we have seen a change,"

says Uttam Kafle of Sabko. "The fact that they are buying a refurbished phone today means they might buy a refurbished washing machine in future."

Fourteen percent of the 1.22 billion mobile phones sold in 2023 were refurbished — that translated to 190 million fewer new phones that year. Says Kafle: "If we can associate refurbishing and upcycling with environmental gain, we will go a long way."

Indeed, experts recommend reducing the consumption of electronic goods not required as the first step to managing waste, followed by repair, reuse, and upcycling. Recycling is often the last option, also because Nepal lacks proper infrastructure as well as a legal mechanism.

Nepal's Solid Waste Management Act 2011 has no mention of e-waste. It has since been revised, but the document is making rounds of various ministers and is yet to be finalised. Even so, it does not have any guidelines on managing electrical and electronic waste, and has only defined the terminology.

India has an Extended Producer's Responsibility (EPR) as well as Battery Waste Management Rules 2022 which clearly outline the responsibilities of producers, recyclers, and refurbishers.

"A national-level e-waste legislation with EPR is a must with provisions at municipalities such that there is a separate collection value chain, and such a policy should allow for recycling infrastructure," says

Panjiyar. “All of this should happen simultaneously and with public awareness about e-waste in Nepal.”

EPR will also help remove unreliable players in the market, and in turn reduce the flow of unwanted goods. This is in line with calls to curb unchecked and uncontrolled consumption of goods as well as prioritising ethical and sustainable development.

This has much relevance for the EV boom in Nepal. Of the 22,907 four-wheelers worth Rs50.88 billion that the country imported last fiscal year, 16,701 units valued at Rs41.23 billion were electric vehicles. Few of them were passenger buses, which are much more expensive than diesel ones of the same size.

Until grid-to-motor technology, such as trolley and tram, are introduced, the [government must subsidise electric buses](#) to make the best use of surplus hydroelectricity while cleaning up the air and reducing Nepal’s petroleum bill.

After all, only so many individuals can afford private EVs, and even then, they do not nearly reduce emissions as much, but add to traffic. Large electric buses also mean fewer lithium-ion batteries per person.

“Our EV adoption is both a success story and a disaster waiting to happen given all that battery waste we will be faced with soon. It is like by trying to solve one problem we have created another,” says Acharya.

Uttam Kafle at Sabko Phone says the concept of responsible use and circular economy which involves reusing, repairing, refurbishing and recycling existing materials and products as long as possible, should be the way forward.

“We must make the best use of electronics for the betterment of our lives, there are still places and people without much access to these goods. But their ethical use and management, especially at the end of their life, will help save us from a lot of future problems.”

『INPS Japan/Nepali Times』



SDGs No. 12

Universities Drive Mexico City's Recycling Culture

By Guillermo Ayala Alanis

Residents of Mexico City generate just over 12,000 tons of waste per day, 10% of which consists of plastic materials. In addition to their educational role, universities also appear to be becoming an important hub for waste collection.

Mexico City (INPS Japan) – In Mexico City, universities are not only centers for education and research—they are also playing a growing role in promoting a culture of recycling.

With a population of around 130 million, Mexico ranks as the tenth most populous country in the world. Its capital, Mexico City, is home to over 22 million residents who generate more than 12,000 tons of waste each day—10% of which is plastic. As environmental awareness grows, universities are emerging as key players in both educating the public and facilitating proper waste collection and classification.



Plastianuis 2025. Foto: Guillermo Ayala Alanis.

Plastics and the Challenge Ahead

Plastics have become deeply embedded in modern life thanks to their durability, lightness, strength, and low cost. However,

their ubiquity poses serious environmental risks. According to a recent United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) study, the world is expected to produce approximately

400 million tons of plastic waste in 2024, much of it from single-use products.

In Mexico City, tackling this challenge means engaging not just policy-makers or industry—but society as a whole. Universities are proving to be the ideal platforms for bridging these sectors and inspiring behavioral change.

Plastianguis: A University-Led Recycling Movement

For the past six years, the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), in collaboration with private partners, has hosted an annual event called *Plastianguis*. The initiative encourages the public to bring in plastic waste in exchange for essential goods such as rice, beans, soap, detergent, and pet food.

UNAM's Faculty of Chemistry welcomed children, students, and adults alike during the 2025 edition. One participant, Alejandra López, emphasized that the rewards weren't

her motivation:

"I don't come for the gifts—they're just napkins or toilet paper. I come to help the planet. That's what really matters."

The 2025 Plastianguis collected 7,675 kilograms of plastic—500 kilograms more than the previous year.

Ximena, another attendee, said her passion for recycling influenced those around her: *"I spent six weeks with the same group of people, and they all ended up creating a recycling corner. It was exciting to see others take initiative."*

Youth Leadership: ConCiencia 2030

Daniela, a student at UNAM's Faculty of Chemistry, is one of the organizers behind *ConCiencia 2030*, a youth-led initiative focused on environmental awareness and sustainability. Based on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4 (Quality Education) and 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), the program seeks to spread eco-friendly habits through fun, youth-to-youth engagement.

"People always ask me, 'Why do you do this?' And I say, 'Why not?' We don't realize how much waste we generate. The day someone at a workshop correctly explained why a greasy pizza box doesn't go in the cardboard bin—I knew my work had made a difference."



Daniela (izquierda) y Ximena (derecha) asistentes a Plastianguis 2025 Foto: Guillermo Ayala Alanis.

Daniela has been part of *ConCiencia* for four years. For her, seeing others like Ximena apply what they've learned validates the entire effort.

Industry, Academia, and the Circular Economy

Miguel Ángel Delgado, President of the

Plastic Industry Commission for Development and Responsibility of the Mexican Chemical Industry, sees plastic waste management as a shared responsibility between society, industry, and government.

“Society generates the waste, industry produces the goods, and government collects it. Universities help tie these elements together. Academia teaches people how to manage waste properly and reintegrate it into the circular economy.”

Fashion from Waste

Recycling isn't limited to collection drives. In Querétaro, a group of young entrepreneurs showcased a T-shirt made from around 12 recycled PET bottles. By turning plastic into polyester fibers, they created a product that's not only environmentally friendly but also durable and high-quality.

Oscar González of Indorama Ventures, which helped develop the product, explained: *“The quality is as good as a brand-new*

shirt—fresh, resistant, and long-lasting. Top brands like Nike and Adidas already use recycled fibers in their products.”

IPN and the Reciclación

The National Polytechnic Institute (IPN), another leading public university, actively promotes environmental care. Partnering with the Mexico City government, IPN hosts *Reciclación* events that collect appliances, batteries, and electronic waste.

Most recently, IPN's Interdisciplinary Professional Unit of Engineering and Social and Administrative Sciences (UPIICSA) served as a collection site on June 27–28. The event gathered 7.1 tons of electrical and electronic waste.

A key attraction was the Interactive Recycling Museum, a converted bus operated by the sustainable tech company Rennueva. Visitors could explore the various phases of recycling as they occur in an actual plant. Itsmietzil Castillo, Environmental Education Coordinator at Rennueva, emphasized that

reducing consumption is even more important than recycling itself:

“The biggest environmental impact comes from cutting back on how much plastic we use in the first place. Recycling helps, but changing our consumption habits is essential to reducing pollution.”

The Bigger Picture

A single plastic container, if not recycled, can take up to 500 years to degrade. Globally, 400 million tons of plastic are used annually—40% of which is discarded after just one use.

By leveraging the power of education, community involvement, and youth leadership, Mexico's universities are demonstrating how academic institutions can be engines of environmental change.

『INPS Japan』

Circular economy in Sweden: Lessons for global waste reduction

By Dr.Arif Kisana



Image Credit:: dml.or.id

Stockholm (London Post) – Sweden stands as a global exemplar in the transition to a circular economy, transforming waste into a resource and setting a benchmark for sustainable waste management that offers critical lessons for Europe and beyond. With a population of 10.5 million and a GDP of €540.7 billion in 2023, Sweden accounts for

just 2.4% of the EU27 population and 3.2% of its GDP, yet its influence on environmental policy and innovation is disproportionate. The country's 99.3% recycling rate for household waste, with less than 0.4% landfilled, starkly contrasts with the global average of 60% landfilled waste and the EU's 23%. This success, driven by stringent

policies, advanced infrastructure, and cultural commitment, positions Sweden as a leader in waste reduction, though its circularity rate of 3.4%—compared to the EU’s 11.8% or the Netherlands’ 24.5%—reveals gaps in material reuse.

Sweden generates 431 kg of municipal waste per capita annually, below the EU average of 513 kg. Austria (611 kg), Denmark (747 kg), and Luxembourg (790 kg) produce more, while Romania (280 kg) and Latvia (357 kg) generate less. In 2023, Sweden managed 4.1 million tonnes of municipal waste, with 39% recycled and 59% converted to energy through 34 waste-to-energy (WTE) plants. These facilities generate heat for 1.5 million households and electricity for 780,000 homes, reducing CO2 emissions by 2.2 million tonnes annually, equivalent to removing 440,000 cars from the road. Denmark and Finland also utilize WTE, but the UK (44% recycling rate) and Poland are only recently adopting it to curb landfill reliance, where Bulgaria and Malta landfill over 70%. Sweden’s landfill rate of 1% aligns with Germany, Austria, and Belgium, far below the EU’s 18% in 2020.

Sweden’s high resource consumption—266 million tonnes annually or 24.4 tonnes per capita, 171.7% of the EU27 average—underscores the need for circularity. The Circularity Gap Report Sweden suggests six interventions to cut material use by 42.6%: circular construction, sustainable food systems, circular manufacturing, reformed extractive industries, clean mobility, and conscious consumables. For example, renovating buildings and using lightweight materials could reduce construction’s material footprint by 8.2%, while plant-based diets and reduced food waste could cut 7.3%. Manufacturing, 26% of Sweden’s

economy, could lower its footprint by 5.3% through repair and rental services, and restricting mining could save 3.4%.

Sweden’s policy framework, rooted in the 1991 carbon tax (€120 per ton of CO2) and Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) laws since 1994, drives circularity. EPR, covering 18 product categories, ensures producers manage collection and disposal, recycling 85% of packaging materials (1.2 million tonnes annually). Landfill bans on combustible and organic waste, coupled with high taxes, align with the EU’s goal of under 10% landfilling by 2035. A 2024 law mandates food waste separation, boosting biogas production, while the “pant” deposit-return scheme achieves a 92% redemption rate for 3 billion bottles and cans annually, surpassing Germany’s 77%. By 2027, waste management reforms will shift responsibility to producers and ban residual waste landfilling.

Infrastructure supports these policies, with recycling stations within 300 meters of homes and technologies like vacuum-based collection and Optibag sorting. Germany and the Netherlands have similar systems, but Romania and Greece lack them. Cultural engagement is key: public campaigns, education, and initiatives like Circular Monday—a counter to Black Friday—promote reuse. Municipal second-hand centers like ReTuna in Eskilstuna, attracting 700 daily visitors, mainstream repair and recycling. Industry plays a role too, with H&M targeting 100% recycled materials by 2025, Volvo designing 95% recyclable buses, and SSAB pioneering fossil-free steel. Textile recycler Syre, launched in 2024, aims to close the polyester loop by 2032. These efforts generate €2.1 billion annually from WTE and

employ 200,000 in circular sectors, 4% of GDP in 2024, up from 1.8% in 2015.

Compared to peers, Sweden's 49% municipal recycling rate trails Germany (69%), Austria (59%), and Slovenia (58%) but exceeds Romania (12%) and Greece (19%). The Netherlands' 26.5% circularity rate highlights Sweden's reliance on energy recovery over material reuse. France's 2020 Anti-Waste Law and Italy's 76% packaging recycling show progress, but their landfill rates (32% and higher in Italy's south) lag. Poland's 38% landfill rate reflects slow transitions. Sweden's import of 1.8 million tonnes of waste annually, generating \$100 million, raises concerns about global responsibility, as it may discourage waste reduction elsewhere. Critics also note WTE's CO2 emissions and low plastics recycling, with much exported or incinerated. A 2024 tax cut on single-use plastic bags sparked debate over reversing environmental gains.

Sweden's model offers four lessons: economic viability (WTE's profitability), ambitious policies (2020 Waste Plan's targets), hyper-local solutions (Malmö's Eco-Cycle Town), and transparency about limitations (waste imports). For emerging economies, landfill bans, EPR, and monetized waste streams are priorities. Developed nations can adopt Sweden's repair-friendly tax policies and deposit systems. The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency advocates exporting expertise to countries like Bulgaria. The circular economy employs 85,100 (1.7% of jobs), below the EU's 2.1%, but resource productivity is rising. Innovations from RISE and RE:Source, plus tax reforms,

drive progress, though vague timelines and EU waste law infractions pose challenges.

By doubling its circularity rate to 7.6%, Sweden could significantly cut its material footprint. Its blueprint—bold legislation, infrastructure investment, cultural buy-in, and economic incentives—shows circularity is an ecosystem, not just policy. As global waste is projected to rise 70% by 2050, Sweden's transformation from landfill reliance in the 1970s to near-zero waste today proves societies can turn waste into an economic engine. For policymakers, businesses, and citizens, Sweden's integration of regulations, technology, and social engagement offers a scalable path to a sustainable future.

『INPS Japan/London Post』



SDGs No. 12

Sweet Hope to End Bitter Pills for Multidrug-Resistant Tuberculosis

By Busani Bafana

BULAWAYO (IPS) – Every day, Yondela Kolweni has to hold down her son, who screams and fights when it is time for his daily life-saving TB tablets—a painful reminder of her battle with the world’s top infectious killer disease.

“It is a fight I win feeling awful about what I have to do,” says Kolweni (30), a Cape Town resident and a TB survivor. “The tablets are bitter, and he spits them out most of the time, and that reminds me of the time I had to take the same pills.”

Kolweni’s five-year-old son is battling Multidrug Resistant TB (MDR TB), a vicious form of TB that is rising among children globally.

The global burden of MDR-TB among children and adolescents has increased from 1990 to 2019, particularly in regions with lower social and economic development levels, according to a recent [study](#). In



Rallying call to end TB by 2030. Credit: Busani Bafana/IPS

addition, the top three highest incidence rates of MDR TB in 2019 were recorded in Southern sub-Saharan Africa, Eastern Europe, and South Asia, while the top three highest rates of deaths in the same period were recorded in Southern, Central, and Eastern sub-Saharan Africa.

South Africa is one of 30 countries that account for 80 percent of all TB cases in the world and has the most cases of drug-resistant TB.

A Bitter Pill to Swallow

Kolweni’s son was diagnosed with MDR-TB five years ago, having tested positive for TB which has affected his grandmother and his mother. He was immediately on treatment, a drug cocktail that included moxifloxacin—a pill not for the yellow-livered.

“There were two medications he had to take, and there was one specifically, the yellow one, that he did not like, and with the color he knew what it was,” Kolweni told IPS in an interview, explaining a daily battle to get her son to take his meds.

It was down to a fight. She crushed the tablets, mixed them with a bit of water, and fed them through a syringe.

“We would sometimes hold him or wrap a towel around him so that we could feed him the medication, but he would still spit it out, which meant he was not taking the dosage he was meant to take,” said Kolweni. “We then came up with the idea to put his tablets in his yogurt, but that technique did not work because, being a smart kid, he took the bait but would soon spit out the medication.”

Moxifloxacin, an exceptionally bitter medicine, is one of the key drugs in the new all-oral treatment for multidrug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR TB). The treatment is a combination of the drugs Bedaquiline, Pretomanid, Linezolid and Moxifloxacin, known as BPaLM. The BPaLM regimen is specially formulated for children but is a bitter pill to swallow.

Sweet Medicine

But there is sweet hope. A new [study](#), by Stellenbosch University and the TB Alliance, found that sweet, bitter-masked versions of Moxifloxacin significantly improve kids’ willingness to take the drug—easing the burden on parents and boosting treatment adherence.

Two formulations of moxifloxacin have been identified by children as tasting better than new generic versions of products currently on the market.

The results from the ChilPref ML study—a Unitaid-funded effort sponsored and led by Stellenbosch University in collaboration with TB Alliance—will help improve MDR TB treatment and adherence in children.

Dr. Graeme Hoddinott, of Stellenbosch University and the principal investigator of the study, notes that children cannot be treated in a humane manner for drug-resistant TB if the medicines taste so terrible that children refuse them or must be forced to take them.

Children diagnosed with drug-sensitive TB have good outcomes even within the four months because there is usually one tablet given, and there is a child-friendly formulation that dissolves easily to be given on a spoon or in a syringe, Hoddinott said. However, for drug-resistant TB, the situation is complicated. Most drugs for MDR TB are no longer used because of their toxicity and have been replaced by new drugs.

MDR-TB drugs are not child-friendly, Hoddinott admits. The active ingredient that kills TB in Moxifloxacin makes the pills incredibly bad tasting for children who have to take the medication daily for between six and nine months in cases of MDR TB.

“These drugs are incredibly bad tasting; they are genuinely awful to a point where adults who have been on extended TB treatment have

been unable to administer the same drugs to their children because the smell evokes the time when they were sick,” Hoddinott told IPS. “It is a trauma to administer such bad-tasting drugs to a child, both for the parent and the child, particularly for the young children.”

The ChilPref study recruited just under 100 healthy children, ages 5–17, from two diverse settings in South Africa. The children evaluated flavor blends using a ‘swish and spit’ taste panel—tasting the medicine, which was dissolved in water, and then spitting it out without ingesting any of it.

Each child participant ranked the flavor blends among the three from each manufacturer and also rated the taste, smell and other characteristics of each. For moxifloxacin, there was a clear, strong preference for the new flavor blends (“bitter masker” and orange for Macleods, and strawberry and raspberry and tutti frutti for Micro Labs) over the existing commercially available flavors for both manufacturers. For Linezolid, there was no preference between the flavor blends.

“Ensuring children have access to effective and palatable TB treatments is a crucial step in improving adherence and treatment outcomes,” said Koteswara Rao Inabathina, one of the study’s authors and CMC Project Manager at TB Alliance.

“Through close collaboration with manufacturers, we have addressed critical unmet needs by developing practical solutions that make

available and effective drug-resistant TB treatments not only accessible but also palatable and acceptable for children.”

The results of the ChilPref study showed that children preferred two new flavor blends of moxifloxacin, produced by Macleods Pharmaceuticals, India, and Micro Labs Pharmaceuticals, India. The results were communicated to the manufacturers, who are already updating their products.

“We are not surprised that a lot of kids did not like any of the tastings because we knew that they were horrible taste-wise, but we got a very clear signal for both manufacturers that the flavor blends we recommended were more preferred,” Hoddinott said. “We changed which flavor was going to market with relatively simple research.”

Dr. Cherise Scott, Senior Technical Manager at Unitaid, said the easier it was for children to take their medicines regularly, the more likely they were to complete their treatment successfully.

“We will not allow children to be neglected in global health responses simply because their needs are more complex.”

A Promising Treatment for MDR TB

As multi-drug-resistant TB transmission increases among children and adolescents, the development of new treatments is imperative, Hoddinott explained.

Moxifloxacin may also be increasingly used in the future for the treatment of drug-susceptible TB, which affects an estimated 1.2 million children globally each year.

Drug-resistant TB, has previously been one of the most difficult diseases to manage because of limited child-friendly treatment options, but scientists have made strides in developing new treatments for children, explains Dr. Anthony Garcia-Prats, one of the study authors and an associate professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

“Now we are making sure that these medicines are appropriate for children, starting with an aspect that children and parents say is critical: taste,” Garcia-Prats said in a statement.

The new treatment is given when TB is either resistant to rifampicin, a critical first-line drug, or rifampicin and isoniazid, another first-line drug combination. These resistant strains are collectively referred to as RR/MDR-TB.

Annually there are an estimated 32,000 new cases of RR/MDR-TB among children 14 years and under—a population that is extremely sensitive to the taste of medicine, according to researchers.

This discovery could help improve adherence to TB medication and move a step closer towards the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 3 to end TB by 2030.

“It is not a silver bullet,” Hoddinott cautions. “It does not solve everything, as people affected by TB still face many other challenges, and even the preferred flavor blends still do not taste nice. But, as part of the overall fight against TB in children, it’s an important step.”

Kolweni welcomes the development of masked TB medication.

“My experience with TB medication was not nice, and for children it is worse, and I think flavored tablets would make it easy for children to take, like *Gummies*,” she said. “Every child loves flavors; even a suspension would be nice. My son would love it, and I will have no trouble getting him to take his medicine.”

『INPS Japan/ IPS UN Bureau Report』



Credit: UN photo

Regaining Progress on Birth Registration Is Critical to Child Protection

By Catherine Wilson

SYDNEY (IPS) – Registering the birth of a newborn, which is taken for granted in many countries, has profound lifelong repercussions for a child’s health, protection, and well-being. But after initially increasing this century, the global birth registration rate has declined in the past ten years, with some countries in the Pacific and Sub-Saharan Africa facing significant challenges. Embracing new registration technologies, increasing political will, and increasing parents’ understanding of its importance are paramount to reversing the trend.

Today about 75 percent of all children aged under 5 years are registered, up from 60 percent in 2000, reports the [United Nations Children’s Fund \(UNICEF\)](#).

But Bhaskar Mishra, Child Protection Specialist at UNICEF Headquarters in New York, told IPS that a recent slowdown is due to persistent challenges.



A mother receives a birth certificate for her youngest child in the village of Bindia, East Cameroon. Photo credit: UNICEF/Dejongh

“Rapid population growth, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, is outpacing registration systems. Weak infrastructure, limited funding, and low political prioritization have also contributed to the stagnation.

Additionally, families often face barriers such as high fees, complex procedures, and limited access,” he said.

Some of these hurdles exist in [East Africa](#), where the birth registration rate is 41 percent and the [Pacific Islands](#) where it is 26 percent. At the country level, it varies from 29 percent in Tanzania to 13 percent in [Papua New Guinea](#) and 3 percent in Somalia and [Ethiopia](#). Of an estimated [654 million children](#) aged under five years in the world, about [166 million](#) are unregistered and 237 do not have a birth certificate.

“Systemic and social obstacles, exacerbated by the lingering effects of COVID-19, which reversed gains achieved in previous years, mean that progress must accelerate fivefold to meet the Sustainable Development Goal target of universal birth registration by 2030,” Mishra emphasized.



In Papua New Guinea, the birth registration rate is being raised with the aid of mobile registration, an important means to reach rural and remote communities and help protect children living in vulnerable circumstances. Mangem IDP Camp, Madang Province, PNG. Credit: Catherine Wilson/IPS

women.

“Some don’t have access to health facilities as they are in very remote areas and it takes hours to get to a health facility, so all births are done in the village. But health facilities in some communities are rundown, there is no maintenance on the infrastructure and no health

One country that is striving to meet the challenge is Papua New Guinea (PNG). The most populous Pacific Island nation of about 11 million people comprises far-flung islands and an epic mountain range on the mainland where people’s daily hardships include extreme terrain, lack of roads, and unreliable transportation.

More than 80 percent of people live in rural areas and, in Madang Province, in the northeast of the country, the Country Women’s Association has worked to increase maternal and health awareness among pregnant

workers on the ground, so that is the most challenging,” Tabitha Waka at the association’s Madang Branch told IPS.

For a mother, recording the birth of her baby could entail long journeys in community buses along dirt tracks and unsealed roads to the registration office, along with the cost of the fares.

“Lack of information is another challenge. These rural mothers don’t have this kind of helpful information and they don’t know the importance of birth registration. And, in some communities, due to traditions and customs, they only allow mothers to give birth in the village,” Waka continued. Just over [half of all births](#) in PNG take place in a healthcare facility, according to the government.

But the country has made significant strides and, from 2023 to 2024, more than doubled the distribution of birth certificates from 26,000 to 78,000. Last July, 44 handheld [mobile registration](#) devices were supplied by UNICEF to the government and field officers have started a massive outreach mission to record births in local communities.

Then in December, the [PNG Parliament passed a new bill](#) to develop the national Civil and Identity Registry. “The Pangu-led government is a responsible government with policies based on inclusivity across the country... accurate and reliable identity information on our people is significantly vital for enabling effective service delivery and for their social well-being,” PNG’s Prime Minister, [James Marape, told media](#) in November.

There is already tangible progress, but the government’s goal to register up to half a million births every year “will require scaling up technology. The kits need to be deployed nationwide, especially in remote areas, and decentralizing certificate issuance,” Paula Vargas, UNICEF’s Chief of Child Protection in PNG told IPS. “There are bottlenecks in the process. For example, there is just one person in PNG authorized to manually sign birth certificates.”

On the other side of the world, [more than half of all unregistered children](#) live in Sub-Saharan Africa, and Ethiopia, among other countries in the region, is grappling with similar issues.

Located on the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia is more than twice the size of PNG and has a high birth rate of 32 births per 1,000 people, compared to the global average of 16. Here the majority of Ethiopia’s more than 119 million people also live in vast and remote regions.

But while birth registration is free and the government is training healthcare extension workers in the procedures, the urban-rural divide persists. The burden on rural parents of multiple visits, with long distances and costs, required to complete registration is impeding progress. The birth registration rate in the rural [Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People’s Region \(SNNP\)](#) is 3 percent, which is the national average, compared to 24 percent in the capital, Addis Ababa.

Dr. Tariku Nigatu, Assistant Professor of Public Health at Ethiopia’s University of Gondar, told IPS that improvements could be driven by “integrating the registration service with the health system, [increasing]

availability of resources to support interventions to boost birth registration and infrastructure for real-time or near real-time reporting of births.”

UNICEF has also assisted Ethiopia in deploying mobile registration kits to healthcare workers in remote communities, including those experiencing instability, “ensuring that children born during emergencies or while displaced are not excluded from legal identity and protection,” Mishra said. Currently a humanitarian crisis and insecurity are affecting people’s lives in the northern Tigray region following a civil war from 2020-2022.

Lack of understanding and misconceptions about birth registration also need to be addressed, Nigatu emphasized.

“There are myths in some communities that counting the newborn as ‘a person’ at an early age could bring bad luck to the newborn. They do not consider the child worthy of counting before people know it even survives the neonatal period,” he said. This is partly due to the country’s high neonatal mortality of 30 in every 1,000 live births, with around half occurring within 24 hours after birth, he explained.

Messaging also needs to reinforce how birth registration is of [lifelong importance](#) to a child. There are high risks and human disadvantages for the uncounted millions of children without an official existence. They will have a greater fight to rise out of poverty, to resist sexual exploitation, abuse, child labor, and human trafficking, and to access

legal protection, voting rights, even formal employment, and property ownership.

But birth registration is only the first step to their protection and well-being.

“It only works when backed by strong systems and services. This includes linking registration to services such as immunizations, hospital births, and school enrollment,” Mishra said.

In the wider context, having accurate birth and population data is essential for governments to plan public services and national development and equally critical to assessing progress on the Sustainable Development Goals.

『INPS Japan/ IPS UN Bureau Report』



SDGs No. 3

Collapse or Renewal? The lessons of Guinea-Bissau for West Africa

By Srushti Hode



<https://londonpost.news/the-fragile-heart-of-west-africa-why-guinea-bissau-matters/#:~:text=44-,Image%20Credit%3AGoogle,-By%20Srushti%20Hode>

How SDG 16 Could Be the Key to Peace, Justice, and Good Governance

London (London Post)— In a region where democratic progress is fragile and often reversed, Guinea-Bissau represents a complex paradox—rich in natural resources, yet chronically unstable. The West African nation has endured five coups over four decades, and each attempt at reform has been undermined by political infighting, institutional weakness, and a lack of public trust.

But there may be a way forward—and it begins with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16): Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions. For Guinea-Bissau, this is not just an aspirational goal—it is a survival strategy.

A Call for Political Renewal

The London Post spoke to Mr. João Bernardo Vieira, former Minister of Transport and Telecommunications of Guinea-Bissau and nephew of the nation's first democratically elected President, João Bernardo Vieira (known as "Nino"). The elder Vieira, a key figure in Guinea-Bissau's liberation struggle, proclaimed the country's independence from Portuguese colonial rule on September 24, 1973.

Mr. João Bernardo Vieira, a seasoned political leader with over two decades of experience in national governance and policy making, has emerged as a pivotal advocate for democratic reform and institutional resilience in



João Bernardo Vieira, former Minister of Transport and Telecommunications of Guinea-Bissau

Guinea-Bissau. He outlined urgent priorities to stabilize the West African nation, which continues to grapple with political turbulence and public distrust.

“The most critical task is restoring citizens’ faith in the state,” Vieira asserted. “This demands an independent judiciary, uncompromising anti-corruption measures, and security forces equipped to serve the people with professionalism and dignity.”

Rejecting external impositions of peace, Vieira stressed that lasting stability must be homegrown. “Peace hinges on internal consensus—open dialogue among political factions and unwavering respect for constitutional order,” he said. Highlighting the need for inclusive justice, he called for streamlined legal processes, decentralized public services, and free legal assistance for marginalized groups, particularly women, children, and rural populations. “Justice cannot remain an urban privilege,” he added.

A Nation at a Crossroads

As someone deeply involved in international electoral strategy, I see Guinea-Bissau as standing on a precipice. Poverty is widespread, with more than 68% of people living on less than \$1.95 per day—a stark increase from 56.6% in 2002. This is not just an economic crisis; it is a governance crisis. The justice system is underfunded, politically influenced, and often inaccessible. In rural areas, many people lack even a legal identity. Only one in four

children is officially registered at birth—effectively locking millions out of education, healthcare, and civil rights. Women and youth—the country’s majority—are sidelined from leadership and decision making. Gender-based violence is rampant, and very few perpetrators are held accountable. Corruption is endemic, weakening the very services that should protect the public. SDG 16, if implemented seriously, can reverse this tide. It offers a framework for real change:

- Strengthening the independence of the judiciary
- Fighting corruption with enforceable laws
- Protecting freedom of speech and civic engagement
- Building mechanisms for peaceful conflict resolution
- Ensuring equal access to justice and civil documentation

Strong institutions do more than protect rights—they unlock development. A transparent and fair government ensures that resources reach the people who need them most. Girls stay in school. Women live without fear. Young people find jobs and purpose. Investment, both local and foreign, begins to flow into a legally stable environment.

Why Stability in Guinea-Bissau Matters

Guinea-Bissau may be small, but its instability has regional

consequences. Often referred to as a “narco-state,” it has become a transit hub for international drug trafficking, which further corrupts institutions and undermines public order. If reforms are delayed any longer, the fallout could destabilize the broader West African region.

The upcoming presidential elections on November 30, 2025, present a unique opportunity—a chance to reset the nation’s trajectory. If these elections are free, fair, and peaceful, they can rekindle public trust, affirm Guinea-Bissau’s democratic potential, and give the international community confidence in its future. As Mr. Vieira aptly concluded: “Only when the State is trusted, fair, and protective can Guinea-Bissau hope to build a stable and prosperous future.”

SDG 16 in Action: Lessons from abroad

Rwanda and Ghana offer instructive examples. Post-genocide Rwanda prioritized judicial reforms and anti-corruption courts, climbing from 121st to 51st on Transparency International’s index since 2000. Ghana’s digitization of land registries and court processes reduced bureaucratic graft by 40%, per the World Justice Project.

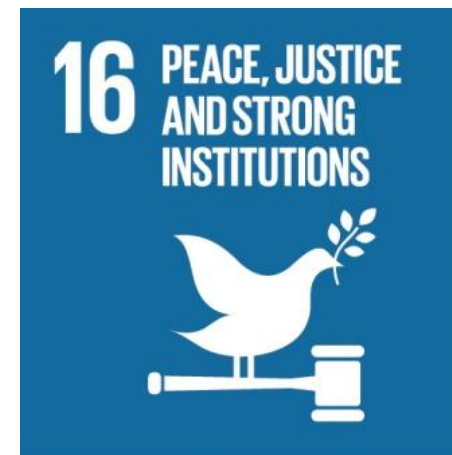
For Guinea-Bissau, such measures could unlock development. Transparent governance would channel cashew revenues into healthcare and schools, while legal identity programs could empower women and rural citizens. “Strong institutions don’t just protect

rights—they catalyze progress,” said UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed.

Final thoughts:

Guinea-Bissau is at a crossroads. The road ahead is difficult, but not impossible. With political courage, regional cooperation, and a committed implementation of SDG 16, this fragile state can be transformed into a resilient democracy. The blueprint is already written—what’s needed now is the collective will to bring it to life.

『INPS Japan/London Post』



SDGs No. 16

Younh Africans Prices Out of Cities as Urban Housing Crisis Deepens

By Promise Eze



High-rise buildings under construction in Lagos, Nigeria. Most accommodation is unaffordable for young Nigerians. Credit: Promise Eze/IPS

ABUJA (IPS) – After graduating in 2019, Jeremiah Achimugu left Sokoto State in northwestern Nigeria for Abuja, the nation's capital, in search of better opportunities. But life in the city brought unexpected challenges, especially the high cost of housing.

At first, Achimugu stayed with his uncle and worked as a marketer, earning 120,000 naira (USD 73) a month. However, his salary barely covered his basic needs.

“The cost of living in Nigeria’s rapidly developing capital soon ate deep into my salary,” he said. “By the end of the month, I was always broke. Transportation, food, and other expenses were just too much.”

When he began searching for a place of his own, he was shocked by the prices. Even a small one-room apartment in a remote area costs about 500,000 naira (USD 307) a year.

“There was no way I could afford that kind of rent even though the apartment was nothing to write home about,” he said.

Few months later, Achimugu resigned from his job and returned to Sokoto. His dream of building a life in the city was cut short by the soaring cost of living.

“The cost of living and rent in Nigerian cities is too high for young people,” he said. “But these are the places where the opportunities are. Some landlords are taking advantage of young people coming into the cities by raising the rent.”

A Continental Rental Crisis

Achimugu's experience reflects a [larger problem](#) faced by young people across Nigeria. About [63 percent](#) of the country's population is under the age of 24, and cities are growing rapidly. The United Nations has [warned](#) that Nigeria's urban population is increasing almost twice as fast as the national average. However, housing hasn't kept up with this growth. As a result, the few available homes are now [overpriced](#). The World Bank [estimates](#) the country has a housing shortage of over 17 million homes.

In major cities like Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt, rent prices can [range](#) from around 400,000 naira (USD 246) to as much as 25 million naira (USD 16,000) per annum, depending on the location and kind of apartment.

With a monthly minimum wage of 70,000 naira (USD 43), which is often unpaid or delayed, and [high unemployment](#), many young people cannot afford decent housing. This makes it harder for them to settle down, build strong social connections, or feel financially secure.

Nigeria is not alone. Across Africa, young people are being [priced out of the rental market](#). Rapid urbanization, population growth, and economic hardship have made affordable housing a growing concern. In interviews with young people in Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, and Nigeria, IPS confirmed that the same challenges exist across the continent.

Formal housing remains beyond the reach of most Africans, with [only the top 5 to 10 percent of the population](#) able to afford it. The majority are left to live in informal settlements, many of which lack essential services such as clean water, electricity, and proper sanitation. Experts have warned that without increased investment in affordable housing, a growing number of young people will struggle to find a place to live.

Kwantami Kwame in Kumasi, Ghana, blames capitalism and the [greed of real estate owners](#) for the high cost of rent. He told IPS that the rush for quick profits in the cities is affecting the welfare of young people, most of whom are low-income earners.

"A few weeks ago, I was looking for a one-bedroom apartment in Accra, the capital of Ghana, and I was asked to pay an upfront two-year rent fee of 38,275 Ghanaian Cedis (USD 2,500). The apartment wasn't even up to standard. The fee didn't cover water, electricity, or waste bills. It's really unfair," said Kwame, who noted that in a country where the [monthly minimum wage](#) is just 539.19 Ghanaian cedis (USD 45), there should be provisions for young people to access affordable housing in cities where opportunities exist.

Kwame believes governments should regulate rents and check the excesses of landlords. But Olaitan Olaoye, a Lagos-based real estate expert, sees it differently. He points to limited land availability as a major factor driving up rent and argues that price controls won't solve the problem.

“Governments in Africa shouldn’t be setting rent prices when they’re not doing enough to tackle inflation, which keeps pushing up the cost of building materials,” he said.

“For instance, in a country like Nigeria, the removal of the fuel subsidy caused prices to skyrocket. This had a ripple effect on everything else, including construction. It led to an increase in the cost of building materials. The government then has no moral right to instruct landlords to reduce their rent,” Olaoye argued.

While he does not excuse the greed of some landlords and estate developers, Olaoye worries that if young people already struggle to rent homes, the dream of owning one may become increasingly unrealistic.

“In the past, it was easier for people to build homes. Prices of building materials were affordable and life was more stable. Back then, when people finished school and got a job, they could start saving right away. They could afford to buy a car, build a house, and live comfortably. But things have changed,” he said.

Inadequate Social Housing Programs

Olaoye’s concerns are echoed by Phoebe Atieno Ochieng in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya. After securing a teaching job in the capital, she left her family home in the countryside of Busia. However, with a monthly salary of only 18,000 Kenya Shillings (USD 140), renting a place in the city was out of her reach.

“I had no choice but to live in a small space provided by the school management within the school premises,” she told IPS. “The houses here are [not affordable](#). A basic one-bedroom apartment costs 120,000 Kenyan shillings per month. I can’t balance my income because I still have to pay taxes, buy food, and take care of other daily needs. Unless I get a better-paying job, I can’t manage.”

Ochieng criticizes the Kenyan government for its failure to provide adequate social housing and ensure access to affordable mortgages.

While the Kenyan government has launched a social housing scheme like the [Affordable Housing Programme](#) to help low- and middle-income earners secure decent homes, the initiative has faced growing criticism. Many argue that the houses being built are still [unaffordable](#), and there are widespread concerns about the potential mismanagement of the scheme. Also, the introduction of a mandatory [housing tax has sparked outrage](#), with many questioning why they are being compelled to fund homes they may never qualify for or benefit from.

Similarly, the Nigerian government has [made several attempts](#) to address the housing crisis through various national housing programs designed to provide affordable homes in cities. However, these programs have often failed due to poor implementation, inadequate funding, and corruption. Many housing projects have been abandoned, leaving the promise of affordable housing unfulfilled for the majority of Nigerians.

[South Africa's housing crisis](#) is worsening due to rapid urbanization, economic challenges, and the [legacy of apartheid](#). Cities like Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban are seeing an increasing number of people move from rural areas in search of better job opportunities, putting pressure on housing infrastructure.

During apartheid, many Black South Africans were confined to overcrowded townships on the outskirts of cities, areas that still lack proper infrastructure and services. As young people flock to cities for better prospects, they face the challenge of unaffordable rent, which, according to Ntando Mji, a receptionist in Cape Town, is limiting their potential.

Although the government has attempted to provide subsidized housing for those with a limited income, the scale of the problem is [overwhelming](#), and millions are still waiting for homes. “In Cape Town, getting a house is so difficult. The agents require a three-month rent deposit, and they scrutinize your income, but even getting approved for a space is really hard,” Mji lamented.

“Because it is mainly commercial entities that build houses, they are so expensive. This is why the South African government should intervene by providing accommodation at lower prices and engaging the private sector in building lower-cost housing in safer areas,” said Bhufura Majola, who told IPS that he waited a year before he could even get a small apartment in a student area far from where he works.

He added, “The high cost of rental prices in South Africa is a big deterrent to young professionals in particular because it takes away their choices of where to stay, especially near places where employment is guaranteed. This has forced many to abandon their dreams.”

Peace Abiola, who lives in Ibadan, Southwest Nigeria, spent all her savings—600,000 naira (USD 369)—on an apartment last year. She works as a freelance content creator for brands, earning an irregular income. Now, with her rent due, she is considering returning to her village because she can no longer afford to keep up.

“I think one solution to this problem is the proper implementation of laws to control the irregular hike in rental prices,” she said, echoing the frustration of many Nigerians who have started [protesting](#) and calling on the government to act.

The Nigerian government has repeatedly [promised](#) to enforce policies that protect tenants, but none of those pledges have materialized. “Here, we are just focused on survival or how to pay the next rent or how to get the next meal. This is not how life should be,” Abiola said.

『INPS Japan/IPS UN Bureau Report』



Tanzania's Women Miners Digging for Equality in a Male-Dominated Industry

By Kizito Makoye

DAR ES SALAAM (IPS) – Under the scorching Tanzanian sun, Neema Mushi wipes sweat from her dust-covered face and swings her pickaxe into the earth. The impact sends dust swirling into the air, coating her tattered clothes. She barely notices. For the past eight years, this has been her life—digging, sifting, sieving, and hoping to strike gold in the male-dominated pits of Geita. It is a grueling task riddled with obstacles.

“I want to own a mining pit myself,” she says. “But in this industry, women are always ignored when it comes to land ownership issues.”

Despite years of hard work, women like Mushi remain on the wobbly edge of survival.



Female miners struggle for recognition, battling land ownership restrictions, lack of financing, and discrimination in a sector where men hold the power. Credit: Kizito Makoye/IPS

One evening, after hours of rock crushing, she spots a tiny twinkle of gold. Before she can pocket it, a male miner comes close to her.

“This is my spot,” he growls, snatching the gold from her hands. Mushi clenches her fists, knowing she can’t fight back—not in a system that was never built for her.

She once tried to register a mining plot in her name. At the local office, the clerk barely looked up.

“You need your husband’s permission,” he muttered, shuffling papers on his desk. Mushi hesitated—she had no husband, only three children to feed. The clerk shrugged. “Then find a male partner,” he said, waving her away.



A group of women miners formed *Umoja wa Wanawake Wachimbaji*, pooling resources and fighting for a mining license of their own. Credit: Kizito Makoye/IPS

Before joining *Umoja wa Wanawake Wachimbaji*, a cooperative for women miners, Mushi struggled to pay her children's school fees. Now, she watches them walk to school in clean uniforms, their laughter filling the air. She has struck more than gold—she has found hope.

A group of women miners formed *Umoja wa Wanawake Wachimbaji*, pooling resources and fighting for a mining license of their own. Credit: Kizito Makoye/IPS

Crushing Male Chauvinism

Tanzania is Africa's fourth-largest gold producer, with mining contributing nearly 10 percent of the country's GDP. An estimated one

to two million people work in artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM), and nearly a third of them are women. Yet, despite their numbers, female miners struggle for recognition, battling land ownership restrictions, lack of financing, and discrimination in a sector where men hold the power.

For years, Mushi worked informally at the edges of licensed mines, sifting through gold-bearing rocks discarded by male miners. Without a mining license or land of her own, she relied on middlemen who bought her finds at exploitative prices.

"If you don't have your own claim, you are at their mercy," she says. "They can chase you away at any time."

Tanzania's mining laws technically allow women to own licenses, but in practice, few manage to acquire them. The bureaucratic process is complex, and costs are prohibitive.

"Most mining land is allocated to men or big companies," says Alpha Ntayomba, a mining activist and Executive Director of the Population Development Initiative. "Women often end up working on borrowed land or as laborers on someone else's claim."

Beyond land rights, financial barriers loom large. Mining requires investment—equipment, processing facilities, and sometimes heavy machinery. But banks see women miners as too risky, denying them loans and locking them into a cycle of dangerous, low-paying work.

As a light rain drizzles, a dozen women trudge through dust-choked paths, carrying heavy sacks of ore on their heads. Many are single mothers, struggling to survive in an industry where they are often underpaid, exploited, and subjected to harassment.

“Women in artisanal mining are at the bottom of the chain,” says Ntayomba. “They do the hardest jobs—crushing rocks, washing ore in mercury-contaminated water—yet they earn the least and are most vulnerable to abuse.”

Sexual Exploitation and Harassment

For many female miners, exploitation is a daily reality. Reports of sexual harassment and coercion in exchange for job opportunities are widespread. Women working in gold-processing areas often depend on male pit owners or brokers to access ore, making them vulnerable to abuse.

“Some women are forced into exploitative relationships just to get access to the gold they help extract,” says Ntayomba. “Sexual favors become a hidden cost of doing business for many women in this sector.”

Many hesitate to report harassment for fear of retaliation or job loss. Others lack the legal knowledge or support networks needed to seek justice.

“I know women who were kicked out of their jobs after rejecting advances from male mine owners,” Ntayomba says. “The system is

rigged against them, and the lack of strong legal protections worsens it.”

Health Risks and Mercury Exposure

Beyond exploitation, women in artisanal mining also face severe health risks. Many spend hours washing gold with mercury—a toxic metal that can cause neurological damage and birth defects—without any protective equipment.

“Most women don’t know how dangerous mercury is,” says Ntayomba. “They mix it with their bare hands and inhale toxic fumes, exposing themselves and their children to long-term health problems.”

Activists like Ntayomba are pushing for change through advocacy and training programs. His organization has been lobbying for stricter regulations to protect women’s rights, provide safer mining practices, and ensure equal access to economic opportunities.

“We need the government to recognize women miners as key players in the sector,” he says. “That means formalizing their work, providing safety training, and ensuring they have legal rights to mining claims.”

But progress is slow.

“Women in artisanal mining deserve dignity, fair pay, and protection from exploitation,” Ntayomba emphasizes. “The industry cannot continue to thrive on their suffering.”

Breaking Rocks, Breaking Barriers

Determined to change their fortunes, Mushi and a group of women miners formed *Umoja wa Wanawake Wachimbaji*, pooling resources and fighting for a mining license of their own—in line with Sustainable Development Goal 8, which focuses on “Decent Work and Economic Growth, a crucial building block for achieving gender equity and women empowerment.

With support from the Tanzania Women Miners Association (TAWOMA) and government programs for female entrepreneurs, they secured a small mining plot and invested in better equipment.

“We had to prove that we belong here,” says Anna Mbwambo, a founding member of the cooperative. “For too long, women have been treated like helpers, not miners.”

For Mushi, the cooperative has changed everything. “Before, I could barely afford school fees for my children,” she says. “Now, I can save, and I dream of expanding.”

Despite persistent challenges, change is underway. Organizations like STAMICO, Tanzania’s State Mining Corporation, are training small-scale miners in safer, more efficient techniques. The government has also established gold-buying centers to ensure fairer prices, reducing women’s dependence on exploitative middlemen.

Internationally, calls for gender inclusivity in mining are growing. The World Bank has pushed for reforms to make the industry more

accessible to women, while the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) is advocating for policies that empower female miners.

TAWOMA, which has fought for women’s rights in mining since 1997, continues to push for a future where women are not just included but leading.

“We want to see women owning mines, running businesses, and making decisions,” says its chairwoman.

Carving a New Future

Standing at the edge of her mine, Mushi watches her fellow miners work the land they now own. It is a small plot, overshadowed by larger male-run operations, but to her, it represents something bigger—hope.

“I want my daughters to see that a woman can do anything,” she says. “She can work, she can own it, and she can succeed.”

She grips her pickaxe and swings again, sending another spray of dust into the air. Each strike brings her closer to a future where women miners are not just surviving but thriving.

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