

**Issue 1 – September 2021**

Bringing You Stories and Issues Relevant To Achieving The SDGs in The Post-COVID Era

**INDEX**

Editorial & Message of DG	3
UN Report considers next 18 months crucial for Global Goals	4
ADB warns COVID-19 threatens Asia’s progress towards global development goals	4
Affordable Clean Cooking Technology	5
‘Green Wall’ in Senegal aims to slow desertification	7
Filipino Medal Winners at Tokyo Olympics show sports could empower the ‘Economically Disabled’	8
Honduras granted \$20m OPEC loan to help improve climatic resilience of rural communities	9
New Accord to improve workers Health & Safety in Bangladesh Garment Factories	10
China counters Western ‘hypocrisy’ at UNHRC with Development Rights push	11
Fijianna Rugby triumph in Tokyo thrills home village	14
Former pastoral Nomads consider In-Place Farming	15
Snippets of SDG News from Non-IDN sources	17
Viewpoint: Dr P.I Gomes ‘Geo-political Challenges Multilateralism, Fobs Off the Global South countries with empty promises’	20
Recent Reports Relevant to SDGs from UN and regional Think Tanks	22
Policy Briefs on TRIPS COVID-19 Waiver from South Centre	23
9/11 Killed it, 20 years on Global Justice Movement is Poised to Reincarnate	24



Gold medalist Dinesh Priyantha Herath with Sri Lankan flag  
(Photo: Screenshot from Ada Derana, Sri Lanka)

**From War Hero to Sports Hero — Inspirational Story of Sri Lanka’s Paralympics Gold Medallist**

By Mohan Srilal

COLOMBO (IDN) — Sri Lanka’s latest sporting hero Dinesh Priyantha Herath is expected to touch down in Sri Lanka to a red-carpet airport welcome on Tuesday. The life story of the F46 Javelin Throw gold medalist at the Tokyo Paralympics is an inspirational one of how to overcome disabilities both economic and physical.

When Dinesh Priyantha using his abled right arm threw the javelin a distance of 67.79 meters creating a world record and winning Sri Lanka’s first ever gold medal at a Paralympics event, it enlivened a depressed nation trying to overcome the Covid-19 pandemic.

Immediately after winning gold under glare of international TV cameras, he grabbed a large Sri Lankan flag, laid it on the track, knelled down and kissed the flag. Perhaps an unprecedented act at an Olympics event, it raised the emotions of a nation to fever pitch. “I am very happy because my main dream came true. I have no words to describe (the feeling),” he had told the media after that.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, himself a military man, tweeted a congratulatory message immediately after his gold medal winning feat. “Your service in fighting for Sri Lanka as a soldier and putting us in the international sporting map is remarkable,” said the President.

In the week since Dinesh won gold on August 30, he has become a media pin-up boy both in the mainstream and social media, in par with Sri Lanka’s legendary cricketers of the past. In an editorial titled “A Man Worth His Weight in Gold,” the island newspaper said: “These troubled times

are devoid of anything positive, but some good news came yesterday, from Tokyo, enlivening the depressed Sri Lankans, who are fighting the pandemic and battling lockdown blues”. The editorial paid tribute to Dinesh’s ability “to fight really hard to turn his disability into

ability (his) rise in the world of sports has been truly impressive and inspiring”.

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*Continued on page 2 .....*

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Dinesh was born into a village farming family near the historic city of Anuradhapura and went to a village school—Kagama Dathusena Maha Vidyalaya. His father died when Dinesh was 12 years old, he had an elder sister and younger brother, but as the eldest son he had to help his mother in the farm and the responsibility of earning a living for his family fell on his shoulders. Thus, at the age of 18 he joined the army, to support his family.

At the time, the Sri Lankan army was fighting a vicious civil war with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) regarded as one of the most ruthless terrorists' armies in the world.

In December 2008, at the height of the civil war when Sri Lankan forces were pushing towards the LTTE stronghold, he was shot thrice on his left arm from bullets fired from a T-56 gun, and it almost killed him. The next four years of his youthful life was spent at the Ragama 'Ranaviru Sevana'—an army rehabilitation centre—getting treated and regaining confidence to start another new chapter in his life. At the age of 22 he took medical retirement from the army.

After his rehabilitation, senior members of his Gajaba Regiment encouraged Dinesh to take up sports to build self-confidence. He has told the media in various interviews that he never played sports at school, except softball cricket with friends on a patch of grass in the village.

Army sports officials introduced Dinesh to the javelin, because he could use only one arm for sporting activity and his tall physique suited the sport. In his first competitive throw at the Army Inter Regiment Para Games—he won a gold medal setting a national record and he has not looked back since then.

Having got used to heartbreaks and hardships from his young days, he was able to take sporting success and failures on its stride. He was disappointed at not being included in the world rankings to take part in the 2012 London Paralympics even after winning gold at an Asian meet in Malaysia. But he was able to work through Asian and international Para Games circuits to qualify for the Rio Paralympics where he won a bronze medal, Sri Lanka's first medal at a Paralympics.

Within three years Dinesh had won medals at three major Para championships: a medal at the Olympics, a medal at the World Para Athletics Championship and a Gold at the 2018 Asian Para Games. His determination saw him win his second World Para Athletics Championship medal, when he clinched a silver medal at the 2019 edition held in Dubai.

"Sports added so much value to my life. After being wounded it was sports that showed me a new dimension in life, and it paved the way for me to become a recognized medal-winning athlete" he had said after winning silver in the world championship. Thus, Dinesh was selected to lead the 9-member Sri Lankan team for the Tokyo Paralympics, where he carried the national flag to the stadium at the opening ceremony.

Just four months before he was shot, Dinesh married Ishanka Maduwanthi and they now have three children including a eight-month old boy. They had to survive on a meagre army pension, but his wife has supported him while he pursued a sporting path.

After receiving the gold medal in Tokyo an emotional Dinesh has dedicated it to his wife. "I have three children and my wife looks after them very well. She motivates me. Our youngest child is only eight months old. (My wife) has done everything. She has given me freedom to do sport. I thank my wife for this gold," Dinesh has said after the ceremony, where the Sri Lankan national anthem was played for the first time at an Olympics venue.

He and his wife need not worry anymore of surviving on his pension. The sports ministry has announced that Dinesh Priyantha will receive a cash reward of Rs 50 million (USD 250,000) which is huge in the Sri Lankan context. Sri Lankan Cricket – governing body of cricket in Sri Lanka—has also announced that they will be awarding him an undisclosed sum of money which is expected to go into millions of rupees. He may also get cash rewards from the corporate sector and other donors.

Dinesh is a wonderful story of guts, grit and determination, a story that highlights that what others may call disabilities should not be an excuse if you have the will power. All these qualities have paid off handsomely, and now Dinesh Priyantha Herath is part of Sri Lankan history, which should inspire more Sri Lankan Para-athletes in the future. [IDN-InDepthNews – 06 September 2021] (SDG category 10 – Reduced Inequalities)



Dinesh Priyantha with his mother (left), wife and 2 children upon returning from Rio Paralympics in 2016 with a bronze medal (Photo Credit: Ceylon Today)

Welcome to our first issue of 'Sustainable Development Observer' – an associated publication of IDN-InDepth News with a selection of articles from SDGsforAll.Net a joint media project supported by the Soka Gakkai International.

With the world slowly recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic – a 'once in a century' global health crisis – the realization of the SDGs by 2030 for much of the global population is currently in serious doubt. The achievements of the past decade, first with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and now the SDGs, is being reversed, in many parts of the global South and small island nations face the added burden of climatic change and rising sea levels.

In this publication – produced with a lot of passion and commitment with no funding - we aim to bring the diversity of issues associated with the SDGs into focus. This is designed mainly for young journalism and development communication practitioners and students to guide them to SDG issues that may not be covered by the mainstream corporate media, especially from the perspectives we offer in this publication.

In a message marking the UN Human Rights Day on 10 December 2020, UN Human Rights Commissioner Michelle Bachelet noted the pandemic has "left us exposed, vulnerable and weakened" and she warned that the medical vaccines "will not prevent or cure the socio-economic ravages that have resulted from the pandemic and aided its spread". In sharp contrast to the former Chilean President, the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in a Christmas message hailed the advent of the vaccinations and said, "once people are vaccinated we can get our normal lives back".

We cannot go back to these "normal lives", as these systems have been exposed for its injustices, and shortcomings. Vulnerabilities of migrant labour, casual worker systems across the world, the great social and economic disparities, lack of investments on healthcare, and many other social evils have been exposed in the "normal lives" that existed before.

While most of humanity suffered, the world's billionaires, big pharmaceutical companies and tech giants have prospered from the pandemic. To achieve the SDGs by 2030 these inequities have to be at the top of the global agenda. The final article in this issue '9/11 killed it, Global Justice Movements are poised to Reincarnate' draws attention to what is needed.

**Dr Kalinga Seneviratne – Editor**

We are grateful to our colleague, Dr Kalinga Seneviratne, for launching '*Sustainable Development Observer*' – a product of INPS Southeast Asia in association with IDN-InDepthNews, flagship agency of the Berlin-based Non-profit International Press Syndicate. In fact, Sustainable Development is an important focus of our independent journalism.

*Sustainable Development Observer* not only draws on IDN, but also on several other sources, among others, from the Pacific. This monthly publication is intended as a guide for young journalists, development communicators and students on sustainable development issues from the perspective of the 'global South', which hardly reflects itself in the mainstream corporate media. As the world begins to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, perspective of the global South is vital.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) build on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) agreed in 2000, seek to realize the human rights of all. They are integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental.

The five Ps, which constitute the focus of SDGs, are: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership. The Heads of State and Government meeting in New York in September 2015 as the Organization celebrated its seventieth anniversary, decided to embark on a collective journey to implement 17 SDGs and 169 targets until 2020, and pledged that no one would be left behind.

P1 (People) aims at ending poverty and hunger, in all their forms and dimensions.

P2 (Planet) seeks to protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change.

P3 (Prosperity) aims at ensuring that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives and that economic, social and technological progress occurs in harmony with nature.

P4 (Peace) expresses determination to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence.

P5 (Partnership) is inevitable to mobilize the means required to implement this 2030 Agenda through a revitalised Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, based on a spirit of strengthened global solidarity.

Enjoy reading the first issue of *Sustainable Development Observer*!

**Ramesh Jaura, Director General, IDN and INPS**

## UN Report Considers Next 18 Months Crucial for Achieving Global Goals

By Santa Banerjee

NEW YORK (IDN) — COVID-19 pandemic has pushed back into poverty an additional 119-124 million people, says a new United Nations report. An equivalent of 255 million full-time jobs was lost, and the number of people suffering from hunger, which was already climbing before the pandemic, may have increased by 83-132 million.

The report was recently launched virtually by UN Under-Secretary-General Mr. Liu Zhenmin. It is prepared by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD, a division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA in collaboration with more than 50 international and regional organizations.

The annual report reviews progress of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, using the latest available data and estimates to track the global progress of the 17 Goals.

The report points out that the decisions and actions taken during the next 18 months will determine whether pandemic recovery plans will put the world on a course to reach the globally agreed-upon goals.

The pandemic has exposed and intensified inequalities within and among countries. As of June 17, 2021, around 68 vaccines were administered for every 100 people in Europe and Northern America compared with fewer than 2 in sub-Saharan Africa.

The collapse of international tourism disproportionately affects Small Island Developing States. Global flows of foreign direct investment fell by 40% in 2020 compared to 2019. The pandemic has brought immense financial challenges, especially for developing countries—with a significant rise in debt distress.

“We are at a critical juncture in human history. The decisions and actions we take today will have momentous consequences for future generations,” said Zhenmin. “Lessons learned from the pandemic will help us rise to current and future challenges.”

The report provides some valuable additional key facts and figures: The global extreme poverty rate rose for the first time since 1998, from 8.4% in 2019 to 9.5% in 2020. Between February 1 and December 31, 2020, Governments around the world announced more than 1,600 social protection measures, mostly short-term, in response to the COVID-19 crisis.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on schooling is a ‘generational catastrophe’, wiping out the education gains achieved over the last two decades.

759 million people remained without electricity and one-third of the global population lacked clean cooking fuels and technologies in 2019. This could increase due to economic impact of Covid. [IDN-  
InDepthNews - 02 July 2021] (Report available from - <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2021/>)

## ADB Warns Covid-19 Threatens Asia’s Progress Towards Achieving Global Development Goals

By Kalinga Seneviratne

SYDNEY (IDN) — A new report released by the Manila-based Asian Development Bank says that an estimated 75 to 80 million people in the developing regions of Asia have been pushed back into poverty last year threatening to derail the region’s progress towards achieving the SDGs.

ADB argues that assuming the pandemic has increased inequality, the relative rise in extreme poverty—defined as living on less than \$1.90 a day—may be even greater. Progress has also stalled in areas such as hunger, health, and education, where earlier achievements across the region had been significant, albeit uneven.

When the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) concluded in 2015, Asia and the Pacific registered an impressive development scorecard. The region managed to cut the poverty rate by more than two-thirds, exceeding the initial MDG target of halving poverty between 1990 and 2015. From 1.5 billion Asians living on less than \$1.90 a day in 1990, this number dropped to 1.2 billion in 1999 and further down to 273 million when the MDGs concluded in 2015.

According to the ADB report, about 203 million people or 5.2% of developing Asia’s population lived in extreme poverty as of 2017. Without COVID-19, that number would have declined to an estimated 2.6% in 2020. “Asia and the Pacific has made impressive strides, but COVID-19 has revealed social and economic fault lines that may weaken the region’s sustainable and inclusive development,” says ADB’s Chief Economist Yasuyuki Sawada.

Only 1 in 4 countries in the Asia-Pacific region has recorded economic growth last year. Containment measures to curb the spread of COVID-19—such as lockdowns and restrictions in mobility and social interaction—have had adverse socioeconomic impacts on various segments of the population. To learn more about the impacts on households and individuals, the Tokyo-based Asian Development Bank Institute (ADBI) administered surveys on households from select developing Asian economies this year.

About 13% of households reported increased income flows, but nearly 75% of surveyed households reported a decline in household incomes. The results of the survey show that people across developing Asia relied on various coping strategies to manage financial difficulties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, but some of these strategies cause scarring effects in the long term and could be potentially costly. [IDN-  
InDepthNews - 01 September 2021] (Report available from - <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/720461/ki2021.pdf>)

## Affordable Clean Cooking Technology - Achieving Sustainable Energy Access

By Kalinga Seneviratne



Shefali Ghosh from Savar, near Dhaka, teaches her daughter in the kitchen. (Photo Credit: The World Bank)

SYDNEY (IDN) — In the Asia-Pacific region which is home to about 60 percent of the global population, some 1.6 billion people primarily rely on open fires or simple stoves fueled by kerosene, coal, or biomass such as wood, dung and agricultural residues for their daily cooking needs, that impacts on climatic change and health hazards.

"Burning biomass in these inefficient stoves contributes to atmospheric warming and forest depletion while inhaling the fine particulates emitted causes a range of serious health impacts," says Olivia Baldy, Energy Access Consultant, at the Bangkok-based UNESCAP (United Nations Economic and Social

Commission for Asia and the Pacific). "In 2016, poor indoor air quality contributed to an estimated 2.2 million premature deaths in Asia and the Pacific," she adds.

As the region recovers from the economic devastation of the Covid-19 pandemic, making clean cooking fuels affordable for low-income families will be a great challenge to providing energy access, which is crucial for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 7.

With rural populations and the urban poor increasingly getting access to the electricity grid, and solar power technology providing cooking fuel alternatives, the challenge is for the governments and the non-profit sector to make available the financing to assist the poor to cut both their cooking fuel costs and the carbon footprint.

While cleaner cooking solutions have the potential to generate a variety of social, economic, and environmental benefits, yet, the clean cooking sector remains hugely underfinanced.

An 'Energy Finance Landscape 2020' report By the Climate Policy Initiative (CPI), argues that the Covid-19 pandemic should be seen as a wake-up call to accelerate attempts to realized SDG 7 that calls for access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all by 2030.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the severe implications that a lack of reliable energy access can have on healthcare systems, water and sanitation services, clean cooking, and communication and IT services," the report notes, adding that, despite significant advances over the last decade, electricity and clean cooking access continue to elude more than 789 million across the region.

The CPI report points out that except for Bangladesh, investments in giving access to the poor for clean cooking technology are lacking in the region and they argue that "green recovery" is crucial to developing sustainable economic recovery models.

With the upcoming negotiations under the 'Paris Agreement' on national carbon markets, this could be a source of funding for providing clean cooking alternatives for the poor using solar power and "green" electricity. According to the CPI report, only \$ 21 million of investments under this facility is estimated to have taken place in 2018.

For rural households connected to mini-grid and solar home systems, the cost of cooking with electricity is now within the cost-competitiveness range of other cooking alternatives, according to a World Future Council and Hivos report in 2019. In addition to the decreasing cost of electric cooking devices, potential synergies between electrification and clean cooking are significant and yet not fully explored, it notes. But, adds that, for example, Nepal's Ministry of Energy, Water Resource and Irrigation has stated last year that the government plan to reach the goal of an "electric stove in every house" through strengthening the country's distribution networks, discussing the possible adjusting of electricity tariffs to favour electric cooking.

Bangladesh imports about 60 percent of its LPG needs and offers significant subsidies for LPG cylinders and fuel. CPI report points out that almost 74 percent of the rural population relies primarily on biomass fuels for cooking, which includes straw, husk, bran, jute stick, wood, and bamboo; while over 95 percent of the population and more than 80 percent of the rural populace in the country has electricity access which can be leveraged to establish a supply chain for efficient electricity-based cooking solutions in the most remote areas.

Between 2013-2017 through funding from a World Bank program, the Bangladesh government has helped poor households to install Improved Cookstoves (ICS) in 1 million households and it was expected to increase to 5

million by the end of 2021. CPI believes that there is a need to steadily redesign the existing policy and financing framework if Bangladesh is to achieve zero biomass use by 2030.

India's 'Surya Project' is aiming to steadily replace the highly polluting cookstoves used in India's rural households with clean energy stoves with funding sourced from carbon offsetting programs. In its first phase, Project Surya will target three rural areas in the Himalayas, Indo-Gangetic plains, Andhra region in South India to enable 5,000 households in each region to switch to cleaner-burning technologies such as solar cookers and other efficient stove technologies.

They are introducing parabolic solar dish cookers of about 1.4 m diameter popularly referred to as SK14 and cost about \$100. They are advertised as able to cook rice for a family of up to ten people in about 30 minutes. They are also using the mobile phone to measure climatic mitigation and health outcomes.

They are working with partners at the Center for Embedded Network Sensing at UCLA and Nexleaf Analysis in the U.S, to bringing together climate scientists, epidemiologists, computer scientists, energy technologists, economists, and rural economic development experts, to find solutions to three of the most pressing challenges facing Asia today - climate change, public health, and economic development.

### Promoting Electric Stove Cooking In Nepal

More than 60% of households in Nepal rely on fuel wood and traditional or chimney mud stoves to satisfy daily cooking needs. Emissions from these sources have led to high levels of indoor and outdoor air pollution, making household air pollution the third leading cause of early mortality,

To address this problem, the Government of Nepal has established a goal of achieving universal access to electricity and electricity-based cooking by 2030. Since Nepal has immense potential for hydroelectric generation, the Government of Nepal plans to lean heavily on electricity and electric cooking appliances to bridge this access gap.

Clean Cooking Alliance in a two-part series, explored the impacts of electric stove adoption on household energy use in two peri-urban municipalities in Nepal connected to the central grid. They found that families do indeed reduce their biomass and LPG use following the purchase of an electric cook stove, and in doing so, reduce their overall household energy costs.

They found that in the study group, 95% of households currently using liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) would save an average of 15% of their cooking energy expenditures by replacing their LPG systems with electric induction stoves. Those households that purchased induction stoves during this study reduced their minutes of traditional biomass stove use by 15-30% and LPG stove use by 15-20%. Reliable electricity services at low cost are important to encourage households to use cook stove regularly.



Nepali Woman using an electric cook stove at home (Photo Credit: peeda.net)

Link To Clean Cooking Alliance Report - <https://www.cleancookingalliance.org/binary-data/RESOURCE/file/000/000/628-1.pdf>

(SDG Categories 3 and 7 – Good Health and Well-being and Affordable and Clean Energy)

"While more efficient technologies greatly reduce the costs of cooking, in many cases, consumers cannot afford the upfront investment needed to switch to cleaner, but often more expensive, alternatives. Amid the crisis induced by the COVID-19 pandemic, affordability is increasingly challenging, with many households backsliding into poverty" warns Baldy in an article published by UNESCAP monthly Newsletter. "This means that, without financial support, more low-income households may not be able to pay for clean cooking solutions".

[IDN-InDepthNews — 07 August 2021]

### PROJECT SURYA: A WOMAN-CENTRIC APPROACH TO CLEAN AIR

Project Surya, along with Nexleaf Analytics has initiated and is implementing an innovative financing mechanism in India and Nigeria, which is now known as Sensor-Enabled Climate Financing that enables the very poor to switch to clean cooking through direct usage-based climate credits for black carbon and CO2 mitigation.

Using innovative sensor data that collects information on the usage of the clean cooking solutions and the emissions reductions, the data helps them track the progress of clean cooking solutions and helps to scale up the project by leveraging data on climate and health outcomes. Project Surya is now pushing for reliable solutions that women can use with a consistent supply chain.

In this video report, Tara Ramanathan, Director of Clean Energy, Nexleaf Analytics explores the intent of the project since its inception in 2009. Tara spent time with the Project Surya team visiting villages in rural India to see whether there was a reason behind the lack of popularity of clean cook stove solutions.

You Tube Report Link -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b8UjRgus2bU>



Screen shot from video

## 'Green Wall' in Senegal Aims to Slow Desertification and Feed People

By Lisa Vives



A farmer in Niger tends to his nursery. Researchers say such community-led efforts will be key to completing the Great Green Wall. (Photo Credit: David Rose/Panos Pictures)

NEW YORK (IDN) — Edible, circular gardens are part of a bigger project to bring a belt of green across the continent of Africa.

“Tolou Keur”—circular gardens resistant to drought—are part of Africa’s Great Green Wall project. The project calls for planting papaya and mango trees and a variety of plants across 5,000 miles, from Senegal to Djibouti.

It’s a new, more local approach than what was originally called the Green Wall initiative, launched in 2007 by the African Union and international partners that aimed to slow desertification across Africa’s Sahel region, the arid belt south of the Sahara Desert, by planting some several thousand trees.

But that initiative only managed to plant 4 percent of the pledged 247 million acres of trees, and completing it by 2030 as planned could cost up to \$43 billion, according to United Nations estimates.

The scheme was also criticized for its narrow focus on reforestation, neglecting other approaches that could better curb the economic impact desertification has had on local residents.

By contrast, the Tolou Keur gardens have flourished in the seven months since the project began and now number about two dozen, said Senegal’s reforestation agency. Circular beds allow roots to grow inwards, trapping liquids and bacteria and improving water retention and composting.

Not all the gardens have succeeded. In the remote village of Walalde, the desert has already begun to reclaim the land set aside and there have been problems with the solar-powered pump.

But in the eastern town of Kanel, the garden is said to be thriving. Its caretakers solved a water pump issue by digging traditional irrigation canals. A concrete wall and guard dogs help keep out rodents that would eat the lush mint and hibiscus plants inside.

“The day people realize the full potential of the Great Green Wall, they will stop these dangerous migrations where you can lose your life at sea”, said Moussa Kamara, a local baker.

“With what they could harvest here, they will never want to leave because they will have their fathers, their mothers, their wives and their children with them. It’s better to stay, work the soil, cultivate and see what you can earn.

\* The writer is from the Global Information Network.

[IDN-InDepthNews — 02 August 2021] (SDG Category 2 and 13 – Zero Hunger and Climatic Action)

## Filipino Medal Winners at Tokyo Olympics Show Sports Could Empower The “Economically Disabled”

By Kalinga Seneviratne



Hidilyn Diaz with her gold medal in Tokyo Olympics 2020.  
(Photo Credit: Wikimedia) COMMONS.

SYDNEY (IDN) — As the Paralympics begin in Tokyo - a celebration of the athletics prowess of the “differently-abled” - it will be appropriate to look at how the Tokyo Olympic Games that concluded on August 8 empowered the “economically disabled” athletes from the Philippines—a Southeast Asian country not well-known for its sporting prowess except for the legendary boxer Manny Pacquiao, whose own story is a great rag to riches one.

When the diminutive Filipino weightlifter (1.58 meter tall and 58 kg weight) Hidilyn Diaz lifted 125 kg setting a new Olympic record to win gold in the 55kg category in women’s weightlifting in Tokyo, she became Philippines’ first-ever gold medallist and almost overnight she became

a multimillionaire with cash and property been presented to her by the government and corporate sector.

“She literally and figuratively lifted the Philippines tonight” Development Communication Professor, Shiella Balbutin from Xavier University-Ateneo de Cagayan in Mindanao posted in her Facebook page. Since her golden lift, she has transformed from a “national security risk” to a “national hero”. Diaz was named in a controversial “matrix” of people plotting to overthrow President Rodrigo Duterte in 2019, and she moved to Malaysia with her Chinese coach in 2020 to train for the Olympics supposedly in fear for her life. She trained for more than a year in a makeshift gym at the backyard of a house rented from a Muslim family.

But, after her Olympic victory, Diaz who is employed by the Philippines Airforce was promoted from sergeant to staff sergeant, and President Duterte in a one-to-one virtual meeting awarded her a house and lot in her hometown Zamboanga and 3 million Pesos (USD 60,000) cash from the President’s own funds. “Let bygones be bygones,” the president was reported to have told Diaz. A day earlier, Philippines national congress had voted to create a Congress Medal of Excellence with its first recipient being Diaz.

With over 50 million Pesos (USD 1 million) in cash and grants of land and condominiums, Diaz’s family has become recipients of an economic windfall they never imagined. The 30-year-old Diaz is the fifth of six children to a father who was tricycle driver before becoming a farmer and a fisherman, and a mother who did casual labouring to feed the family. After her gold medal lift, a property developer affiliated with real estate tycoon Andrew Tan, offered Diaz a condominium, valued at 14 million pesos, in Metropolitan Manila and Chinese automaker Beiqi Foton Motor said it will provide her with a 13-seat van for family trips. Diaz’s head coach Gao Kaiwen is a Chinese national.

A week after Diaz’s win, Philippines won two silver and one bronze medal in Boxing making this the biggest medal haul for the Philippines in 97 years of participation in the Olympics. All three of them came from the island of Mindanao as well, for long the most neglected part of the Philippines, before Davao city mayor Duterte won the presidency in 2016 and brought national attention to Mindanao by giving his press conferences in Davao and not in Manila.

Diaz’s win has also turned national attention on Zamboanga city, Diaz’s hometown, which had a reputation of being a troublesome part of the Philippines, because it only gets into national news when there are attacks by Abu Sayyaf, the local affiliate of the Islamic State terror group. Lot of this terror has been attributed to economic deprivations in the region. Two of the medal-winning boxers were also from Zamboanga city, the women’s featherweight silver medallist Nesthy Petecio and men’s middleweight bronze medallist Eumir Marcial. Carlo Paalam, who won the men’s flyweight silver medal also came from Mindanao Island.

“For the four Mindanao Olympic medallists, there was clearly no lack of motivation. They all wanted to make the country and their families proud, so a victory always hits home. And of course, there’s that long time hope that sports could be their ticket out of poverty,” noted Jasmine Payo, sports editor of popular online news portal Rappler.

The government is mandated to give 10 million Pesos (USD 200,000) to an Olympic gold medallist, 5 million Pesos to an Olympic silver medallist, and 2 million Pesos to an Olympic bronze medallist under the National Athletes and Coaches Benefits and Incentives Act. For winning the Olympic silver medal, President Duterte gave an additional 2 million Pesos cash reward to Petecio and Paalam.

In addition, Philippine Olympic Committee President Bambol Tolentino announced in a news conference on August 8 those additional monetary incentives will be given to the four Filipino Olympic medallists, sourced



from the savings of the organization. Tolentino also pledged his personal rewards of a house and lot each in Tagaytay (scenic area south of Manila) to Paalam, Petecio, and Marcial. He earlier made the same pledge to Diaz. "This is for them to share with their families," said Tolentino.

All the medallists came from humble backgrounds from the impoverished island of Mindanao. Marcial as a reservist member of the Philippines Air Force reportedly receives a small monthly stipend of 30,000 pesos (USD 600) a month as a reservist. Which he sends to his family to raise 5 children. His mother has used the money also to set up a small store called "Emir Store" in a popular street corner to help the family.

The Tokyo Olympics silver medals have been made with recycled electronic devices, thus an emotional Palaam, holding his medal has told the Philippines media after returning home: "This medal symbolizes my life. I was a scavenger before and this medal was made from broken gadgets"

Petecio who grew up in Davao also comes from a poor family—her father was a farmer while her mother is a housewife. At a young age, she and her siblings picked up chicken drops to sell as manure just to earn money to feed themselves. In an interview with the Go Hard Girls podcast, Petecio talked about the difficulties of growing up in an underprivileged environment.

"During that time, we really had nothing, and we would just borrow money to be able to buy our food," she said in her native tongue. "So, what we would do was join inter-barangay (community) competitions and we would join because we knew, win, or lose, we would get meals". It was boxing that paved way for her to be able to attend Rizal Technological University. A lesbian, she has dedicated her medal to the LGBT community.

Diaz told Rappler that the success of the Filipino athletes is due to grassroots sports development programs that are funded and promoted by Local Government Units (LGU). She is critical of the government in Manila and has said that she found it very difficult to get funds to set up her team to prepare for her medal bid in Tokyo. "Filipino athletes (need funds) not just when they're competing, but also when they're preparing" says Diaz. "The program of an LGU matters to the athletes. I know Zamboanga City has a good LGU project because they've now produced three Olympic medallists".

Marcial also got discovered by slugging it out in local bouts as a young boy, and as a pre-teen Paalam similarly joined weekly matches in his local community in Cagayan de Oro fighting at the local "Boxing at the Park." "We are encouraged by this. We will produce more Carlo Paalams," says Cagayan de Oro Mayor Oscar Moreno, whose local boxing program turned into a launching pad for several boxers from the province.

"As the much-deserved cash incentives and rewards continue to pour in for the four Filipino sport heroes, their shiny Olympic medals have truly been symbolic of how they've turned their lives around from their humble beginnings in Mindanao," notes Payo.

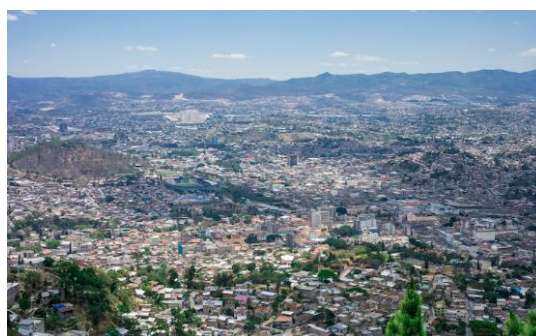
[IDN-InDepthNews – 22 August 2021] (SDG Category 10 – Reduced Inequalities)

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### **Honduras Granted USD20 Million OPEC Fund Loan to Help Improve Climate Resilience of Rural Communities**

By Reinhard Jacobsen

VIENNA (IDN) — The OPEC Fund for International Development has signed a US\$20 million loan agreement with Honduras to co-finance the 'Northeastern Small Producers' Economic and Social Inclusion Project—PROINORTE'. The importance of the project lies in the fact that the Central American nation's economy is primarily agricultural, making it especially vulnerable to natural disasters such as Hurricane Mitch in 1998.



Aerial shot of Honduras capital Tegucigalpa  
(Photo Credit: Tegucigalpa CC BY 2.0)

Honduras is bordered to the west by Guatemala, to the southwest by El Salvador, to the southeast by Nicaragua, to the south by the Pacific Ocean at the Gulf of Fonseca, and to the north by the Gulf of Honduras, a large inlet of the Caribbean Sea. Its capital and largest city is Tegucigalpa.

North-eastern region of Honduras, the focus of the project, is characterized by high poverty levels and food insecurity. It is also highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, which threatens the livelihoods of small subsistence farmers that comprise the majority of the population.

Honduras has a Human Development Index of 0.625, classifying it as a nation with medium development. When adjusted for income inequality, its Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index is 0.443.

The project is co-financed with the Rome-based International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the government of Honduras. It aims to enhance incomes and living conditions for some 70,000 people in rural communities, with a strong emphasis on boosting livelihoods for women and youth, reducing urban migration and strengthening the country's resilience to climate change.

PROINORTE project will work with up to 90 producer organizations and support them to enhance their organizational and business capacities increasing access to market value chains and optimizing primary production, transformation and commercialization models, according to an official OPEC Fund press release issued on July 22.

The OPEC Fund's contribution will exclusively finance rural production infrastructure, water management and climate change mitigation activities, including the construction and upgrading of 220 km of roads, water storage and sanitation facilities, irrigation and food crops storage and processing facilities, the press release stressed.

OPEC Fund Director-General Dr. Albdulhamid Alkalifa said: "We are pleased to support Honduran rural communities that are affected by the impact of climate change, food insecurity and urban migration. By providing communities with the necessary infrastructure and technical assistance, the project will promote self-sufficiency and sustainability."

OPEC Fund is the only globally mandated development institution that provides financing from member countries exclusively to non-member countries. The organization works in cooperation with developing country partners and the international development community to stimulate economic growth and social progress in low- and middle-income countries around the world.

The OPEC Fund was established by the member countries of OPEC in 1976 with a distinct purpose: to drive development, strengthen communities and empower people. To date, the OPEC Fund has committed more than US\$22 billion to development projects in over 125 countries with an estimated total project cost of US\$187 billion.

[IDN-InDepthNews – 23 July 2021] (SDG Category 17 – Partnerships for the Goals)

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## **New Accord Set To Improve Workers' Health and Safety In Bangladesh Garment Factories**

By Kim Lui



Bangladesh Accord's success could benefit these workers  
(Photo Credit: UNI Global Union)

SINGAPORE (IDN) — Representatives from international textile retailers have reached a new, 26-month agreement with UNI Global Union and IndustriALL that builds on the progress made by the ground-breaking Bangladesh Accord while promising to expand the scope of the Accord's legally binding commitments.

The last Bangladesh Accord was adopted in May 2018 and it is an independent, legally binding agreement between brands and trade unions to work towards a safe and healthy garment and

textile industry in Bangladesh. The Accord covers factories producing Ready-Made Garments (RMG) and at the option of signatory companies, those producing home textiles and fabric and knit accessories.

The infamous Rana Plaza factory building fire and collapse on April 24, 2013, killed 1,133 people and critically injured thousands more. In the years prior to the Rana Plaza building collapse, numerous fatal factory fires occurred in Bangladesh. The Accord was created to enable a working environment in which no worker needs to fear fires, building collapses, or other accidents that could be prevented with reasonable health and safety measures.

The International Accord for Health and Safety in the Textile and Garment Industry, which takes effect on 1 September 2021, advances the fundamental elements that made the first Accord successful—including legally binding commitments, respect for freedom of association, and independent administration and monitoring.

Key features of the International Accord include a commitment to continue the health and safety program in Bangladesh through the independent RMG Sustainability Council (RSC) and an agreement to expand the

Accord into new countries. There is also an option to grow the Accord's scope to address human rights due diligence, and an optional streamlined arbitration process to enforce the Accord's terms.

"This new agreement is further proof that the Accord model works," said Christy Hoffman, General Secretary of UNI Global Union. "With its accountability, transparency, and legally binding commitments, the International Accord is an example of what modern due diligence should look like in Bangladesh and beyond. It also recognizes that the work in Bangladesh's garment industry is not done, and this agreement helps strengthen the RSC and deepen brands' commitments to the people who manufacture their products."

Like its predecessor agreement, this is a legally binding agreement between companies and trade unions to make Ready-Made Garment (RMG) and textile factories safe. In Bangladesh, the agreement is implemented by the independent national tri-partite RMG Sustainability Council consisting of brands, unions and industry.

The agreement comes after months of intense negotiations, including a three-month extension in May. The original Bangladesh Accord was signed by apparel brands and global union federations three weeks after the Rana Plaza disaster in 2013.

It established an on-the-ground organization that conducted independent safety inspections, transparent remediation protocols, as well a worker complaint mechanism and training. Roughly 200 global brands signed it, and the 2018 agreement covers more than 1,600 factories and two million workers

It is following significant pressure from worker unions and campaigners, that the new strengthened agreement has been negotiated and will now come into effect on September 1.

According to Vague magazine H&M and Zara are among the major high street players who are committing to protect garment workers in Bangladesh as part of the new legally-binding agreement.

The workers' rights campaigners have welcomed the new Accord. "This is a binding contract between brands and unions that can be upheld in the court of law in case brands do not meet their obligations," Christie Miedema, campaign and outreach coordinator at the Clean Clothes Campaign told Vogue. "[That] makes all the difference."

The UNI Global, and IndustriALL in a statement said that they encourage all garment and textile companies to sign this agreement and join their collective goal of safe and sustainable RMG and related industries.

The first wave of signatories to the International Accord will be announced 1 September.

*\* This article is transmitted under a new partnership between IDN-InDepthNews and Uni Apro, a Regional Organisation of Services workers in Asia Pacific, part of UNI@uniglobalunion.*

[IDN-InDepthNews – 30 August 2021] (SDG Category 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth)

### **Update: Over 90 brands commit to garment worker safety with International Accord**

More than 90 global brands and retailers have so far signed the International Accord for Health and Safety in the Garment and Textile Industry, since it began this week on 1 September. More brands are expected to sign on to the 26-month legally-binding agreement, which comes into effect as the Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety expires.

The new signatories include the world's biggest fashion retailers H&M, Inditex (Zara) and Uniqlo, as well as Next, C&A, Marks & Spencer and U.S. brands Calvin Klein, Tommy Hilfiger and American Eagle.

By signing the International Accord with UNI Global Union and IndustriALL Global Union, garment brands commit to the health and safety work already undertaken in Bangladesh and to the expansion of country-specific health and safety programmes based on the principles of the 2013 and 2018 Accord agreements. The new agreement will be implemented through the International Accord Foundation in the Netherlands.

(Source: UNI Global Union)

### **While Accord Protects Garment Factory Workers, What About Other Factories?**

As the international accord to protect garment factory workers came into force, Bangladesh factory owners scant regard for the safety of its workers came into focus in another area. On July 8 this year 54 factory workers were killed at a Hashem Foods Ltd factory in Dhaka. The factory produces a variety of food and beverages from hot chocolate power, spice powders, yogurts to cakes. On 7 September 2021, Daily Star in Bangladesh reported that the company has paid a meager 200,000 Taka (USD 2,350) to each family of those killed by the factory fire, and got them to give an undertaking that absolves the factory owners from any more monetary liability for the deaths.

A writ petition is pending in the High Courts filed by 4 organisations to claim compensation far in excess of what has been given. "The fire was not an accident but a case of pure and simple murder, and the factory owners cannot be allowed to get away so cheaply," said the Daily Star in an editorial. "Not only is the money offered a pittance, the manner in which the acquiescence of the victims' families has been obtained smacks of deceit".

Source: Daily Star (Bangladesh)

## China Counters Western 'Hypocrisy' At UNHRC With Development Rights Push

By Kalinga Seneviratne

SYDNEY | GENEVA (IDN) — China came out with its guns blazing at the recently concluded 47th sessions of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) pointing out western hypocrisy on human rights, by particularly targeting Canada and Australia. China was supported on this counterattack by over 60 developing country members of the UN body.

This reflected that the international community is fed up with the West's weaponizing of human rights at a time of a deep global economic and development crisis due to the Covid-19 pandemic. These countries want development rights given emphasis over individual rights.

UNHRC head Michelle Bachelet began her opening statement to the 47th sessions by pointing out that "extreme poverty, inequalities and injustice are rising (and) democratic and civic space is being eroded" due to the Covid-19 crisis, and that economic and social rights, and the right to development, are universal rights. "They are not ordinary services with a market-set price-tag, but essential factors in building more peaceful and equal societies," she noted.

Yet, a block of 44 countries that included mainly European Union (EU) members plus Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan, would have none of it. They preferred to focus on specific countries targeting individual human rights. Whereas China, supported by 65 developing countries that included Belarus, Cuba, Venezuela, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Thailand, and Russia focused on redefining human rights with an emphasis on development rights especially in the post-Covid recovery era.

In the absence of the US as a full member, the battle between the western block and China began when Leslie Norton, Canada's permanent representative to the UN, presented a statement signed by 44 countries to the 47th sessions of UNHRC held from June 21 to July 14 in Geneva, urging transparency and access to China's northwest, where it was claimed that rights groups and extensive media investigations have alleged widespread discriminatory policies targeting Uyghur Muslims living in the region. Norton told the UNHRC that Canada and others were "gravely concerned about the human rights situation in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region".

Interestingly, none of the Muslim countries—except for Bosnia and Herzegovina which has applied for accession to the EU membership —have signed the statement presented by Canada.

The Canadian statement was challenged by Belarus that made a statement on behalf of 65 member states in opposing "politically motivated and groundless accusations against China based on disinformation". This statement was supported by 6 Gulf states and Pakistan.

"We are gravely concerned that some countries fabricate and spread disinformation out of political purposes, and smear others under the pretext of human rights, in an attempt to make excuses for interfering in other countries' internal affairs, imposing unilateral coercive measures and setting up country-specific mechanisms at the Human Rights Council," said Minister Jiang Duan of the Chinese mission to the UN in Geneva.

He added that China is "gravely concerned" that a few special procedure mandate holders indiscriminately take "unauthenticated information" from western media and political groups to make groundless accusations against sovereign States. "We urge countries concerned to immediately stop fabricating and spreading disinformation and refrain from using human rights as a political tool", said Duan.

In responding to accusations of the violation of human rights in Xinjiang where about 45 percent of the population are Muslim, Gulinaer Wufuli, Vice-Chairperson of the Science and Technology Association of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region in a statement to the UNHRC sessions said that the situation in Xinjiang is stable, and not a single violent and terrorist attack occurred in the past four consecutive years.

He attributed this to the achievement of "high-quality economic development" and the success of poverty alleviation programs in the region". (By 2020) a total of 3.06 million people below the current poverty line were lifted out of poverty. All the 3,666 poverty-stricken villages and 35 impoverished counties shook off poverty. Peoples' livelihood has been improved notably," noted Wufuli.

China told the sessions that there are ongoing negotiations between the office of the human rights commissioner Bachelet and the Chinese government for her to visit to Xinjiang. But China has reiterated that the conditions for such a visit will be on the basis of a friendly visit and not a so-called "investigation" under the presumption of guilt.

Liu Yuyin, a spokesperson for the Chinese Mission to the United Nations Office at Geneva, has told China's Xinhua news agency that more than 200 million visits are made by tourists to Xinjiang every year, and those

Western countries all have embassies in China, "How come that their ambassadors and diplomats have no idea of the truth in Xinjiang?" Liu questioned.

China has extended invitations on several occasions to these ambassadors of Western countries to visit Xinjiang, but on each occasion, they declined with one excuse after another, and failed to make the trip to this date, he said. "People just wonder, why are they so scared to go? Obviously, what they really care is not facts and truth, but how to slander and frame China," he added.

In statements to the recently concluded UNHRC sessions, China has blasted Canada and Australia on their human rights record. They expressed "deep concerns" about the historic treatment of indigenous people in Canada and called for a credible investigation on the recent discovery of 200 bodies of indigenous children at a Canadian boarding school. China also raised "deep concerns on the illegal killing of civilians by Canadian overseas military servicemen".

Duan also took aim at alleged war crimes committed by Australian troops in Afghanistan, which are being probed by a special investigator in Australia. "Australian troops indiscriminately killed civilians in overseas operations, committed war crimes, yet they are still at large today," Jiang said. He also pointed out Australia's system of offshore detention, saying asylum seekers were "forcibly detained for long times, even indefinitely, with their basic human rights violated."

It is interesting to note the voting pattern of UNHRC members when resolutions were adopted at the 47th sessions. Some 16 resolutions were either country specific or on gender issues, the 44-member western-led grouping supported that. These include country specific resolutions on Xinjiang, Tibet and Hong Kong, on Belarus, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Iraq and Ethiopia, and issues such as on disinformation and freedom of expression; violence against transgender women; female genital mutilation; sexual and reproductive health and rights; and the economic rights of women.

The western bloc voted against the resolution on development rights such as the resolution on 'contribution of development to the enjoyment of all human rights'. This resolution said among others that the aim of development is to constantly improve the well-being of the entire population and of all individuals ... and the important role of inclusive and sustainable development in promoting and protecting human rights and stressing the importance of development cooperation. It emphasized people-centric development policies to ride over the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The resolution has asked the UN Human Rights Commissioner's office to organize a series of seminars in the next couple of years to address the issue of development rights.

The above resolution was carried by 31 votes to 14 against, and voting against were Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Poland, Republic of Korea, Ukraine, and United Kingdom. A resolution calling for international cooperation to contain, mitigate and defeat Covid-19 and to lift unjustified obstacles for the export of Covid-19 vaccines; and another resolution calling for international solidarity to realize the Sustainable Development Goals were carried by the same vote margin with same countries voting against.

The Swiss Broadcasting Corporation's international news site "swissinfo" noted that China is now on a mission to redefine human rights on a global level. Quoting Kazushige Kobayashi, a researcher at the Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding of the Graduate Institute Geneva, it points out that China's influence among developing countries has continued to grow over the past few years.

Kobayashi confirms that China has taken in recent years a more active approach towards human rights in its foreign policy, departing from a previous position that considered the issue as an internal matter. "In this process, China tries to influence the narrative of human rights, as others do," he argues.

Swissinfo also points out that China has a different notion of Human Rights than the West and that the concept has to be understood under the dimension of sovereignty.

Meanwhile, New York-based Human Rights Watch, claims China seeks to "reposition international human rights law as a matter of state-to-state relations, ignores the responsibility of states to protect the rights of the individual ... and foresees no meaningful role for civil society".

But 'swissinfo' observes that in the language of the Chinese delegation, what Beijing wants is to "enhance cooperation, rather than create division".

[IDN-InDepthNews — 22 July 2021] (SDG categories – Almost All)

## For Sesenieli Donu, Fijiana Sevens Rugby Triumph in Tokyo Thrills Home Village

By Josefa Babitu

SUVA, Fiji (IDN/APR) — It might have been just a bronze medal to some people but for the Fijiana team—especially Sesenieli Donu—it was the fruit of sacrifice and a token of appreciation for her village of Vatukarasa in Nadroga.

After an intense competition for the bronze medal with Great Britain at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics in Japan, the country's women sevens rugby team bagged their first ever after defeating their former coloniser on July 31.

The excitement spread like wildfire in Vatukarasa as one of their very own has her name down in the history book especially at a hard-hit time when Fiji is battling the deadly delta variant of covid-19.

"This is gold to us to see that one of our own women got to the top and played against teams from bigger countries," Donu's uncle Jone Domonakibau said. "After losing both her parents at a very young age, Sesenieli became determined to be one of the best players in rugby and she has proved herself. She would lose herself to training and even if it meant for her to be surrounded by men as this was a male-dominated sport. She never gave up."

Donu was picked for the sevens squad after she proved herself worthy to be with the team at the 2020 Women's Skipper Cup games in Lautoka. The 25-year-old's Olympic journey out of Fiji is her first time in a foreign land and Domonakibau said it was a deserving trip after what she had been through.

"We are so blessed to have witnessed her rugby life at the Olympics and we look forward to more magical works of God in her life as we know she is a capable child," said Domonakibau.

He knew that Donu would do wonders when they would see her returning from her training at the beach near their village early in the morning. "She would wake up around 4 to 5am in the morning when the village is silent and run to the beach and train. It was not a surprise to many of us waking up to her return after an intense exercise." He added that the village was organising a celebration for the 25-year-old when she returns. "We are aware of the restrictions in place and so we would do something really small yet meaningful to show how proud we are of her".

Like Donu, the rest of the history-making team could not contain their happiness as a video by the Fiji Rugby Union featuring the Fijian captain Rusila Nagasau saying "thank you" to people in the country. "I want to thank the girls for standing up and winning the bronze today," she said. "To our family and friends back at home, I would like to say a big *vinaka vakalevu* (thank you)... thank you very much for your prayers and support. To the government, thank you so much for helping us throughout the five months of quarantine back in Fiji."

In his official Facebook page, the Prime Minister Voreqe Bainimarama congratulated the team of women for the legacy created in Tokyo. "Ahead of the Rio Olympics, there were 200 registered women rugby players in Fiji. Now, there are more than 1000. With the eyes of the young women of Fiji upon these heroes—no doubt we'll soon see many thousands more," the prime minister said, adding that the best was yet to come from the team.

[IDN-InDepthNews/ Asia Pacific Report – 6 August 2021] (SDG Category 3 and 5 – Good Health and Wellbeing and Gender Equality)

**Note:** Fiji's men's team won the Rugby Seven gold medal in Tokyo.

*\* Josefa Babitu is a final-year student journalist at the University of the South Pacific (USP) in Fiji. He is also the current student editor for Wansolwara, USP Journalism's student training newspaper and online publication. He is a contributor to Asia Pacific Report.*



Fiji's Fijiana women's sevens rugby team that bagged bronze medal after beating Great Britain in Tokyo (Photo Credit: 24 News)

## Former Pastoral Nomads Considering In-Place Farming

By Jacqueline Skalski-Fouts



Young fruit trees growing in the Atlas Mountains are monitored by HAF (Photo Credit: HAF)

VIRGINIA, USA (IDN) — North African pastoralism, an agricultural method used for centuries by nomadic people in the steppe highlands, is on the decline. Facing limited grazing land due to overuse and drought, pastoral nomads are favouring more sedentary farming methods like growing fruit or nut trees and crops.

Developmental non-profits in the area have begun working with communities facing scarce economic prospects in the face of “extreme” climate events like drought, which occur in Morocco every two years. The High Atlas Foundation (HAF), working in part with Farmer-to-Farmer, a USAID program, creates tree nurseries in areas of the lower mountain regions. Some communities from the higher

pasturelands have voiced their interest in these projects. This follows a trend within the past two decades of nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralists seeking out additional or alternative forms of agriculture.

Since 2004, the number of nomads in the Maghreb region has declined by more than 60 percent. As of 2014, only 25,300 remain.

Morocco is home to one of the largest regions of pastoral rangelands in the Maghreb. These rangelands make up about 40 per cent of land territory, or 20 million hectares, in Morocco and Algeria. In Morocco, most of the nomadic pastoralists range in the western coastal plains. Their pasturelands include the Rif and Tell mountains, where altitudes for some summer pastures reach 3000 meters above sea level. There, the air is dry and the pressure is lower, limiting the kind of agriculture the area can sustain. Along these routes, pastoralists herd camels, sheep, and goats, producing mutton and valuable products like wool (to be used for local handicraft) and manure, an alternative for chemical-based fertilizer.

Pastoralism is a process engrained in Moroccan history and heritage. Up until the last century, semi-nomadic pastoralists occupied the Middle Atlas regions, travelling with herds during the grazing season and growing crops like cereal for domestic consumption. Herders still use indigenous breeds and veterinary medicine developed over centuries.

Yet some pastoralist communities are beginning to favour more sedentary farming methods. Part of the reason is the rising cost and devaluing of mutton as a main source of meat, now associated with being unhealthy due to its high cholesterol content. However, the Moroccan Ministry of agriculture suggests the reason is that pastoralists are suffering from degradation of rangelands, which makes it difficult to maintain livelihood.

### Overuse, not overgrazing, degrades pasturelands

Moroccan pastoralism is changing for a wide range of reasons. Viable grazing lands are affected by the amount of rain per season, availability of shrubs for grazing, and regional politics or poverty—all of which are subject to change. The main factors that make pastoralism difficult for many and may be a reason for some to switch to sedentary farming, include shifting social values, environmental change, and rising population in both urban and rural areas. But the most pressing issue for pastoralists is land degradation.

Many typically point to overgrazing as a reason for the degradation of pastoral rangelands. This is often blamed on pastoralists themselves, whose herds graze away the vegetation. Yet varying rainfall, especially in arid climates, leads to periods of drought, and the shrubs that typically cover the steppe lands are not as plentiful.

Rangelands in the Maghreb region lose 1557 hectares a year to drought and degradation, and in nearly three decades, more than 8.3 million hectares of land have been “severely degraded.” This is one of the reasons there has been a recent movement of pastoral nomads travelling northward, particularly towards the Souss region.

But this kind of movement leads to regional conflicts like land disputes and tension, especially in the Souss region which is home to a large population of Amazigh people, who must now compete with newcomers for land and natural resources.

Overuse, rather than overgrazing, more accurately explains the desiccation of pastoral land. Overuse, or human-induced degradation, comes from improper agricultural practices like ploughing with heavy machines and over-irrigation, soil erosion by deforestation, and to some extent, overgrazing.

Agricultural researchers have suggested that overuse, coupled with growing rural population and a difficult climate, wears away the land, so pastoralists must either move to more viable pasturelands or build themselves an economic cushion by engaging in irrigation farming and growing crops, fruit or nut trees.

### **Facing limited prospects, pastoralists move towards stationary farming**

Land formerly used for pastoral purposes is being converted to sedentary farming areas. Fruit and nut trees provide diverse incomes as grass for herding becomes harder to find. Land used for forestry and herding has declined by 21 percent since the early 1980s, while agricultural land used for non-forestry and non-pastoral purposes has increased by 7.7 per cent.

At the same time, as more people move to cities, rural areas face low population densities. Modernization policies have tended to favour farming expansions and development in areas with higher populations, leaving pastoralist societies, far from city centres, to be politically marginalized. This has reduced their access to certain services, such as privatized veterinary services which makes it difficult for herders to afford veterinary care.

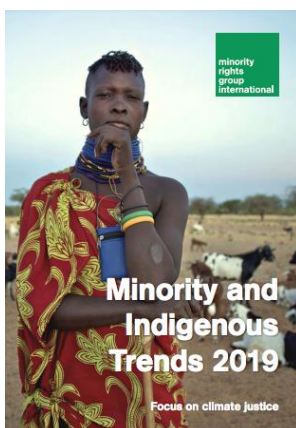
### **A semi-nomadic majority**

Many pastoralists in the region, in part a result of changing social norms and development in the region, are only semi-nomadic and will likely stay so. This means that they may have both farmlands and herds, which they send off with a herder for the grazing season. As advancements in education expand access to rural areas, pastoral families value sending their children to schools for a more formal education, which requires them to stay in one place. Yet despite shifting trends and smaller numbers, pastoral systems will remain important as the population grows and demand for meat rises.

As rural life changes, development must also change, so it is important to work with rather than against existing shifts. The High Atlas Foundation works with communities to address these agricultural changes by taking a participatory approach to development. HAF takes note of communities who are looking to grow fruit, nut, or medicinal plants, thereby determining trends and producing a plan for the community to approve for implementation.

This process has taken root as HAF's *House of Life* program, through which 12 nurseries have been built around the Kingdom. Trees are planted every January where they grow for two years, contributing around 30,000 trees annually to be donated to local farmers and schools as a way to reduce environmental damage and improve local livelihoods. As communities continue to mark their interest in sedentary farming, projects like this face new levels of expansion. [IDN-InDepthNews – 10 September 2021]

\* The writer is an undergraduate student at the University of Virginia.



*For many climate change is a terrifying prospect in the near future, a threat that could soon bring incalculable catastrophe to our lives. For others, however, this disaster has already begun. From melting ice in the Arctic to rising sea levels in the Pacific, from droughts in the Sahel to shrinking coral reefs in Australia, minorities and indigenous peoples are on the front line of environmental collapse. The cost to humanity could prove immense: the devastation of entire communities and their way of life. This new report by Minority Rights Group International is a timely reminder of how much we all stand to lose if we choose not to act - Joshua Castellino, Executive Director of Minority Rights Group International*

**This report which is almost 200 pages in length has 3 thematic chapters and 21 other chapters covering Africa, Asia, Middle East, Europe, Americas and Oceania-South Pacific.**

The report could be downloaded from - [https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2019\\_MR\\_Report\\_170x240\\_V7\\_WEB.pdf](https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2019_MR_Report_170x240_V7_WEB.pdf)



## Running Dry – Water Scarcity in Middle East and North Africa

AMMAN, 22 August 2021- Nearly nine out of 10 children in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) live in areas of high or extremely high-water stress with serious consequences on their health, nutrition, cognitive development and future livelihoods. The MENA region is reported to be the most water scarce region in the world. Out of the 17 most water-stressed countries in the world, 11 are in the MENA region. Nearly 66 million people in the region lack basic sanitation and very low proportions of wastewater are adequately treated according to a new UNICEF report titled ‘ *Running Dry: the impact of water scarcity on children in the Middle East and North Africa* ’



Water scarcity in the Middle East  
(Photo Credit: UNICEF)

The report, released on World Water Week, highlights key drivers behind water scarcity in MENA, including rising agricultural demand and the expansion of irrigated land using aquifers. According to Bertrand Bainvel, UNICEF Deputy Regional Director for the Middle East

and North Africa, “water scarcity is having a profound impact on children and families, starting with their health and nutrition. Water scarcity is also increasingly becoming a driver for conflicts and displacement.”

Source: UNICEF - <https://www.unicef.org/mena/press-releases/running-dry-unprecedented-scale-and-impact-water-scarcity-middle-east-and-north>

## Residents of Gujarat village protest against windmills being set up on forest land

Ahmedabad, 7 Aug 2021: In a small village of Sangnara in Kutch in Gujarat, villagers have been trying to save their forests and grazing land from a “clean energy” winmill company that will deprive the people of their greenery and natural resources.

Kutch has been designated as an important wind energy exploitation zone, and in the past few years thousands of windmills have been put up by wind energy companies, leading to conflicts with locals because these huge turbine structures are eating up common forests and grazing lands critical for villagers livelihoods.

Source: The Hindu - <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/residents-of-gujarat-village-protest-against-windmills-being-set-up-on-forestland/article35781540.ece>

## Ancient Buddhist City Under Threat In Afghanistan

Mes Aynak, 1 Sept 2021: Mes With the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, experts are worried about the fate of Mes Aynak, an ancient Buddhist city around 40km southeast of Kabul. Once a major stop on the Silk Road, the site encompasses around 400 statues and wall paintings across a citadel, numerous monasteries, stupas and small forts.



Mes Aynak ancient Buddhist city in Afghanistan (Photo Credit: Jerome Starkey)

It is sitting on an estimated \$50 billion copper deposit for which a state-owned Chinese company has signed a \$3.5 billion contract in 2008 to mine over 30 years. Nothing has happened since then and cultural heritage workers say they have about 5 years to secure the heritage site’s contents before it is destroyed to extract the ore.

Source: The Art Newspaper - <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/fate-of-mes-aynak>

## Children in Bhutan at 'risk' of climate impacts, says UNICEF



School children in Thimpu  
(Photo Credit: Kalinga Seneviratne)

Thimpu, 21 Aug 2021: Young people living in Bhutan are among those at risk of the impacts of climate change, threatening their health, education, and protection, according to a UNICEF report launched yesterday.

'The Climate Crisis Is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children's Climate Risk Index' is the first comprehensive analysis of climate risk from a child's perspective. It ranks countries based on children's exposure to climate and environmental shocks, such as cyclones and heatwaves, as well as their vulnerability to those shocks, based on their access to essential services.

Bhutan is carbon negative and while children in Bhutan are at a relatively lower risk to climate change in comparison to its neighbours, Bhutan's dependence on climate sensitive sectors such as hydropower and agriculture makes it vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

Source: Kuensel - <https://kuenselonline.com/children-in-bhutan-at-risk-of-climate-impacts-says-unicef/>

## China pushes new global biodiversity fund to help secure nature accord

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 27 (Thomson Reuters Foundation) - China and African nations are pushing for the establishment of a multi-billiondollar "global biodiversity fund" to help developing countries meet goals agreed in a new pact being negotiated to protect nature, U.N. officials and observers said.

About 195 countries are expected to finalise a new accord to safeguard the planet's plants, animals and ecosystems at a two-part U.N. summit due to culminate in May next year in the southern Chinese city of Kunming.

Georgina Chandler, senior international policy officer at the UK-based Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), said summit host China was exploring the idea of a new fund.

Source: Thomson Reuters Foundation - <https://news.trust.org/item/20210827120007-52x3d/>

## An Ecological Disaster Is Waiting To Happen In Odisha

The world famous Bhitarkanika mangrove forests of Odisha state in India are now under severe threat due to planned diversion of fresh water from the Brahmani river basin. Though a notified Ramsar Convention wetland, the state government has ignored the need to conserve it for posterity. Without fresh water, no mangrove ecosystem can survive in the world.



The world famous Bhitarkanika mangrove forests of Odisha  
(Photo Credit: Swarajyamag)

Fresh water mixes with seawater near the lower end of the Brahmani and Kharasrota rivers to produce brackish water - ideal for mangroves. Brackish water is also high in nutrients for a variety of life forms like crustacean, fish, aquatic flora and water birds. But, mangroves, which grow in brackish water, are very sensitive to changes in salinity. Coal mines, steel and power plants are drawing enormous quantities of fresh water from the Brahmani river and threatening the mangrove forests.

Source: Swarajyamag - <https://swarajyamag.com/economy/an-ecological-disaster-is-waiting-to-happen-in-odisha-heres-why>

## Improving air quality 'key' to confronting global environmental crises: UN report

United Nations, 3 Sept 2021: With environmental events becoming increasingly interconnected, a new global report on air pollution published by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) has underscored that

improved air quality is “key to tackling the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution and waste”.

“Yet, air quality continues to deteriorate despite the increase in laws and regulations seeking to address air pollution”, UNEP chief Inger Andersen said in the foreword to the Global Assessment of Air Pollution Legislation (GAAPL).

Findings on air quality legislation in 194 countries and the European Union (EU), reveal that despite the international movement of pollutants which impact air quality, only one third of the countries studied, have legal mechanisms for managing or addressing transboundary air pollution.

“The air we breathe is a fundamental public good, and Governments must do more to ensure it is clean and safe”, Ms. Andersen said. “UNEP is committed to expanding its assistance to countries in addressing the pollution crisis, thereby protecting the health and well-being of all.”

Source: Associated Press of Pakistan - <https://www.app.com.pk/global/improving-air-quality-key-to-confronting-global-environmental-crises-un-report/>



Pre-Covid days Hanoi Vietnam  
(Photo Credit: Kalinga Seneviratne)

## Reaching SDGs will require a collective commitment from African Universities

Africa, 29 July 2021: For universities to play their part in achieving Africa’s sustainable development goals (SDGs), a collective commitment will be required. Higher-education stakeholders highlighted some of the challenges facing African universities in contributing towards achieving SDGs at the 15th General Conference of the Association of African Universities (AAU) held in July.

“African universities’ contribution towards SDGs depends on the way they implement curricula. More comprehensive research studies can continue to be done on this aspect to check what is really happening on the ground,” Makuku said. Dr Violet Makuku, a quality-assurance specialist and the project officer for the Harmonisation of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation Initiative at AAU. “Those who could contribute more are institutions with degree programmes like agriculture extension, because, whether they like it or not, they have to work with communities to address the SDG [aimed at zero-hunger],” Makuku added.

Source: University World News – for full story  
<https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20210725224123298>

## Covid outbreak stymies Thailand’s SDG prospects

Bangkok, 9 Sept 2021: The ongoing spread of Covid-19 has become a major challenge for Thailand in trying to achieve the sustainable development goals (SDGs) by 2030, warns the government’s planning unit.

Danucha Pichayanan, secretary-general of the National Economic and Social Development Council (NESDC), said the Covid-19 outbreaks since early 2020 pose more risks for Thailand to reach the SDGs by 2030. The NESDC reported that development of SDGs between 2016-2020, Thailand achieved between 74% and 100% of the goals on zero poverty, quality education, gender equality, affordable and clean energy, decent work and economic growth, due to the accelerated development of infrastructure, higher investment on research and development and attempts to reduce inequality. The NESDC proposed the public and private sectors as well as civic organisations work together to speed up the development, focusing on each small category such as poverty eradication.

Source: Bangkok Post - <https://www.bangkokpost.com/business/2178691/covid-outbreak-stymies-thailands-sdg-prospects>



Thriving trade on Thai-Cambodia border  
pre-Covid (Photo Credit: Kalinga Seneviratne)

## Geo-political Regionalism Challenges Multilateralism, Fobs Off the Global South with Empty Promises

Viewpoint by P.I. Gomes

Dr P.I. Gomes is former Secretary-General of the Organisation of African, the Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS), previously the ACP Group of States.



Dr P.I. Gomes former secretary-general of OACPS

PORT OF SPAIN, Trinidad and Tobago (IDN) — The commemoration of the 75th Anniversary of the United Nations in January 2020 was acknowledged world-wide and accompanied by the Declaration, Our Common Agenda, containing Twelve UN 75 Commitments.

These Commitments are: Leave No One behind; Protect Our Planet; Promote Peace and Prevent Conflicts; Abide by International Law & Ensure Justice; Place Women & Girls at The Centre; Build Trust; Improve Digital Cooperation; Upgrade the United Nations; Ensure Sustainable Financing; Boost Partnerships; Listen To & Work with Youth; Be Prepared.

While the Anniversary is conceived as a *Moment for Reinvigorating Multilateralism* and not displacing the UN Agenda 2030 and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), one reasonably expected that the

“Twelve UN 75 Commitments” would have served, in early 2020, as a clarion call for action on critical global concerns.

For the poor countries of the global South, those formidable Commitments could have been paths to transform the everyday lives of the great majority of our world. This view received reassurance in the 75th Anniversary deliberations that recognised “2021 must be the year we change gear” and underlined the need for “a multilateral system that is inclusive, networked and effective”.

But today, a year later and as we approach the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA 76) from September 14, 2021, questions can rightly be asked on what has been “inclusive” or “effective” in regard to the stated Commitment “*Leave No One Behind*”?

The COVID-19 pandemic is a case in point to legitimately question, such a “commitment” in the face of millions of persons in low and middle-income countries who are “left behind”; expected to trust promises of vaccines from the rich countries meant to prevent hospitalisation or death of the poor. Continuing unfolding of devastating effects of the pandemic appears to be but another example of high-sounding proclamations in a long history of UN conferences, summits and gatherings that promise so much and deliver so little.

### Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

The initial Declaration of UN 75th Anniversary’s Twelve Commitments preceded the official announcement on January 30, 2020, by the World Health Organisation (WHO) that SARS-CoV-2 was an outbreak constituting a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. Then followed WHO’s declaration of a pandemic on March 11, 2020. In regard to this global issue of the pandemic, multilateralism in practice is best summed up by operations of the COVAX facility.

Under co-leadership of the WHO and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), the COVAX facility, with assistance of GAVI, a global alliance on vaccine deliveries and UNICEF, the UN agency for children’s well-being, is intended to accelerate development, manufacture and delivery of COVID-19 vaccines and guarantee fair and equitable access worldwide.

Overall, recent data, as of August 28, 2021, indicate that more than 5.29 billion doses have been administered globally. Of this amount, 39.4% of the world population having received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. But the lopsided and unequal situation is such that “only 1.7% of people in low-income countries have received at least one dose.” (<https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus>). It is not surprising that African Union’s Special Envoy for procurement of COVID 19 vaccines, Mr. Strive Masiyiwa, was harsh in his criticism of COVAX for failing to inform that “key donors” had not met funding pledges.

In view of this, understandably, open criticism greeted the pledge by the Group of 7, the world’s highest per capita income countries (Canada, France Germany, Italy, Japan, United Kingdom and USA), at their meeting of June 11-13, 2021, in London, of one billion doses (sic) in a year’s time. It was meant to be their commitment for the global South: “leaving no one behind”!

The UK's offer was for 100million doses and US President Biden said the US would donate 500 million vaccines; and Canada expected to commit a sharing of up to 100million doses.

As *Reuters* reported, former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown saw the G7 pledges more akin to “passing round the begging bowl” than a real solution. According to Oxfam's health policy manager, “If the best G7 leaders can manage is to donate 1 billion vaccine doses then this summit will have been a failure.”

Oxfam also called on G7 leaders to support a waiver on the intellectual property rights (IPR) behind the vaccines. This was opposed by the multinational pharmaceuticals whose control of intellectual property and profits take precedence over pledges for “poor and middle-come countries”. So too did the US and UK oppose a waiver of IPR.

The production, access, distribution and administration of vaccines, the single most significant scientific instrument to fight the pandemic and save humankind, according to the WHO, of necessity requires 11 billion doses of vaccines for at least 70% of the world's population. Facing this reality, it was no surprise that in response to the G7 promise of one billion doses, UN Secretary-General António Guterres said more was needed.

He was quoted saying: “We need a global vaccination plan. We need to act with a logic, with a sense of urgency, and with the priorities of a war economy, and we are still far from getting that.” (*Reuters*, June 12, 2021).

Lacking both a sense of urgency and committed action by wealthy countries, an opportunity for genuine multilateral action through COVAX was lost. The crude self-interest by the wealthy of the world is visible in the disparity of rates of persons vaccinated across the globe.

Evidence is undeniable that “poor and middle-income countries” are being left behind. For instance, according to the percentage of persons vaccinated with, *at least one dose, it is* in the UK 64%; in the EU 57.6% and among the G7 some 55%. The glaring contrast is that in Mozambique only 2.2%; Kenya 1.8% and Zambia 1.5% have been so vaccinated. (COVID-19 vaccine tracker FT ig.ft.com).

### Geo-political interests smack multilateralism

Despite the glorious UN's 75th Anniversary Commitments of Member States—*Leaving No One Behind*—the power and influence of the wealthy G7 primarily serve national interest at the expense of the poor majority of countries. But this is so irrational and short-sighted. It jeopardises their own safety from the SARS-CoV 2 virus and its variants that respect neither geography, wealth nor pious pledges.

These and related circumstances emphasise the need for the global South to rethink its multilateral role and be a counterfoil to how power and self-interest intersect and undermine the scope and relevance of multilateral diplomacy. Billionaires of the South, joining forces with public authorities, might well be mobilised in trans-regional partnerships to serve the needs of the poor across the globe. This could be a meaningful contribution to “eradicate poverty in all its forms everywhere” (SDG #1). [IDN-InDepthNews – 03 September 2021]



## Challenges Of Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) In The Post-COVID Era Recent Reports From The United Nations and Regional Think Tanks



### Policy Brief: Covid-19 and Transforming Tourism

Tourism, one of the most dynamic and most job intensive sectors of our times, has been one of the hardest hit by the current crisis. Millions of livelihoods are at stake and need to be supported.

As countries gradually lift travel restrictions and tourism slowly restarts in many parts of the world, health must continue to be a priority and coordinated health protocols that protect workers, communities and travelers while supporting companies and workers must be firmly in place. International cooperation needs to be stepped up, especially around travel restrictions and border management, to ensure support to livelihoods and economies with responsibility and sense of solidarity.

Rebuilding tourism is also an opportunity for transformation with a focus on leveraging its impact on destinations visited and building more resilient communities and businesses through innovation, digitalization, sustainability, and partnerships. This report published in August 2020 by the United Nations explores international collaboration in the recovery of tourism sectors worldwide.

Link to download Report - <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/policy-brief-covid-19-and-transforming-tourism>

### SDG Implementation Progress: What does the Asian Experience reveal?

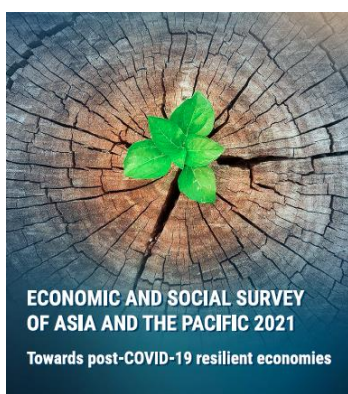
Southern Voice's flagship initiative on the State of the Sustainable Development Goals (SVSS) has generated country-level, evidence-based analysis to enrich the global dialogue on the 2030 Agenda. SVSS is neither a typical data-driven analysis of progress nor a traditional monitoring exercise of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Instead, through this research initiative, Southern Voice seeks to identify the 'second-generation' challenges of the global agenda along with the policy responses to address them.

The cross-country and regional analyses show that, on the one hand, national governments have made discernible progress in designing policy frameworks aligned with the Agenda. The governments have recognised the importance of not leaving the most vulnerable behind. On the other hand, weak coordination among relevant stakeholders and lack of horizontal coherence remain as challenges in achieving the Goals. Silo approaches continue to undermine national governments' ability to address systemic problems and create the necessary conditions to end poverty for all. The paucity of financial resources, along with no changes in the allocative priorities, are symptomatic of most of the developing countries' drive towards SDGs. With these challenges in mind, the SVSS report identifies three layers of critical action and analysis.

Occasional Paper Series No. 67 published by Southern Voice



Download report from - <http://southernvoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/SDG-Implementation-Progress-Asia-Rhman->



### ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SURVEY OF ASIA AND THE PACIFIC 2021: Towards post-COVID-19 resilient economies

In the Forward to the Report - Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCAP says: "One of the key lessons emerging from the crisis is that protecting development from shocks and building resilience should be a pressing priority for the region's policymakers. Slow progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals had already exposed existing vulnerabilities to crises. The need to rebuild better towards a more resilient, inclusive and sustainable future was highlighted by leading policymakers and eminent persons during the 2020 ESCAP Regional Conversation Series.

The 2021 *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific* provides our member States with timely analytical and policy perspectives on building resilient post-COVID-19 economies. The *Survey* maps out a "riskscape" of economic and non-economic shocks - financial crises, terms of trade shocks, natural disasters and epidemics - and finds that these leave behind long-lasting scars that reverse hard-won gains across all three dimensions of sustainable development. Highlighting the fact that policy choices matter, the *Survey* recommends that countries respond aggressively in order to minimize the reversal of hard-won gains rather than end up with "too little, too late".

Published the UNESCAP from Bangkok - March 2021

Download from <https://www.unescap.org/kp/2021/economic-and-social-survey-asia-and-pacific-2021-towards-post-covid-19-resilient-economies#>

## South Centre Mission Statement

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly poverty eradication, requires national policies and an international regime that supports and does not undermine development efforts. The South Centre is an intergovernmental policy research think-tank composed of and accountable to developing country Member States. It conducts policy-oriented research on key policy development issues, and supports developing countries to effectively participate in international negotiating processes that are relevant to the achievement of SDGs.



POLICY BRIEF  
No. 99 ■ August 2021

### The TRIPS COVID-19 Waiver, Challenges for Africa and Decolonizing Intellectual Property

**About the Author:** Yousuf Vawda is a Senior Research Associate, School of Law, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

Report could be downloaded from - <https://www.southcentre.int/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/PB-99.pdf>

**Abstract:** The intellectual property (IP) regimes of African countries are a function of their colonial past, which imposed strong protections, and which have been entrenched through the Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS Agreement). This has had a devastating effect on their ability to access necessary health products both before and during the current COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to reflect on the challenges that African countries face, before considering the implications of the WTO TRIPS waiver on COVID-19. In assessing the challenges faced by these countries, as well as the possibilities of improving access, this paper argues that while the waiver offers the best available solution to overcome the current supply shortages of a range of COVID-19 health products, in the longer term a break from this past - the decolonization of IP regimes - is necessary.



POLICY BRIEF  
No. 97 ■ July 2021

### The WTO TRIPS Waiver Should Help Build Vaccine Manufacturing Capacity in Africa

**About the Author:** Faizel Ismail is currently Professor and Director of the Nelson Mandela School of Public Governance and the University of Cape Town, South Africa.

Report could be downloaded from - <https://www.southcentre.int/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/PB-97.pdf>

**Abstract:** The current global health crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic has refocused our attention on the inadequacy of the TRIPS agreement and the patent system to address global public health crises. This time, developing countries must ensure that the TRIPS waiver succeeds in creating the impetus for the building of manufacturing capacity in the poorest countries, especially in Africa, for vaccines, pharmaceuticals and other health technologies. This is the only effective way in which African countries can reduce their dependence on imports of essential medicines and build their health security, contributing to the achievement of the sustainable development goals, for the poorest countries.



POLICY BRIEF  
No. 92 ■ April 2021

### Expanding the Production of COVID-19 Vaccines to reach developing countries - Lift the Barriers to Fight the Pandemic in the Global South

**About the Author:** Carlos M. Correa is the Executive Director of the South Centre

Report could be downloaded from - <https://www.southcentre.int/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/PB-92.pdf>

**Abstract:** The unfolding of COVID-19 has shown that the international system has been unable to ensure equal access to the vaccines and other products necessary to fight the pandemic. While the need for a strong response remains obvious, proposals for scaling up the production of COVID-19 vaccines across the globe are still blocked in the World Trade Organization.

## 9/11 Killed It, But Twenty Years on Global Justice Movement Is Poised to Reincarnate

Analysis by Kalinga Seneviratne

SYDNEY (IDN) — Since the attacks on the United States by 15 Saudi Arabian Islamic fanatics on September 11, 2001 (now known as 9/11) the world has been divided by a 'war on terror' with any protest group defined as "terrorists". New anti-terror laws have been introduced both in the West and elsewhere in the past 20 years and used extensively to suppress such movements in the name of "national security".



Activists protest policies of the World Bank in Washington, DC.  
(Photo Credit: CC BY 2.5)

It is interesting to note that the 9/11 attacks came at a time when a huge 'global justice' movement was building up across the world against the injustices of globalization. Using the internet as the medium of mobilization, they gathered in Seattle in 1999 and were successful in closing down the World Trade Organisation (WTO) meeting.

They opposed what they saw as large multinational corporations having unregulated political power, exercised through

trade agreements and deregulated financial markets, facilitated by governments. Their main targets were the WTO, International Monetary Fund (IMF), OECD, World Bank, and international trade agreements.

The movement brought 'civil society' people from the North and the South together under common goals. In parallel, the 'Jubilee 2000' international movement led by liberal Christian and Catholic churches called for the cancellation of \$90 billions of debts owed by the world's poorest nations to banks and governments of the West. Photo:

Along with the churches, youth groups, music, and entertainment industry groups were involved. The 9/11 attacks killed these movements as 'national security' took precedence over 'freedom to dissent'.

Dr Dayan Jayatilleka, a former vice-president of the UN Human Rights Council and a Sri Lankan political scientist notes that when "capitalism turned neoliberal and went on the rampage" after the demise of the Soviet Union, resistance started to develop with the rise of the Zapatistas in Chiapas (Mexico) against NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) and culminating in the 1999 Seattle protests using a term coined by Cuban leader Fidel Castro 'another world is possible'.

"All that came crashing down with the Twin Towers," he notes. "With 9/11 the Islamic-Jihadist opposition to the USA (and the war on terror) cut across and buried the progressive resistance we saw emerging in Chiapas and Seattle."

"9/11 panicked us into the 'war on terror' using lethal weapons of questionable legality which inspired more terrorists. 20 years on, those same adversaries are back and we now have a fear of US perfidy—over Taiwan or ANZUS or whatever. There will be many consequences," warns Geoffrey Robertson QC, well known British human rights campaigner, and TV personality. But, he sees some silver lining that has come out of this 'war on terror'.

"One reasonably successful tactic developed in the war on terror was to use targeted sanctions on its sponsors. This has been developed by so-called 'Magnitsky acts', enabling the targeting of human rights abusers—31 democracies now have them and Australia will shortly be the 32nd. I foresee their coordination as part of the fightback—a war not on terror but state cruelty," he told IDN.

When asked about the US's humiliation in Afghanistan, Dr Chandra Muzaffar, founder of the International Movement for a Just World told IDN that the West needs to understand that they too need to stop funding of terror to achieve their own agendas. "The 'war on terror' was doomed to failure from the outset because those who initiated the war were not prepared to admit that it was their occupation and oppression that



compelled others to retaliate through acts of terror." he argues. "Popular antagonism towards the occupiers was one of the main reasons for the humiliating defeat of the US and NATO in Afghanistan," he added.

Looking at western attempts to introduce democracy under the pretext of 'war on terror' and the chaos created by the 'Arab Spring', a youth movement driven by western-funded NGOs, Iranian born Australian Farzin Yekta who worked in Lebanon for 15 years as a community multi-media worker argues that the Arab region needs a different democracy.

"In the Middle East, the nations should aspire to a system based on social justice rather than the western democratic model. Corrupt political and economic apparatus, external interference and dysfunctional infrastructure are the main obstacles for moving towards establishing a system based on social justice," he maintains, adding that there are signs of growing social movements being revived in the region while "resisting all kinds of attacks".

Yekta told IDN that while working with Palestinian refugee groups in Lebanon he has seen how peoples' movements could be undermined by so-called 'civil society' NGOs (non-governmental organizations). "Alternative social movements are infested by 'civil society' institutions comprising primarily NGO institutions. 'Civil society' is effective leverage for the establishment and foreign (western) interference to pacify radical social movements. Social movements find themselves in a web of funded entities which push for 'agendas' drawn by funding buddies," noted Yekta.

Looking at the failure of western forces in Afghanistan, he argues that what they did by building up 'civil society' was encouraging corruption and cronyism that is entangled in ethnic and tribal structures of society. "Western nation-building plan was limited to setting up a glasshouse pseudo-democratic space in the green zone part of Kabul. One just needed to go to the countryside to confront the utter poverty and lack of infrastructure," Yekta notes. "We need to understand that people's struggle is occurring at places with poor or no infrastructure."

Dr Jayatilleka also sees positive signs of social movements beginning to raise their heads after two decades of repression. "Black Lives Matter drew in perhaps more young whites than blacks and constituted the largest ever protest movement in history. The globalized solidarity with the Palestinian people of Gaza, including large demonstrations in US cities, is further evidence. In Latin America, the left-populist Pink Tide 2.0 began with the victory of Lopez Obrador in Mexico and has produced the victory of Pedro Castillo in Peru. The slogan of Justice, both individual and social, is more globalized, more universalized today, than ever before in my lifetime," he told IDN.

There may be ample issues for peoples' movements to take up with TPP (Transpacific Partnership) and RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership) trade agreements coming into force in Asia where companies would be able to sue governments if their social policies infringe on company profits. But Dr Jayatilleka is less optimistic of social movements rising in Asia.

"Sadly, the social justice movement is considerably more complicated in Asia than elsewhere, though one would have assumed that given the social inequities in Asian societies, the struggle for social justice would be a torrent. It is not," he argues. The brightest recent spark in Asia, according to Dr Jayatilleka, was the rise of the Nepali Communist Party to power through the ballot box after a protracted peoples' war, but "sectarianism has led to the subsiding of what was the brightest hope for the social justice movement in Asia."

Robertson feels that the time is ripe for the social movements suppressed by post 9/11 anti-terror laws to be reincarnated in a different life. "The broader demand for social justice will revive, initially behind the imperative of dealing with climate change but then with tax havens, the power of multinationals, and the obscene inequalities in the world's wealth. So, I do not despair of social justice momentum in the future," he says. [IDN-InDepthNews – 09 September 2021]

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