

Sustainable Development Observer Issue 2 October 2021

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

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WINNERS OF ASIA’S “NOBEL PRIZE”



Bangladesh’s ‘Affordable Vaccine Pioneer’ Dr Firdausi Qadri

Dr Muhammad Amjad Saquib founder of Pakistan’s community development network Akhuwat



Would Thailand’s Traditional Massage Industry Fall Into Chinese Hands?

We look to the global system to stop illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing. We look to UN member states to agree to a new treaty to preserve marine in waters beyond national jurisdictions... Leaders who cannot summon the courage to unveil these commitments and policy packages at COP26 should not bother booking a flight to Glasgow.



Fiji Islands Prime Minister Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama



Coastal Developing Countries Count on a Sustainable Ocean Economy



Tanzania President Calls for Waving of Vaccine Patents



As Asia Grapples ‘Living With COVID-19’ Media May Need to Shed Adversarial Culture

FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to the 2nd issue of Sustainable Development Observer bringing you news and views on sustainable development goals from the perspective of the Two-Thirds World (Global South).

October is the month when there is much hype in the Global Media about the Nobel Prizes announced from Sweden – usually given to westerners or those who help to promote a western ‘liberal’ agenda. Not many people outside Asia knows about the Ramon Magsaysay Prizes announced at the same time from Manila, as it is in honour of a former President of the Philippines. There are normally 5 prizes announced and it is widely seen as Asia’s “Nobel Prizes” and the recipients of these prizes are widely respected across Asia. Since 1958, over 300 outstanding individuals and organisations have received this prize for selfless services to their society, Asia and the World to find solutions for pressing problems of humankind.

In this issue we feature two outstanding Asians who received this year’s prize – Bangladesh scientist Dr Firdausi Qadri for creating affordable vaccines to combat cholera and typhoid; and Dr Muhammad Amjad Saquib who founded Pakistan’s largest Islamic Community Development Organisation Akhuwat. Both deserve global recognition for outstanding contributions to achieving the SDGs.

We also take a special look at the UN Food Systems Summit that took place on September 23rd asking the question whether it could help to find solutions to global hunger? In this regard, an article from Bhikkhu Bodhi looking at the root causes of global hunger from a Buddhist perspective offer much food for thought.

Fiji Island’s outspoken Prime Minister Josaia V Bainimarama in an OpEd makes an impassionate plea to world leaders to acknowledge the link between climate and disease, and look at security threats as a problem of people living against nature and not with it. His article provide much guidance for mindful thoughts for world leaders heading towards Glasgow for COP26.

In this month’s issue we have a focus on Africa recovering from COVID-19 with the aid of UN’s ‘Africa Renewal’ website, while from South Center in Geneva, this month’s focus is on their policy briefs on ‘Restructuring the Global Vaccine Industry. The final article is designed to provoke media practitioners to rethink their adversarial reporting culture that could be a security risk.

Dr Kalinga Seneviratne - Editor



Bangladeshi scientist Dr Firdausi Qadri (Photo Credit: Noor A Alam/TBS)

Bangladesh’s “Affordable Vaccine Pioneer” Wins Asia’s ‘Nobel’ Prize

By Amitava Chowdhury

KOLKATTA (IDN) - One of 2021 Ramon Magsaysay Awards - known as ‘Asia’s Nobel Prize’ - has been awarded to the Bangladeshi scientist Dr Firdausi Qadri who has played a “key role” in creating more affordable vaccines to combat cholera and typhoid, the Manila-based award foundation said in a statement on August 31.

The 70-year-old female scientist has dedicated a lifetime to help the poor overcome sickness and disease with her research at the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research (ICDDR) at Bangladesh’s capital Dhaka.

In announcing Dr Qadri as one of the five winners of this year’s Ramon Magsaysay Award, the board of trustees of the Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation (RMAF) said that it “recognizes her passion and life-long devotion to the scientific profession; her vision of building the human and physical infrastructure that will benefit the coming generation of Bangladeshi scientists, women scientists in particular, and her untiring contributions to vaccine development, advanced biotechnological therapeutics and critical research that has been saving millions of precious lives”.

“I’m overwhelmed, extremely delighted but also humbled,” Dr Qadri said in a video message shared by the foundation.

Dr Qadri was also cited for her leading role in a mass vaccination effort in Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh’s south-eastern district of Cox’s Bazar in recent years that prevented a cholera outbreak. The disease causes acute diarrhoea and spreads through contaminated food and water.

In 2017, about 1 million Rohingyas came to Bangladesh from Myanmar. The Rohingya community living in the overpopulated camp areas had raised concerns regarding the cholera epidemic. However, together with the government, Dr. Qadri has run an immunization program that helped to reduce the prevalence of cholera in the Rohingya refugee camps.

“This success created new hope in the race against cholera,” notes United News of Bangladesh (UNB). “With

the help of Dr Qadri's pioneering work, the world is now moving towards this goal and there may be a day when diseases like cholera can really be forgotten. Hence, Qadri was the right person to win the Magsaysay Award."

In the current Covid-19 pandemic medical research, particularly the development of vaccines has been politicised. Dr Qadri has worked for

over 25 years in developing vaccines for the poor for diseases like cholera and typhoid that kills million every year and her work has not been motivated by making profit.

Development Communications Professor Mohhamad Sahid Ullah argues that her standpoint has always been clear when she says: "I am a scientist from a developing country, I must think for the people where I am born." Thus, Prof Ullah does not believe that she works for generating profit for companies or for her. "Rather she works for the betterment of the poor who really need low price vaccines" he told IDN.

Ramon Magsaysay Award is Asia's highest honour and is given to individuals who have made extraordinary contributions to the eradication of poverty and the development of the society in Asia. She will be conferred with the award at a ceremony on November 28 at the Ramon Magsaysay Center in Manila, said a press release from the RMAF.

It caps a year in Dr Qadri's life that saw her life's work finally receiving the recognition it merits, within the general atmosphere in which scientists - particularly those in the field of life sciences - are being more valued for the invaluable work they do since the onset of the global pandemic.

Prof Ullah believes that Dr Qadri's work should "inspire scientists and governments from developing countries to dedicate or mobilise their resources and efforts toward serving their people, because the vaccine developed by Dr. Qadri might cost less," he argues. "You see most of the people from the developing countries are the victims as they have no capacity to afford high-priced vaccines and I trust her invention contributes towards that end (to eradicate the problem)."

In October 2020, Bill Gates described her as a hero for her work in developing the new cheap cholera vaccine, which was done with financial assistance from the Gates Foundation. "For the last 25 years, Dr Qadri has been one of the few people advocating for an affordable vaccine to protect entire communities from cholera epidemics," Gates said in a You Tube vblog post. "While all of us are focused on the Covid-19 pandemic, it is easy to forget about the world's longest-running pandemic - cholera," he added.

Over the last two centuries, the deadly diarrheal disease, which thrives in areas without safe water and sanitation, has killed millions of people. Every year, cholera outbreaks around the globe affect about 4 million people and lead to as many as 130,000 deaths. An affordable, effective, and safe oral cholera vaccine, however, is proving to be a game changer in the fight against this dreaded disease that mainly effects the poor living in dilapidated conditions.

On the occasion of International Day of Women and Girls in Science in February 2020, Dr Qadri was one of five scientists who won the L'Oréal Foundation and UNESCO award for her outstanding work in understanding and preventing infectious diseases affecting children in developing countries, and promoting early diagnosis and vaccination with global health impact.

In an interview with *Dhaka Tribune*, when asked what motivates her to do this work, she replied: "I have wanted to work on those diseases mostly suffered by Bangladeshi people". She also added that the main problem she faced while doing the research was access to different facilities. "Appropriate and expensive facilities are available in developed nations, but their problem is they cannot use them, and we do not have them. With the constant change in technologies, it is a challenge for us to deal with this lack of facilities," she explained.

Dr Qadri is also involved in the Covid-19 pandemic work in Bangladesh in coronavirus testing, vaccine trials, and related research activities. This work is done through the research institute called the Institute for Developing Science and Health Initiative (IDESI), she set up in 2014. A large part of the genome sequencing of some of the coronavirus samples in the country has been done at this center.



Prof Ullah says that Bangladesh has a good number of brilliant biological science female students and "her award of course will be an example of inspiration for scientists in Bangladesh, women scientists in particular, to engage their devotion and efforts to scientific research". [IDN-InDepthNews - 13 September 2021] (SDG 3 - Good Health and Wellbeing, SDG 10 - Reduced Inequality)

Women of Bangladesh waiting for bus to go to work, Dhakka (Picture Credit: Kalinga Seneviratne)

Without Tourists Thailand's Famous Massage Industry on The Brink of Collapse

By Pattama Vilailert



Traditional Thai massage on the beach for tourists in pre-Covid times
(Photo Credit: Kalinga Seneviratne)

BANGKOK (IDN) — Thailand's famous tourist industry has been synonymous with its traditional massage parlours and treatment centres. But the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns are having a serious impact on the industry and may force foreign takeovers. The continuous lockdowns have impacted savagely on the spa and massage business.

The Thai Spa Association president Krod Rojanastien revealed in an interview with the *Manager* Newspaper here, that since the pandemic's first wave last year, when tourism traffic came almost to a halt, over 80% of spa and Thai massage businesses have been closed in line with the lockdown orders with job losses of over 200,000.

Ratchanee is a single mother of two girls. She was a Spa Manager in Pratunam in the Central Bangkok area. Before the outbreak, she earned over \$1,000 a month from her fixed salary and massage services which she also provided to customers when there were not enough masseurs to cater to the influx of foreign tourist clients.

"My life has turned upside down from the closure of my spa business," Ratchanee told IDN. "We have been closed since early 2020, (and) even at the end of the two earlier waves when the government allowed massage and spa business to open for the locals that didn't help me to make a living."

The main customers of her spa were tourists from Malaysia, Singapore, and India among others. With no international tourists coming into Thailand, her spa remains closed. Now, she must change her career path and leave the job she loves the most. She is forced to sell grilled pork on the sidewalk near her rented apartment in a Bangkok suburb. She is still waiting to receive some money from the government stimulus package.



Ratchanee selling grilled pork in the street
(Photo Credit: Pattama Vilailert)

Thai massage has gained popularity around the world. It is believed that it has been practiced in the kingdom for around 2,500–7,000 years. Thai massage has its unique characteristic of the combination of yoga and Thai medicine, which works with the body's energetic pathways. Another distinguished feature of Thai massage is during the massage, customers will lie down on the floor, not on the table and they would be fully clothed.

Thai traditional massage or Nuad Thai is regarded as part of the art, science, and culture of traditional Thai healthcare and in 2019 UNESCO placed Thai massage on the List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

In 2019, Thai tourism revenue accounted for \$62 billion, while the spa and massage business earned around \$900 million with a promising annual growth rate of 8%. Global Wellness Institute has estimated that Thailand is a destination for over 12.5 million tourists coming for health and wellness tourism each year. The government has introduced a policy to promote Thailand as a Spa Capital of Asia. Currently, there are over 8,600 spa and massage places all over Thailand, but how many of these would survive the pandemic is a big question.

During the series of lockdowns, some local small business owners received subsidies of 5,000 Baht (about \$150) for 3 months during the first wave lockdown. But many of the spa businesses are also owned by foreigners.

To judge the impact of the pandemic on the spa/massage industry, one just needs to go to the Pratunam area adjacent to the famous shopping centres in Bangkok, which are normally crowded with tourists. Most have been closed permanently since the first wave hit Bangkok in the first quarter of 2020.

The following sums up the situation.

The smaller operators and locally owned massage shops have adapted themselves by offering massage at home service or temporary shifting to other small businesses so that they can survive. Frustrated with prolonging lockdowns from COVID-19, the massage and spa operators filed a lawsuit against the Thai government in August this year. They demanded 200-million-baht (\$5.9 million) compensation. They claim that the government did not have any plans for them to continue their livelihood.

In a recent interview with *Biznews*, Rojanastien expressed concerns that most local operators may not be able to survive the current crisis, and with the Chinese constituting the biggest tourism market, Chinese businesspeople with deep pockets may take over these spa businesses. He claimed that he's already noted such movements with Chinese learning to do Thai massage.

In a bid to keep the spa industry afloat, the government has allowed spa and massage places to reopen from September 1, but only to serve the local customer. Sky, who is a masseur at a massage place in Makkasan, near Pratunam says her major customers were foreign tourists from India, Malaysia, and Singapore who came shopping in Pratunam. "I have been doing massage for 12 years and earned around 500 dollars monthly before the outbreak," she told IDN.

During three waves of COVID-19 where there were no foreign customers, she neither went back to her hometown in the northeast nor shifted her career path. She just stayed over at the shop since the Thai owner provided accommodation and some food for staff. She has relied on government stimulus packages, which have been given to those out of jobs resulting from COVID-19. She sometimes had to borrow money from loan sharks to survive. "Since this month, I can do massage again, but there are only a few customers daily. There's less demand because local Thais also earn less during the pandemic. I may have to go back to settle in my village," she says sadly.

Wesda owns a Thai massage shop on a small road opposite to Indra Hotel, the main shopping area of Bangkok. Her main customers were tourists from Korea, Japan, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, and India. Before the outbreak, she used to earn around \$3,000 a month. During the three waves of lockdowns, in the beginning, she made a living from interpreting the Thai language for some Vietnamese living in Pratunam. However, for the 2nd and 3rd waves lockdown, the Vietnamese had gone home.

"I used to have 17 masseurs, 7 permanent and 10 part-time ones. When the pandemic came most of my masseurs went back to their hometowns. Three part-time masseurs are working with me, right now," she says. "Even though my business has suffered tremendously, I still have to pay the rent of 25,000 Bhat (\$740) monthly, after the landlord gave me a 50 per cent discount along with electricity and water bills."

Since the lockdown had been imposed, the government issued stimulus packages to provide financial assistance to businesses and Thai people. The spa and massage places were among the very first businesses that had been ordered to close. Unfortunately, they did not receive any subsidies from the government, only their workers registered under

Section 39 and Section 40 of the Social Security Act 119 (SSA) would receive cash handouts of 5,000 baht (\$150).

Wesda was so stressed by having to make both ends meet from her savings and borrowing from loan sharks that she was becoming suicidal. Luckily, one day in June, her husband drove her to



Deserted massage parlours in Pratunam (above) and Wesda selling coconuts outside her massage shop (right) (Photo Credit: Pattama Vilailert)



Nakhon Pathom, a province that is 70 kilometres from Bangkok. There, she saw the light at the end of the tunnel. She started to buy coconuts from Nakhon Pathom and sell them outside her massage shop. She has been making 340 baht (\$10) of profit a day, which she said: "It's better than nothing".

After the reopening of the business on September 1, she could provide foot massage service to local customers. "I cannot make enough money from this to cover my costs, only reopening Thailand later in the year to tourism will save me," she says hopefully. [IDN-InDepthNews – 02 October 2021] (SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth)

NGOs Urge Donor Governments to Intervene to Stop New Logging Plans on The Congo Rainforest

By Devendra Kamarajan



The DRC government is planning to lift a moratorium on new logging concessions that threatens some of the last intact tropical forest on earth. (Photo Credit: Greenpeace.)

NAIROBI | KINSHASA (IDN) — Ahead of international donors announcing a USD 1 billion forest protection agreement with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), NGOs are urging that such funding for the Central African country should be conditional on a moratorium on any logging concessions, reports Greenpeace. The ban has stood since 2002 but the DRC government is apparently planning to lift the moratorium.

In a letter* to the donor countries, more than 40 international and Congolese NGOs are warning that lifting the ban would put at risk an area of rainforest the size of France, resulting in land grabs, social conflict and the exacerbation of the climate and

biodiversity crises.

“We are standing on the precipice of an historic failure to protect one of the world's great rainforests, and possibly the last still serving as a carbon sink. Any - rather than a scaling back of industrial logging - will inevitably result in an unstoppable ‘cascade of deforestation’, threatening millions of hectares of forest and the communities that depend on it.” alerted Joe Eisen, Executive Director of Rainforest Foundation UK.

The appeal by to dozens of environmental and human rights organisations to donor governments comes with less than six weeks to go before crucial international climate negotiations in Glasgow. The organisations including Rainforest Foundation UK, Greenpeace Africa, and the national Indigenous Peoples network, DGPA, are appealing to donor governments to intervene.

The letter has been sent on September 23 to the ministers of development, environment and foreign affairs in France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, South Korea, and the UK, as well as the European Commission. These are all members of CAFI (Central African Forest Initiative), which is negotiating the forest protection agreement with the DRC government.

“Industrial logging puts Indigenous Peoples and local communities at risk of displacement and swathes of biodiversity under existential threat. If donor governments give unconditional support to logging, that will endanger the forest on an apocalyptic scale. It would remove the last shreds of credibility from COP26,” said Irene Wabiwa, International Project Leader for the Congo Basin forest in Greenpeace Africa.

The NGOs’ letter comes after the council of ministers, presided over by DRC president Félix Tshisekedi, adopted the Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Environment Eve Bazaiba’s proposal to lift the moratorium in July. [IDN- InDepthNews — 24 September 2021] (SDG 13 – Climat Action)

* Leter could be read via this link:
<https://www.rainforestfoundationuk.org/media.ashx/letter-to-ministers.docx>

USE IT AND LOSE IT - INDUSTRIAL LOGGING AND ITS ROLE IN DEFORESTATION IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

05 MAY 2021

New research demonstrates a clear link between the establishment of commercial logging operations and a cascade of deforestation. Investigating forest loss in DRC across 60 logging concessions and eight ‘control’ areas, the findings from this study show that the selective

logging of high-value timber species is not a sustainable form of forest management, but rather an underlying ‘driver’ of deforestation after logging roads open up new forest areas to settlements and other uses. Link to download pdf copy of report : <https://www.rainforestfoundationuk.org/publications>



Philippines: Supporting The Weavers of Louisiana

Story from Our Better World (Singapore)



Staff at Maria's Kitchen bakery pack ube cheese pandesals into pandan leaf boxes (Photo Credit: Our Better World)

LUISIANA, Philippines (IDN/OBW) — Each day, Maria's Kitchen, a bakery in Laguna, sells tray after tray of ube cheese pandesal (cheese and yam infused bread rolls) and other breads and cakes. But there is more to these baked goods than belly-rubbing yumminess; the simple and elegant pandan leaf boxes that bear them tell a story of their own.

The boxes are the meticulous work of weavers from remote villages in Luisiana, Laguna (a four-hour drive from the Philippines capital Manila), who have honed the skill of weaving pandan leaves over generations, making bags, boxes and various crafts from the leaves of 100-year-old trees.

And in the midst of COVID-19, where demand for their craft has dried to a trickle, the boxes are providing steady, much needed income for the weavers.

"The pandemic really took a really big hit on us. Our past customers never came back," shares Nenita Racoma, a 59 year old weaver who was taught the craft at seven years old.

A bakery that warms hearts

The idea of using the boxes came from Kwin Garcia-Anino, one of Maria's Kitchen's three founders, whose mother-in-law is from the same village as the weavers.

A long-time fan of pandan crafts, she previously set up a business in 2017 to sell their products, but stopped to focus on raising her children.

Fast forward to 2020, when the pandemic took the world by storm. Kwin, who was working as a financial advisor and event organiser, saw her income drop. Together with her friends Kristine Garcia and Zyra Porca, they decided to start a baking business.

"Since we like to eat, obviously, why not try exploring the food business?" says Kwin with a laugh. "It turned into a passion and took my mind away from the pandemic."

Maria's Kitchen was a success, creating a "happy problem" for its founders. "When more orders started to come in, our packaging supplies could not hold up," Kwin recalls. "We decided to return to pandan packaging as it was our first love."

Pandan, she explains, grows plentifully in parts of the Philippines, and offers a more eco-friendly alternative to single-use plastic packaging.

And as Kwin would discover, it would become a lifeline to weavers in a time of crisis too. "When I met the weavers in these remote areas, they told me they really had a hard time with less orders and transport restrictions. So I told my partner, we'll use pandan packaging so we can help the weavers in Luisiana."

Where altruism and artisanal meet

Pandan weaving requires skill and dedication, from cutting down leaves from the trees, to removing the thorns and shaping them to the required size, to drying and softening them on presses that weigh over 1,000kg—all before anything can be woven.

The result is a durable, reusable material that can be made into items like baskets, boxes, hats, mats and more, customised to the users' needs.

Before the pandemic, weavers made about 500 pesos (US\$9.90) a day for their craft and labour—enough to help support their families.

"I am very proud because weaving helped us survive...you can see that weaving is the main source of income here. There are big houses and you will see there pressing machines below. Those pandan leaves sent their children to school," says Rose Rondilla, a weaver.



Weavers at work (Photo Credit: Our Better World)

Even though times are tough, Rose and Nenita try to make sure everyone in the community has a chance to earn. “If I have orders, I do my best to share the workload with them. I also purchase their products so they don’t need to sell it to marketplaces far away. I understand the struggle, so whatever I earn, I share it with them, says Nenita.

When the orders are ready, Kwin and her partners will drive the long, narrow bumpy roads to the villages to collect the boxes. “ We don’t mind the hassle, we really just want to be of help with their livelihood,” says Kwin.

Although many weavers have been forced to lower their prices amid low demand, Kwin is steadfast in honouring whatever weavers quote her. “I have an idea of what the struggle of losing an income is like, especially during the pandemic, and I do not want to add to their suffering,” she shares.

It is a spirit that resonates with Maria’s Kitchen’s customers. “When we told our customers that every purchase with pandan packaging could help the weavers of Luisiana, we received a lot of support from them,” says Kwin. “The customers are happy because they want to support the community we are helping.”

Nenita hopes other weavers will take heart and press on. “Don’t lose heart and just continue making those bags. Every problem has a solution,” she says.

In the long run, Kwin hopes to see newfound appreciation for the weavers’ craft. “Pandan weaving is a cultural representation of their town that can be passed on to the next generation. I hope we can help them in preserving that.” [IDN-InDepthNews — 28 September 2021] (SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth)

Note: This story first appeared on [Our Better World](https://www.ourbetterworld.org/stories/marias-kitchen-pandan-weavers-packaging) - Original link <https://www.ourbetterworld.org/stories/marias-kitchen-pandan-weavers-packaging>

Link for Video version of the story: <https://youtu.be/opd27y66l-Q>

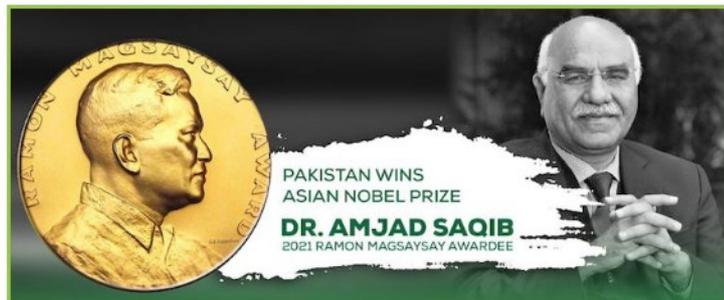
Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals – Paving The Path

Alternative Noble Prize Recognition for Pakistan's Islamic Community Development Pioneer

By Kalinga Seneviratne

SYDNEY (IDN) — One of the five winners of this year’s Ramon Magsaysay Awards—known as Asia’s Nobel Prizes—is Dr Muhammad Amjad Saquib the founder of Pakistan’s biggest community development network Akhuwat that is based on Islamic principles of sharing and brotherhood.

Launched in 2001, hundreds of thousands of poor families have been supported through Akhuwat’s interest-free microfinance loans. Islamic law prohibits interest on loans, but Islamic teachings that encourage followers to set aside a portion of one’s wealth to help the needy assist to finance this model.



Asian Nobel prize winner, Muhammad Amjad Saquib, the founder of Pakistan’s biggest community development network Akhuwat. (Photo Credit: Akhuwat)

“It is definitely an Islamic development model,” argues Fatimah Shah, a Pakistani international development professional. “Akhuwat’s no-interest financial model, where lending is based on trust and encourages options for group lending to foster a sense of community; is fundamentally rooted in core Islamic values.”

Akhuwat’s core program, Akhuwat Islamic Microfinance (AIM), provides interest-free loans to the underprivileged to enable them in creating sustainable pathways out of poverty. With 800 plus branches in over 400 cities across Pakistan, AIM is the largest interest-free microfinance program in the world.

Dr Saquib was intellectually and professionally well prepared for the role when he embarked on setting up Akhuwat. After graduating from King Edward Medical College in Lahore, he completed a Masters’s degree in Public Administration from American University Washington through a Hubert Humphries Fellowship. From 1985 to 2003 he served in the civil service of Pakistan during which he realized that government programs were not designed to help the poor, especially the women—even when they claim to do so.

Akhuwat has “adopted” hundreds of neglected and non-functioning public schools and established four residential colleges (one of them for women), and soon a university, for poor and deserving students. Established in 2015,

Akhuwat College is a residential college that caters to students from low-income households who despite their talent and desire to pursue education, are unable to do so due to financial constraints. Their Learning Hubs provide education and vocational training to children of unknown parentage, who are often found in alleys plagued by drugs, prostitution, and violence.

The organization encourages the education of women, and Akhuwat College for Women and their website says that its philosophy is based on “the firm belief that no nation can progress without investing in the education of women”. Located in Chakwal, the Akhuwat College for Women is a residential campus, housing women from all over the country with young women who receive merit-based admissions. Akhuwat runs a health services program, helping hundreds of thousands of patients; a “clothes bank” that has distributed more than three million clothes for the needy; and a program of economic, health, and psycho-social services for the discriminated khwajasira (transgender) community.

In nominating Dr Saquib to receive the 2021 Ramon Magsaysay Award, the board of trustees said in the citation that they “recognize the intelligence and compassion that enabled him to create the largest microfinance institution in Pakistan; his inspiring belief that human goodness and solidarity will find ways to eradicate poverty; and his determination to stay with a mission that has already helped millions of Pakistani families”.

Dr Saqib dedicated this award to the poor beneficiaries of Akhuwat and to the Pakistani nation. He said this award is an endorsement of Akhuwat, interest-free lending model, and a tribute to the compassion and integrity of his nation. Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan in a tweet congratulated Dr Saquib for winning "Asia's highest honour" and he added: “We are proud of his achievement as we move forward in creating a welfare state based on Riyasat-e-Madina Model.”

“Akhuwat in its entirety—its name, its central philosophy, its slogan of Iman-Ihsan-Ikhlās (faith-kindness-sincerity), and its financial approach is designed on Islamic social and financial principles. Akhuwat is derived from Mawakhaa’t which means Brotherhood; a principle that defined the way the Prophet catalyzed the integration of immigrants from Makkah into the social and financial fabric of Yathrib (Medina),” Fatimah explained to IDN in an interview.

Akhuwat's success is another example of how the global banking model based on interest payments fuelling the system is not serving the poor. “It is a phenomenal story even in sheer numbers; starting with a single loan of less than 200,000 Pakistani Rupees (approximately, 3000 USD) in 2001, to over 140 billion Pakistani Rupees worth of interest-free loans that continue to help over 20 million people.” Amjad Saqib has successfully managed to manifest his empathy and selflessness into a cyclic social endeavour. His philosophy is not just to do good himself, but to encourage and help others in joining hands to help” Fatimah adds.

Akhuwat uses places of worship for loan disbursements, saving on costs, and also promotes volunteerism among staff and clients. It aims at transforming borrowers into donors. Akhuwat model is sometimes compared to the famous Grameen Bank model of Professor Muhammad Yunus from fellow South Asian predominantly Muslim nation of Bangladesh. But the Grameen model does charge interest on its micro-loans. There are similarities in the two models, says Dr Faiz Shah, Director of Yunus Center at the Asian Institute of Technology in Bangkok. “Primary function of both organizations is to provide access to finance through social capital and social collateral,” he adds, “loaning to the unbankable, that is the similarity”.

Dr Faiz points out that Professor Yunus has never claimed that Grameen Bank is an Islamic model. “It's simply a loan program that is sometimes seen as savings and loan program. It is driven by a commitment to social development. The Grameen principle is that anyone who subscribes to a Grameen programme would contribute to a community building or nation-building program,” he explained to IDN. “Akhuwat is simply driven by a motivation to tap into a reservoir of Islamic welfare funding. Which is enunciated in the principles of the Islamic faith... motivated by the principle of brotherhood in Islam.”

Today, Akhuwat is the largest microfinance institution in Pakistan, offering a package of loans for the poor. It has distributed 4.8 million interest-free loans amounting to the equivalent of USD 900 million, helping three million families, with a remarkable 99.9% loan repayment rate. In the Covid-19 pandemic, Akhuwat responded with emergency loans and grants, food relief, and other assistance in over a hundred cities in Pakistan.

Dr Faiz, who is a Pakistani, points out that it's important to underscore the fact that one of the tenants on the five pillars of Islam is charity, in which one-fortieth of whatever one earns has to be spent in a way to helping another human being through a difficult time. “The state can administer this, but it's also a personal obligation on Muslims,” he says.

“Muslims can do it in a variety of ways, and this percentage has to be deducted from any holding that a Muslim has and be spent for community development or helping people in need” explains Dr Faiz. “You could say that the inspiration of Akhuwat is very firmly rooted in the Islamic development model, (adopted to) modern times, in its modern implementation or its modern interpretation of the application.” [IDN-InDepthNews — 15 September 2021] (SGDs 1,3,4 and 5: No Poverty, Good Health and Wellbeing, Quality Education and Gender Equality)

Link to Akhuwat website - <https://akhuwat.org.pk/>

Coastal Developing Countries Count on A Sustainable Ocean Economy in the Aftermath of COVID-19

By Jamshed Baruah



Fishing in the Caribbean. (Photo Credit: Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0)

GENEVA (IDN | UNCTAD) — Barbados, Belize and Costa Rica are looking beyond the pandemic and climate shocks by developing and implementing national trade strategies strongly linked to resilience, conservation and the sustainable use of their marine resources.

A regional experience-sharing workshop held on September 23-24 highlighted the need to adopt, elaborate and implement evidence-based and policy-coherent oceans economy and trade strategies (OETS) under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) framework.

UNCTAD organized the workshop in conjunction with the UN Division for

Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (DOALOS), as part of a project to boost the ocean economy.

“The value of ocean assets has been estimated to be at least \$24 trillion and it could be more,” said UNCTAD Deputy Secretary-General Isabelle Durant. “Understanding the value of oceans and the trade and governance aspect to sustainably manage them can support millions of livelihoods globally and ensure prosperity for all.”

Costa Rica

Applying the OETS approach, the project identified marine coastal fisheries and big pelagics as the most promising sectors.

As a result, Costa Rica is developing its first collective certification mark (Pura Vida™) for sustainable fish, seafood and aquaculture products. The mark to be launched in the last quarter of 2021 guarantees that such products are of high quality and sustainable.

Fishermen and other stakeholders who implement Pura Vida’s™ sustainability ethos can use the mark.

“Through the OETS collective branding strategy, Costa Rican fishery and aquaculture products can compete and be distinguished in international markets,” said Andrés Valenciano, Costa Rica’s minister of foreign trade.

Costa Rica is also formalizing the employment of fishers, boosting domestic demand for fisheries products, and working on doubling its marine areas of responsible fisheries from 11 to over 20 in the next few years.

Belize

Belize’s minister of the blue economy and civil aviation, Andre Perez, announced that despite COVID-19 pandemic shocks, the country’s GDP growth estimates over the last six months exceeded the 2% projected by IMF, with its seafood industry recording an excellent performance.

“We fully support the OETS project and are committed to ensuring Belizean fishing communities, stakeholders and vulnerable groups continue to receive fair and enhanced economic benefits from our blue resources,” he said.

The OETS project in Belize developed a science-based adaptive multispecies finfish management plan that complements the country’s finfish data collection methodology.

These are expected to introduce new measures to promote the sustainable management of the marine capture fisheries and seafood manufacturing sectors, encourage great export and tourist consumption, while reducing illegal fishing.

This approach will directly improve the livelihoods of more than 2,500 fishers and indirectly benefit more than 15,000 Belizeans.

Barbados

Among the project’s three beneficiary countries, Barbados reported the greatest COVID-19 impact in terms of its capacity to receive technical assistance and implement related activities.

Despite the pandemic-induced challenges, the OETS project continued, with the country receiving multi-agency technical assistance on fisheries and coastal and marine environmental services and legal and institutional frameworks governing ocean-based economic sectors.

The latter contributed to the selection of the pelagic longline fishery as the most promising subsector for further development. This will be followed by country-driven programming and delivery of subsequent activities on climate-resilient fisheries, based on UNCTAD's ocean economy pillars.

“This OETS project through the current workshop is promoting and allowing more South-South learning opportunities in the area of sustainable ocean economy development,” said Sonia Foster, permanent secretary in the ministry of maritime affairs and the blue economy.

COVID-19 impacts and other vulnerabilities

The COVID-19 pandemic hit the tourism-dependent economies of small island developing states (SIDS) hard, slashing their GDP by about 7% due to the collapse in international tourism. During the first weeks of the pandemic, marine fisheries and aquaculture production also decreased by between 40% (in the Americas) and 80% (in SIDS).

All the three beneficiary countries reported economic disruption that could last for years due to the pandemic and the measures put in place to contain it.

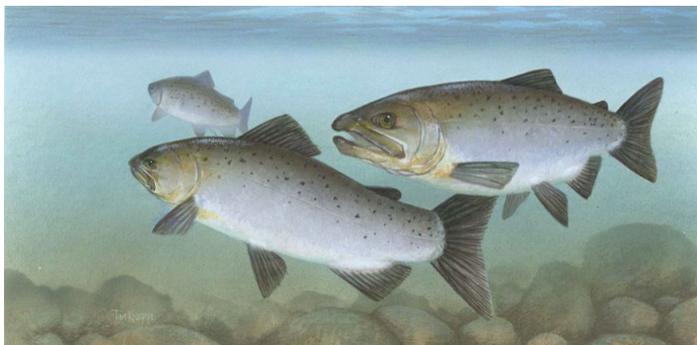
Despite some interruptions in project implementation – worsened by climate-related events – the experiences shared at the workshop demonstrated that resilience, adaptability, transparency and cooperation enhance preparedness against climate, health and man-made vulnerabilities.

Key messages to forge ahead

- Adaptive fishery management/improvement plans conducted through inclusive stakeholder engagement, supportive and dynamic regulatory and policy frameworks are relatively low-cost options that promote sustainable fisheries, complement sustainability certifications and secure livelihoods in coastal developing countries and SIDS.
- Investment in digitalization and innovative technologies to upgrade infrastructure and skills through new partnerships, financing and regional economic integration can support ocean governance and research, promote sustainability and increase market access and value addition.
- Limited national fisheries data remains a key challenge for scientific and evidence-based processes; the lack of robust data and human and financial resources negatively affects traceability, monitoring and surveillance, which in turn become linked to market access barriers.
- Coordination and information sharing should be strengthened (for example, by linking fisheries with tourism and marine protected areas, facilitating exports through trade agreements and key markets).
- Promotion of national and regional markets and tourism, using online platforms and e-commerce is necessary for diversification, product development and innovation.
- Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the COVID-19 pandemic responses should be complementary, integrating actions to tackle emergency and support recovery.

As part of the wider impact of the OETS project in the Caribbean, UNCTAD also provided technical support to the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM) in its collaboration with the Development Bank of Latin America (CAF) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

This support will help establish a blue economy and sustainable fisheries initiative, envisaged to create regional market mechanisms to support fisheries value chains and sustainable development in the region. [IDN-InDepthNews – 08 October 2021] (SDG 2 – Zero Hunger and SDG 14 – Life Below Water)



(Photo Credit: Wikimedia Commons)



UN Food Systems Summit 2021

Under the leadership of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, the UN Food Systems Summit took place on 23 September 2021. It was mainly a virtual event during the UN General Assembly High-Level Week.

The Summit was designed to awaken the world to the fact that we all must work together to transform the way the world produces, consumes and thinks about food. It was also a solutions summit that will require everyone to take action to transform the world’s food systems.

Guided by five Action Tracks, the Summit brought together key players from the worlds of science, business, policy, healthcare and academia, as well as farmers, indigenous people, youth organizations, consumer groups, environmental activists, and other key stakeholders.

The Summit process aims to deliver and generate significant action and measurable progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and raise awareness and elevate public discussion about how reforming our food systems can help us all to achieve the SDGs by implementing reforms that are good for people and planet.

The term “food system” refers to the constellation of activities involved in producing, processing, transporting and consuming food. Food systems touch every aspect of human existence. When they function well, food systems have the power to bring us together as families, communities and nations.

Source: UNFSS 2021 website

Tale Of Two Peoples’ Food Summits - Who Can Help to Feed the World?

By Kalinga Seneviratne
 SYDNEY (IDN) — There were two “Peoples’ Food Summits” held on September 23, one hosted by the United Nations from New York with some world leaders appearing virtually, while the other was hosted completely virtually with peoples’ movements bringing grassroots voices to the world.

The first ever UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) convened world leaders in an effort to spur national and regional action to deliver the UN’s 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through “transforming food systems”. While the Global People’s Summit (GPS) on Food Systems slammed the UNFSS for “paving the way for greater control of big corporations over global food systems”.

In his opening remarks to the UNFSS, UN Secretary-General António Guterres said that the global community needs to build a world where healthy and nutritious food is available and affordable for everyone, everywhere, but he warned that the COVID-19 pandemic has made this challenge much greater.

“We need food systems that support the health and well-being of all people. Malnutrition, hunger and famine are not forces of nature. They are the result of the actions - or inactions - of all of us,” Guterres told the audience of world

leaders, agricultural scientists, agribusiness leaders and civil society representatives. “We need systems that can support prosperity. Not just the prosperity of businesses and shareholders, but the prosperity of farmers and food workers.”

The UN chief appealed to world leaders to “shift our approach” on agricultural subsidies, and employment support for workers, and he also added “we need to re-think how we see and value food—not simply as a commodity to be traded, but as a right that every person shares”.

Grassroots farmers and community leaders meeting virtually at the GPS would certainly agree with those sentiments, but they are suspicious of the UN's motives because Guterres has organized the UNFSS in close collaboration with the World Economic Forum (WEF) that represents the interests of big corporations.

"We find it unacceptable that the UNFSS is proclaiming itself as a so-called 'people's summit' when the aspirations and demands of the world's peoples for a truly radical transformation of food systems are being met with lip service while being side lined by the profit-seeking interests of monopoly corporations," said GPS in a statement issued via their website on September 24th.

"UNFSS projects an image of inclusiveness and democratic participation with its host of events meetings and dialogues with people's organizations and civil society, but it remains unclear how the agenda and demands of small landless farmers indigenous peoples, fisher folk, workers, pastoralists, women, youth, consumers and all those that advocate for food sovereignty, agroecology and human rights will be carried in the summit's outcomes, much less carried out by the global policy," Sarojeni Rengam, executive director of the Pesticide Action Network Asia-Pacific noted in an opening address to the GPS from Malaysia.



Sarojeni Rengam, executive director of the Pesticide Action Network (Photo Credit: PAN Asia-Pacific)

In a long address to the GPS, Sylvia Mallari, global co-chairperson of the People's Coalition on Food Sovereignty (PCFS) explained how global agribusiness giants infiltrated the UNFSS process through the partnership the UN struck with the WEF and positioned themselves for the "corporate capture of the UNFSS process". She explained how they did it by getting assigned as champions to 'action tracks' that would guide the UNFSS. "They are influencing these action tracks which would be processing policy proposals," she said.

Mallari said that during the preparation process in 2020 over 550 civil society organizations came out with position papers including one by PCFS, that "raised concern about the corporate dominance in the coming summer conference, but all of these points that were raised were put aside in fact in June of 2020 as the summit was being operationalized in consultations sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation with the World Economic Forum".

Some of the world leaders that addressed the UNFSS reflected concerns the GPS summit speakers made. Fiji Islands Prime Minister Josaia Voreque Bainimarama speaking as the Chair of the 16-member Pacific Island Forum raised the issue of the impact of climate change on food security especially for small island nations.

"For the Pacific, climate change represents a major threat to the maintenance and development of food systems which are vital to food security. Our greatest challenges include sea-level rise, saltwater intrusion, and ocean acidification. All of these combined will impact our culture, water and food security; livelihoods; biodiversity; health and wellbeing," he said.

Bainimarama also raised the importance of fish stocks for food security in the Pacific and welcomed the "growing recognition that Blue Food Systems serve as an anchoring pillar in the development and maintenance of sustainable food". He told the meeting that a successful management of Blue Foods requires co-operation among governments and between governments together with relevant stakeholders. "We are supportive of efforts to create a network to ensure that Blue Foods are brought into the heart of discussions and decisions about food systems" he noted and agreed with Guterres's view that transforming our food systems is central to achieving the SDGs.

Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina argued that access to quality food should be considered as a "fundamental right" of the people, while Finland's President Sauli Niinisto pointed out that his country introduced free-of-charge school meals in the 1940s to overcome post-war poverty and malnutrition, and added that the "school meal system has proven to be an investment in the future and in the economic and social welfare of the society."

In a media release the UNFSS said that the Action Tracks have clustered a "rich input in a systemic way to build communities of practice and foster new partnerships". And that through the Champions Network, Global Food Systems Summit Dialogues, and over 900 Independent Dialogues, people around the world have offered ideas on how to transform food systems.

"The UN Food Systems Summit will launch bold new actions, solutions, and strategies to deliver progress on all 17 SDGs, each of which relies to some degree on healthier, more sustainable, and equitable food systems," the statement added.

Meanwhile, the GPS in their statement said: “The nature of this transformation should be a subject of open and honest debate, with people’s rights at the center of all discussions. But the oligopolies of agribusiness including the agro-industrial livestock industry, agrochemicals, genetic engineering, and digital technology in cahoots with

research institutions, foundations, and token civil society groups, have dominated and dictated the discussions on food systems transformation, as can be clearly seen in the UNFSS”.

“It was just as we expected. While branding itself as the ‘People’s Summit’ and even the ‘Solutions Summit,’ the UNFSS did not listen to the voices of marginalized rural peoples, nor forward real solutions to the food, biodiversity and climate crises. Instead, it let powerful nations and big corporations play an even bigger role in determining food and agricultural policies” notes Mallari.

The PCFS in their statement warned: “We will continue to assert that land belongs to those who directly till and enrich the land to produce food and other needs of societies, and not to the landlords or corporations that enormously profit from its wanton exploitation”. [IDN-InDepthNews — 26 September 2021]

The Food Systems Summit- A New Deal for People, Planet and Prosperity

By Dr. Agnes Kalibata, UN Secretary-General’s Special Envoy to the 2021 Food Systems Summit¹

The Summit is the first of its kind to take on the incredible complexity of food systems in their entirety, asking countries to confront the reality of balancing food production with climate action, affordable food with healthy diets, and stable food supplies with fair and open trade. And never before has a UN Summit been so open, so inclusive and so transparent with farmers, youth and Indigenous Peoples squarely placed in leadership roles who represent millions from their constituencies. From member states to individuals across more than 140 countries, they all search for a new deal for people, planet, and prosperity.



Dr Agnes Kalibata
(Photo Credit: UNFSS)

Given the correct focus on “system change”, the definition of success for the Summit is necessarily messier and less linear than other processes. As you know, there will be no equivalent of the Paris Agreement. While there will therefore be no “gavel moment”, this Summit is set to achieve the catalytic equivalent of the “Paris Effect” by accelerating a deep irreversible change in mindsets, decision-making, financing flows and innovation.

The world has set the goal of delivering the SDGs in nine years and if we learned anything over the past 18 months, it is that these goals are needed more than ever. Partly due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the prevalence of undernourishment increased to around 9.9 per cent in 2020, with estimates of hungry people reaching between 720 and 811 million globally in 2020. Transformed food systems post pandemic can contribute to the fight against poverty and hunger by creating good jobs, improving access to food, and supporting healthy communities. In creating a strong recovery, we need to double our efforts to build economies and societies that are more equitable, resilient, and greener.

Our food systems – local, regional, and global – are central to delivering this agenda. There is no net zero pathway for communities and countries without transformation of our food systems. There is no end to chronic hunger, the costs of nutritional deficits, or the challenge of unhealthy diets without bold actions to change. There is no route to better livelihoods and greater gender equality unless we start to pay farmers and farmworkers fairly. And we need to do this while respecting regional, local, and cultural drivers of our food systems. There is not one single answer, which will transform our food systems, but where there is a will there is a way.

The recent IPCC report is clear that we are on 'code red' and that we can not achieve 1.5 degrees unless we fix our food systems. How food is consumed is a health burden to 3 billion people and nearly one billion people go to bed hungry every night. We are fast eroding the genetic base we depend on for our livelihoods, and in parts of the world there simply is no path out of poverty and hunger without fixing climate change. By providing the most comprehensive picture to date of food systems in every country, each government has the information and resources needed to develop its own route towards a stronger food system that nourishes both people and planet.

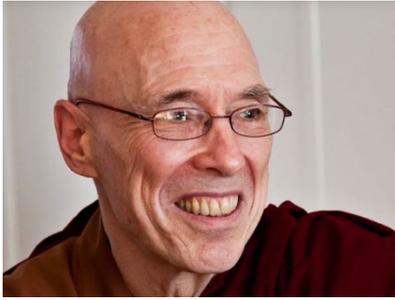
The Summit is one moment that is important irrespective of where we are in the world. It is an opportunity for world leaders to step forward. It is once in a generation opportunity to make a difference for millions of people, to define a new deal for people, planet, and prosperity - don't hold back.

¹ This is an edited version of a statement issued by Dr. Agnes Kalibata via the UNFSS website

Tackling Global Hunger At Its Roots

Viewpoint by Bhikkhu Bodhi

Tackling global hunger requires that we identify its fundamental causes and remove these at the roots. This necessitates not only the adoption of transformative policies, but a fundamental change in our own values and attitudes, writes Bhikkhu Bodhi.



Bhikkhu Bodhi (Photo credit: Buddhistdoor)

NEW YORK (IDN) — The Buddha teaches that to effectively solve any problem we have to remove its underlying causes. While the Buddha himself applies this principle to the ending of existential suffering, the same method can be used to deal with many of the challenges we face in the social and economic dimensions of our lives.

Whether it be racial injustice, economic disparities, or climate disruption, to resolve these problems we have to dig beneath the surface and extricate the roots from which they spring.

A recent media report from Oxfam International, *The Hunger Virus Multiplies*, adopts just such an approach to global hunger. While the COVID pandemic has driven world hunger to the outer margins of our

awareness, the report points out that more people are actually dying each day from hunger than from the virus. The death rate from COVID is estimated at 7 lives per minute, but hunger claims 11 lives per minute.

Since its arrival, however, the coronavirus has pushed the mortality rate from hunger even higher than under pre-pandemic conditions. Over the past year, according to the report, the pandemic has driven 20 million more people to extreme levels of food insecurity, while the number living in famine-like conditions has risen sixfold, to more than 520,000.

The report traces the death rate from acute hunger to three deep causes, which it calls “the lethal Cs”: conflict, COVID, and the climate crisis. *Conflict* is the single most potent driver of global hunger, pushing nearly 100 million people in 23 countries to crisis levels of food insecurity and even to famine.

Conflict not only disrupts agricultural production and blocks access to food, but in a war of attrition it is common for the hostile parties to use starvation as a deliberate weapon to crush their opponents. They may block humanitarian relief, bomb local markets, set fields ablaze, or kill livestock - thereby depriving people, especially hapless civilians, of access to food and water.

Economic hardship, the second major factor driving global hunger, has been exacerbated over the past two years by the COVID pandemic. The pandemic has forced lockdowns around the globe, driving up poverty levels and causing sharp spikes in hunger. Last year, poverty increased by 16% and over 40 million people in 17 countries faced severe hunger. As food production has declined, food prices around the world rose last year by almost 40 percent, the highest rise in over a decade.

This has made food, even when available, unaffordable for many people. Those hit hardest have been women, displaced populations, and informal workers. At the same time, the corporate elite have turned the pandemic into a windfall, reaping unprecedented profits. In 2020, the wealth of the ten richest people increased by \$413 billion, and the trend toward increasing concentration of wealth in the hands of the privileged few continues this year as well.

The third driver of global hunger is *the climate crisis*. This past year extreme weather events related to climate change have caused unprecedented damage. According to the report, climate disasters—storms, floods, and droughts—pushed nearly 16 million people in 15 countries to crisis levels of hunger. Each climate disaster, the report states, leads us downward into deepening poverty and hunger. Tragically, the countries hit hardest by climate shocks are those with the lowest levels of fossil fuel consumption.

Looking at the crisis of global hunger from a Buddhist point of view, I would hold that beneath the three causes of hunger outlined in the Oxfam report there lies a deeper web of causation that ultimately stems from the human mind. At the base of conflict and war, extreme economic inequality, and ever more deadly climate devastation we would find the “three root defilements”—greed, hatred, and delusion—along with their many offshoots.

Although we cannot expect that these dark dispositions of the human mind will ever be extirpated on a global scale, if we are to solve the interwoven problems of hunger and poverty, we must mitigate, at least to a sufficient extent, their collective manifestations.

Ultimately, the persistence of hunger in our world is a moral failure as much as a sign of flawed policies. To significantly reduce global hunger we need not only wise policies—as critical as these may be—but a fundamental reorientation in our values that cuts at the roots of economic injustice, militarism, and environmental destruction. Without such inner changes, policy changes will inevitably be limited in impact and diluted by those opposed to them.

I would posit two internal changes as most crucial to our efforts to eliminate poverty and hunger. One is *a widening of our sense of empathy*, a willingness to embrace in solidarity all those who daily face the harsh struggle to subsist. The other is *an intelligent grasp of our long-range good*, the wisdom to see that our real common good extends far beyond narrow economic indicators, that we all flourish when we create the conditions for everyone to flourish.

We already have at our disposal the means of tackling each of the drivers of global hunger identified in the Oxfam report. What we need is the foresight, the compassion, and the moral courage to enact them and promote them on a sufficiently wide scale.

Empathy is indispensable, and for this we need to expand our sense of identity, to learn to regard those facing daily hardships not as mere abstractions—as statistics or distant “others”—but as human beings fully endowed with inherent dignity. We must see them as essentially like ourselves, sharing our basic desire to live, thrive, and contribute to their communities. We must see that their lives matter to them—and to those who love them—as much as our lives matter to each of us.

But empathy on its own is not enough. We also need a clear insight into our true long-term good as a species sharing a common planet. This means we must look beyond profits and stock values as our criteria of success, taking other standards than rapid economic growth and returns on investments as the ends of global policy. Instead, we must give priority to the values critical to social solidarity and planetary sustainability.

These should include, at minimum, providing economic security to all, pursuing racial and gender equality, and protecting the natural environment from reckless exploitation and destruction by commercial interests.

Certainly, we should continue to advocate for the policies and programs offered as antidotes to world hunger. But behind such policies and programs we need changes in our views and attitudes: a right understanding of the human good and a broad commitment to the well-being of all who share this planet with us.

By widening our vision, we would see that we can only fully flourish when we establish the conditions for everyone to flourish. With a wide sense of empathy, we’ll strive to create a world in which no one has to go hungry. [IDN- InDepthNews — 19 September 2021]

Note: Bhikkuh Bodhi is founder of [Buddhist Global Relief](#). Born Jeffrey Block in 1944, he is an American Theravada Buddhist monk, ordained in Sri Lanka and currently teaching in the New York and New Jersey area.

Faith Based Groups Lead Call To Defund Industrial Agriculture in Africa

Prior to the launch of the UNFSS, an alliance of faith-based and civil society groups working for food sovereignty and sustainability in Africa called on donors to stop funding the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) and other programs that promote industrialized agriculture on the continent.

The Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA) is the continent’s largest network of faith-based organizations and other civil society groups, representing more than 200 million farmers, fishers, pastoralists, and Indigenous peoples across Africa. In early September, AFSA delivered a letter - endorsed by international organizations - to AGRA donors, saying “AGRA has unequivocally failed in its mission to increase productivity and incomes and reduce food insecurity,” and stated in a press release that AGRA “does not speak for African small-scale farmers.” t said AGRA, which was created with the goal of transforming smallholder agricultural ventures into farming businesses, should be defunded and said donors should instead “support African-led efforts to expand agroecology and other low-input farming systems.”

AFSA also criticized AGRA for promoting monoculture farming — growing only one crop at each time on a specific field - as that forces farmers to rely on chemicals that harm the environment while making the farmers themselves dependent on corporations and long supply chains. ASFA said the organization’s strategy “undermines resilience, and increases the risks of debt for small-scale farmers in the face of climate change.”

AGRA was founded in 2006 with the vision of using a “green revolution” - a push to transform agriculture and raise yields through what it calls “innovative approaches” - to increase the income and food security of 30 million small-scale farmer households by 2021. To achieve these goals, AGRA received funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, as well as other donors including the United States, United Kingdom, and Germany.

* For more information please refer to – <https://www.devex.com/news>

Security Challenges We Face Are Climate and Disease, World Leaders Need to Rise Up

By Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama, Prime Minister of Fiji Islands

Fiji Islands Prime Minister Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama is the current Chair of the 18-member Pacific Islands Forum.



Prime Minister of Fiji addressing the UN General Assembly virtually on September 25, 2021 (Photo credit: PM's official Website).

SUVA (IDN) - The United Nations report to the UN General Assembly this year is titled “Our multilateral challenges: UN 2:0” a Common Agenda the blueprint for a future that is better, greener, and safer—and I would humbly add, “bluer”.

We want that future for Fiji. We want islands inhabited by citizens who stand with nature and not against it. We want sustainable economic growth that is powered by clean energy and protected from the impacts of climate change.

We want robust and resilient health systems, and we want good jobs and income supported by a green and blue economy. To succeed, our vision must become the vision of humanity, because our fate is the world's fate.

The world's present course leads nowhere near the future we want for ourselves. A deadly pathogen is burning through humanity like a bushfire - and inequity is fanning the flames. This year alone, climate-driven floods, heatwaves, fires, and cyclones have killed hundreds and inflicted unsustainable economic damage. We humans are the cause, but we are refusing to become the solution.

The UN Secretary General's recommendations in “Our Common Agenda” are spot on. We must meet this moment with a new UN- a new energy, new resources, and new bonds of trust with the people this institution serves.

A new UN that empowers those on the margins of society - particularly women and girls - and brings them into the centre of global decision-making.

In the past year, it has become clearer that we face two pandemics - one that is ending for the wealthy nations and one that is worsening across much of the developing world. That widening chasm can be measured in lives lost and in years of economic progress undone.

Across the Global South, what the world once branded as “sustainable development” is unravelling before our eyes. Hundreds of millions of jobs have been lost, hundreds of millions of people cannot access adequate food, and an entire generation has had their education disrupted. The wounds of this crisis will cripple us for years if left untreated.

Fiji's experience shows how an equitable recovery can begin. It starts by getting jabs in arms, fast. After one full year with zero local COVID cases, the insidious Delta variant crept into our country and sparked a deadly second outbreak. After a slow start while we scrambled to acquire enough vaccines, we are winning the battle.

Over 98% of adults across our 110 populated islands have one jab of the vaccine, and more than 67% are fully vaccinated. We thank India, Australia, New Zealand and the United States for helping us secure the doses we needed.

Our mission now is to recover the more than 100,000 jobs lost to the pandemic and to recoup a 50% loss in Government revenues. Soon, Fiji will reopen to tourism and to regional and international business. We will look to accelerate investment trends, like increased digitization, that will modernize our economy and help it recover.

But Fiji's victory over the virus will be short-lived unless the global community can accelerate vaccinations everywhere. It is appalling that wealthier countries are already considering third doses or boosters for their citizens while millions of people - including frontline healthcare workers - in the developing world cannot access a single dose. Globally, thousands of lives are still being lost every day to the virus. The majority represent our collective failure to make vaccines available to developing countries.

Vaccine nationalism must end. The G7, G20, and multilateral financial institutions have failed to stop it. Only the UN can fill this void of leadership. I join other leaders in calling on the UN to convene an urgent special meeting of Leaders to agree to a time bound, costed, and detailed plan for the full vaccination of developing countries.

Vaccine inequity is a symptom of a much larger injustice, one that is inherent to the international economic system. This injustice is the unequal distribution of finance, or access to finance, that can fuel a recovery.

While wealthy nations have propped up their economies by printing and investing trillions at near zero interest rates, developing nation - particularly small states - have had to borrow at punitive rates to simply keep our people alive, fed, and healthy.

Through the pandemic, my government rolled out the largest cash transfer program in our history- providing hundreds of millions of dollars in unemployment benefits to nearly one-third of Fiji's adult population. We even expanded some of our social protection programs, including pensions for the elderly, and financial support for the differently abled and other vulnerable communities.

The alternative was mass destitution, which we would not accept. But to pay for it, we had to take on debt, precipitated by massive reduction in Government revenue.

We need a more innovative framework for development finance that recognises the unique needs of SIDS (Small Island Developing States). And we must adopt a more sophisticated framework of assessing debt sustainability that incorporates the urgency of building resilience and breaks free of the norms of the 20th century.

This pandemic has been a painful lesson about where unilateral action can lead and where our multilateral institutions are unwilling to go. We must find new frontiers of co-operation if we stand any chance of averting future pandemics - or staving off the worst of climate change. If small States are to build back greener, bluer, and better, we will need an equal voice about and vote on decisions that determine our future. Small States need our interests heard, understood, and acted upon.

Despite all the talk we hear of saving the planet, the world's collective commitments are paltry. Akin to spitting into the strengthening winds of climate-fuelled super-storms.

The climate is on track for 2.7 degrees Celsius of global warming, which would ensure the loss of entire low-lying nations in the Pacific and huge chunks of global coastlines. It guarantees frequent devastation from floods, cyclones, coastal inundations, and wildfires. It spells climate-driven conflict, mass migration, and the collapse of food systems and ecosystems. It is appalling. It is unimaginable. But it is where we are headed.

Since March 2020, Fiji has experienced three cyclones- two of which approached Category Five intensity. Fijians are strong people. We endured much, and we will endure more still. But I am tired of applauding my people's resilience. True resilience is not just defined by a nation's grit but by our access to financial resources.

Today, SIDS are able to access less than 2 per cent of the available climate finance. To build a truly resilient Fiji, we need access to fast-deploying targeted grants, long-term concessionary financing and financial tools and instruments established through public-private collaboration and partnership.

The Fijian economy depends on a healthy ocean and so we are taking bold strides to reverse its current decline. We have committed to 100 per cent sustainable management of EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone) and 30 per cent declared as marine protected areas by 2030. We are expanding investments in sustainable aquaculture, seaweed farming, and high-value processed fish.

But we cannot do this alone. We look to the global system to stop illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing. We look to UN member states to agree to a new treaty to preserve marine in waters beyond national jurisdictions.

In one month, we meet in Scotland for a hugely consequential COP. The Pacific's mission in Glasgow is clear: we must keep the 1.5 target alive.

This demands drastic emissions cuts by 2030 that put large nations on a path towards net-zero emissions before 2050.

Leaders who cannot summon the courage to unveil these commitments and policy packages at COP26 should not bother booking a flight to Glasgow. Instead, they - and the selfish interests they stand for - should face consequences that match the severity of what they are unleashing on our planet.

We do not tolerate war between States. So, how can we tolerate war waged against the planet, on the life it sustains, and on future generations? That is the firm red line Pacific nations will draw in Glasgow. We are demanding net-zero emissions and accepting zero excuses.

At COP26, the global north must finally deliver on \$100 Billion per year in climate finance and agree to a pathway to increase financing commitments to at least \$750 Billion per year from 2025 forward.

If we can spend trillions on missiles, drones, and submarines, we can fund climate action. It is criminal that vulnerable Pacific Small Island Developing States can access a mere 0.05% of the climate finance currently available to protect ourselves from an existential crisis we did not cause.

These are the challenges we face, and we must find the courage to face them squarely. The consequences of not doing so are simply unthinkable. [IDN-InDepthNews — 28 September 2021]

We Are in a Global State of Emergency on Extreme Poverty Viewpoint by Shameran Abed



Buildings affected by worsening flooding in Bangladesh(left). After Nurjahan moved into a slum to escape flooding in Bangladesh's south, she used the Graduation program to give her and her family a new outlook on life (right). (Photo credit: BRAC 2019)

DHAKA (IDN) — It is time we start treating extreme poverty as the global emergency it is. This International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, October 17, we are looking at 100 million more people being forced into extreme poverty by the end of 2021 as a result of COVID-19, joining nearly 700 million people who were living in extreme poverty before the pandemic struck.

This increase is likely to be most significant in low-income countries, where poverty is projected to increase at a faster rate than before the pandemic.

Hundreds of millions of people worldwide have limited access to income, food, clean water, healthcare, and employment, yet extreme poverty does not receive the attention or resources that other humanitarian crises do from the international community.

Extreme poverty is more than a lack of income - it is inextricably linked to and exacerbated by ongoing disasters, contributing to rises in child labor, gender inequality, and famine around the world.

In 2020, progress in eliminating child labor stalled for the first time in 20 years² due to rising poverty in Africa; 47 million more women and girls have been pushed into extreme poverty by the pandemic; and amid rising poverty and food prices, 41 million people are at imminent risk of famine in 2021.

The lack of urgent action on ending extreme poverty has been due, in part, to a misplaced belief that growth alone could end the deepest forms of poverty.

However, progress toward global poverty reduction began slowing in recent years³ and existing anti-poverty policies and programs were missing many of the most marginalized populations. 79 percent of the bottom quintile of earners in low-income countries were receiving no social assistance whatsoever.

The data is clear: We will not be able to eliminate extreme poverty under the status quo.

COVID-19 has further exacerbated the issue and made clear that we need all sectors at the global, regional, and local levels to actively take measures to alleviate the worst forms of poverty.

The pandemic has taken the world off course in poverty reduction, particularly in low income countries where poverty is projected to increase at a rate of 2.7% in 2021 as compared to 0.2% before the pandemic. The long-term global impact could mean nearly 600 million people could still be living in extreme poverty by 2030, an increase of 50 million people compared to pre-pandemic estimates.

Setting a course to eradicate extreme poverty in the foreseeable future will require increased financial support from the international community as many of the governments who are facing rising levels of extreme poverty lack the fiscal space to address it. But money alone will not be enough to address this emergency. Countries will also need to change their policies and programs aimed at poverty reduction to ensure they reach people who are poorest and enable them to build long-term resilience.

² Download ILO report 'Child Labour – Global estimates 2020, trends and the road forward' - https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---ipec/documents/publication/wcms_797515.pdf

³ Progress toward ending poverty has slowed, World Bank Blogs - <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/progress-toward-ending-poverty-has-slowed#:~:text=While%20the%20global%20rate%20of,registered%20between%202013%20and%202015>

Extreme poverty is not insurmountable. Evidence-based interventions with the potential to make a tremendous impact on extreme poverty worldwide exist. They are called economic inclusion programs, and they have enabled millions of people around the world to escape cycles of extreme poverty.

These interventions focus on empowering people who have been socially and economically excluded to build sustainable livelihoods and often involve providing support for their basic needs alongside asset transfers, skills training, and ongoing coaching.

A recent report from the Partnership for Economic Inclusion at the World Bank finds that these interventions are experiencing an unprecedented surge worldwide, with 219 programs now reaching nearly 92 million people across 75 countries.

With government-led programs scaling in some countries, economic inclusion programs could reach nearly 20 percent of all people experiencing extreme poverty by 2030. Economic inclusion interventions have the ability to break the poverty cycle for good.

The evidence base supporting this is broad and growing; research from LSE (London School of Economics) found 93% of participants in BRAC's Ultra-Poor Graduation program in Bangladesh⁴ have seen a continued increase in income, savings, consumption, and self-esteem for years after program interventions ended. Innovations for Poverty Action compared Village Enterprise's Graduation program in Uganda to cash transfers of the same cost and found that economic inclusion interventions led to greater improvements in income, consumption, nutrition, and subjective well-being than cash alone.

More evidence is surfacing that suggests these programs have long-term impact. MIT research by Garima Sharma and Nobel Laureates Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo studied Bandhan's Graduation program in West Bengal, finding that even ten years after starting the interventions, participants saw significant improvements in their consumption, food security, income, and health.

Another study conducted by LSE and BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD) finds that more than a decade after completing BRAC's Graduation program in Bangladesh, participants were more likely to have more productive jobs with greater job security in 2020 despite the economic shocks of COVID-19.

As development actors seek to make meaningful strides in poverty eradication, an emphasis on sustained impacts and resilience building will be more crucial than ever as worsening climate shocks such as flooding, drought, and soil erosion threaten to destroy lives and livelihoods.

By scaling economic inclusion interventions, countries can go beyond providing much-needed cash and food aid, enabling people in extreme poverty to build their savings, diversify and increase their incomes, and learn the skills needed to withstand shocks which would otherwise force them back into the poverty trap. Beyond increased financing and more effective long-term approaches, eradicating extreme poverty will require a shift in political will. To drive systems change around the emergency of extreme poverty, we need a new paradigm for how we think and talk about it.

Many still believe poverty is a fact of life and there is little we can do about it. This is demonstrably false when we have rigorous evidence to show that a single, two-year intervention can empower people to escape extreme poverty and improve their wellbeing for years afterward.

We need to start viewing extreme poverty as a policy choice and take the steps needed to change policies to better meet the complex needs of people who experience it. We also need to stop viewing people in extreme poverty as victims.

When given the right tools and resources, people who are the furthest behind can become agents of change in their lives, escaping the poverty trap and building the resilience to continue an upward trajectory that benefits their households and communities.

To truly move the needle on ending extreme poverty by 2030, financial and political change is needed, but it is not impossible. We must strive to mobilize support and resources at the global, regional, and local levels, cultivating multisectoral partnerships to rapidly expand proven anti-poverty policies and programs. Only then will we be treating this issue with the urgency it deserves. [IDN-InDepthNews – 14 October 2021]

** The writer is Executive Director, BRAC International. Originally founded in 1972 as the Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee and later known as the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, BRAC's operations have grown globally and with that growth, the organization is now simply known as BRAC.*

Link to website of BRAC - <https://www.bracinternational.nl/en/>

⁴ See for more information - <https://bracupgi.org/about-bracs-graduation-approach/>

A Climate Awakening Is Urgently Needed to Save The World's Most Vulnerable

Viewpoint by Georges Rebelo Pinto Chikoti



OACPS Secretary General Georges Rebelo Pinto Chikoti (Photo credit: OACPS)

BRUSSELS (IDN) — Time is fast running out for millions of peoples living in situations of high risk where lives, livelihoods and a safe, secure place to live are all at stake.

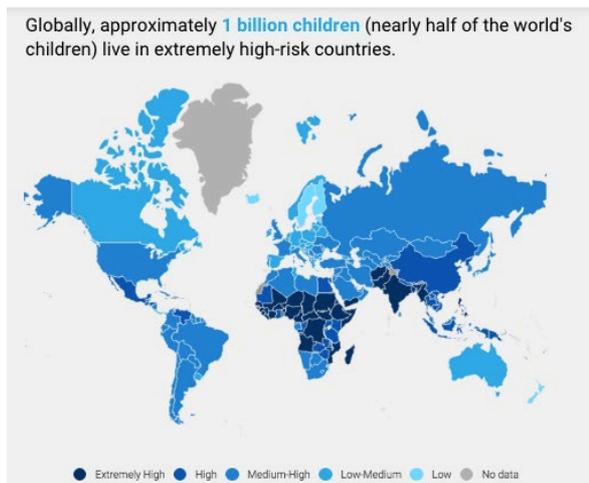
Extreme climate and weather-related devastation is occurring at unprecedented scales, frequencies and intensities. We need only to look at the headlines of recent months to see the onslaught of drought, wildfires, hurricanes, torrential rains and floods right across the Blue Planet—North; South; East; West.

The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Report⁵, published on 6 August, confirms that global warming will rise from 1.5 °C to 2 °C by the middle of the 21st Century, unless immediate, profound, large-scale and sustained measures are taken to reduce CO₂, methane, and other greenhouse gas emissions.

The report also provides evidence of how human influence and activities have warmed the Earth's atmosphere, oceans and lands. And how, sadly, those who are currently most affected and vulnerable to future climate shocks are the people who have contributed the least to the global climate emergency.

For the 79 members of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS), which include the lion's share of the World's Small Island Developing States (SIDS); Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Land-Locked Countries (LLDCs), the rising temperatures and the impacts of climate change are higher and more significant than the global average.

Yet the level of their greenhouse gas emissions remains negligible. OACPS economies and livelihoods, and peoples and ecosystems health and wellbeing are becoming even more severely affected. For example, a four-year long drought in Madagascar, the worse in forty years, threatens tens of thousands of people with famine. And in Haiti, heavy flash floods in August further compounded the misery of a population already struggling to recover from the devastating impacts of an earthquake which struck just days before the floods. These exemplify how the poorest and least protected of the world's population are at the frontline and how they are the ones bearing the full brunt of the climate crisis.



Source: UNICEF (2021), The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children's Climate Risk Index

The UNICEF Report 'The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis'⁶, also released in August 2021, further demonstrates increasing vulnerabilities. It highlights how almost half of the world's 2.2 billion children are already at 'extremely high risk' from the impacts of the climate crisis and pollution. I concur with UNICEF's Executive Director, Ms Henrietta Fore who said that this is an "unimaginably dire situation". It is a situation that must be urgently addresses if we are to have any chance of achieving the future we want for ourselves, our children and their children.

With the 26th United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP26) convening on 1st November 2021, the 79 member States and six regions and UNFCCC climate negotiators of the OACPS are collaborating with and calling upon like-minded Partners to join their efforts to ensure COP26 delivers on the most pressing issues for developing, vulnerable countries. All 79 member countries of the OACPS are vulnerable countries.

⁵ See 'IPCC, 2021: Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change' - <https://www.ipcc.ch/assessment-report/ar6/>

⁶ See 'The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children's Climate Risk Index. New York: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2021' - <https://www.unicef.org/reports/climate-crisis-child-rights-crisis>

In this regard, it is worth underscoring the view of Ambassador Tosi Mpanu-Mpanu, Chair of the UNFCCC Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA), who has pointed out that “Despite several challenges and uncertainties due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the UK Presidency and the Chairs of the subsidiary bodies are working closely and at pace to ensure the readiness of Parties to effectively engage in advancing ongoing work, and finalising outstanding issues of the Paris Agreement rulebook.”

With just over one month to go until COP26 convenes the SBSTA Co-Chairs’ efforts to convene informal technical expert events on various topics of priority and import, to prepare for a successful COP in Glasgow that delivers must be commended. It is my view that all Parties should actively engage in the informal events to prepare and be ready for Glasgow. I have heard Ambassador Mpanu Mpanu’s plea that “Time is running out, and the world can no longer afford to delay any decision. We must bring the climate process back on track and to take climate action and ambition forward.” I hope that you will also hear his impassioned call.

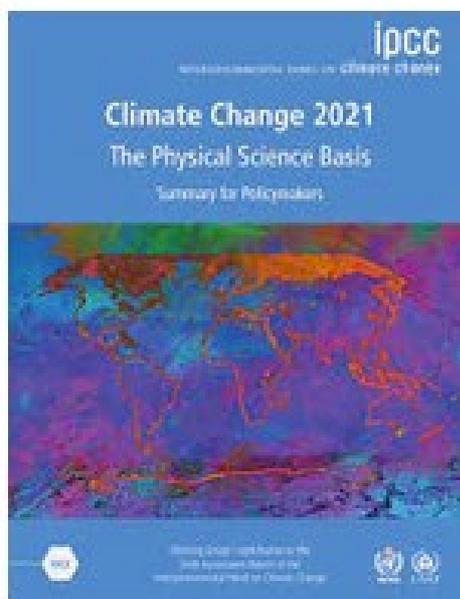
On behalf of the OACPS I call upon and urge all Parties to commit to further strengthening their greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets in the next round of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). I also call on all Parties to increase climate ambitions and adaptation actions (giving them the same weight as mitigation), scaling up technical and financial support to least developed and most vulnerable countries, including capacity building, technology transfer and provisions to loss and damage linked to the adverse effects of climate change.

COP26 will be decisive in determining how to expand climate finance beyond the current commitment to mobilise at least US\$100 billion in climate finance in the post-2020 period and beyond. As we all grapple with the climate crisis we know that additional, predictable, easily accessible, and clearly defined financial resources needs to be made available to support climate adaptation and resilience building initiatives of the most vulnerable countries, which include all members of the OACPS.

Following through on long-term commitments

According to the recent IPCC Report, limiting future climate change requires limiting cumulative CO₂ emissions, achieving at least zero net emissions and strong, rapid and sustained reductions in CH₄ emissions, which would also decrease the warming effect and aerosol pollution to improve air quality.

While the challenge is huge, it is not insurmountable. But we must act now and we have to act together. It will require a whole, systemic transformation from local action to global coordination. Our global commitment and momentum to accelerate climate change adaptation and mitigation actions will be crucial. We need to be more expansive in our outlook and exploration, including embracing ecosystem-based approaches to tackle the global challenges of environmental degradation, and the biodiversity and climate change crises. We need to think and act in an integrated and more connected way.



Members of the OACPS realise that clear risk-informed methodologies to translate global goals on adaptation and mitigation into national strategies and plans, complemented by adequate finance, capacity building, and technological support is required.

We the OACPS, a 79 Members strong international organisation of developing, vulnerable countries spanning the African, Caribbean and the Pacific continents and sea of islands are counting on the strong leadership from developed countries at COP26, to provide clarity, reliability, and predictability on how they will fulfil their long-term commitments to mobilise at least US\$100 billion in climate finance in the post-2020 period and beyond, as well as mechanisms to coherently access and channel those funds. We also welcome the launch of the deliberations on the new, collective quantified goal (post-2025). [IDN-InDepthNews — 26 September 2021]

** The writer is Secretary-General of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS).*

Global COVID-19 Summit: Which Way Africa?

By Githinji Gitahi

Following the US-hosted Summit, Dr. Githinji Gitahi, the Group CEO of Amref Health Africa, says Africa should be outraged that barely 4 per cent of its population is fully vaccinated, outlines 5 steps to end the vaccine injustice.



Dr Githinji Gitahi (Photo credit: Africa Renewal. IJN)

The number of fully vaccinated people in Africa stands at barely 4 per cent of the continent's population, compared to up to 80 per cent for some of the high-income countries; despite having a near 75 per cent acceptance rate. This is a supply and not a demand problem.

Policy makers in Africa and communities at all levels should be outraged!

The recently concluded Global COVID-19 Summit hosted by US President Joe Biden on *Ending the Pandemic and Building Back Better Health Security to Prepare for the Next*⁷, served its objective – to marshal more doses and financial support to developing nations where COVID-19 tools; vaccines, treatments and supplies remain scarce.

Several commitments were announced at the summit, including the delivery of at least 2.6 billion vaccines to accelerate vaccination, hoping to vaccinate 40 per cent of the world's population by the end of 2021, and up to 70 per cent by September 2022.

As plans are underway to ensure commodity security, we welcome the additional contributions of approximately 850 million COVID-19 vaccine doses (for the world) and commitments from leaders of countries and organizations to save lives now and build back better.

These are the first, in a long line of steps to secure Africa's ability to fight for its future. We applaud South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa for underscoring the need for a sustainable plan on how developing countries will meet targets around vaccination, oxygen, diagnostics and personal protective equipment, as well as boost manufacturing.

Summit goals met?

The Summit certainly met its goals to garner support; however, we are still miles away from COVID-19 pandemic control and building better health security for Africa.

At Amref Health Africa, we have been at the forefront of engaging communities on the continent, providing technical assistance to ministries of health, educating and supporting deployment of health workers and defining a new way of doing public health in Africa.

As we move forward, the 5 imperatives for ending vaccine injustice in Africa are the following:

1. **Donations not loans!** Vaccines that come at a cost, however low, or those acquired through World Bank loans increase the debt burden.

Africa, a continent that is home to 17 per cent of the world's population but accounts for only 2.7 per cent of global production cannot afford more than \$50 per capita of public expenditure on health even at maximum tax efficiency, maximum allocation to health and 100 per cent budget execution. For an African country to buy its own COVID-19 vaccines, it has to spend more than 30 per cent of its total health budget. **Therefore, COVID-19 vaccinations to Africa cannot be through loans but through multilateralism. Health, just like climate change mitigation, is a GLOBAL PUBLIC GOOD.**

2. **End vaccine injustice!** Demand that rich countries stop stockpiling COVID-19 vaccines. Vaccine manufacturers and countries with vaccine stockpiles should prioritize and accelerate dose commitments to

⁷ See <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/09/24/global-covid-19-summit-ending-the-pandemic-and-building-back-better/>

COVAX and the African Vaccine Acquisition Task Team (AVATT) giving these mechanisms room to move forward in the queue.

Timely delivery of these vaccines is critical; only 15 per cent of pledged doses have been delivered in Africa to date. Delays mean continual spread of the virus and the increase in the virus variants, regression of hard-earned gains made for health systems and prolonged economic recession. ***An explicit timeline must be shared with COVAX to enable transparent and equitable distribution and the eventual end to this pandemic suffering.***

3. Strengthen existing global architecture: Before creating new mechanisms, we need to strengthen what we have. African governments must sign on to calls to support the strengthening of WHO's pandemic preparedness instruments and existing global and regional health architecture. These include the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, Gavi, the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) and so on; as well as civil society platforms for community mobilization and accountability.

4. Invest in people-centered health systems: Specifically, realistic, country-specific plans focused on communities and individuals, their needs, and their concerns. We have to re-imagine our health as defined in Africa CDC's new Public Health Order for Africa. It addresses health systems broadly, and the systems needed to improve health security in Africa. It aims at strengthening public health capacity, especially in national public health institutes; increasing investments in health financing and harmonizing regulatory policies to enable flow of commodities and labour; investing in training Africa's public health workforce; increasing local manufacturing of health commodities; and leveraging partnerships to meet these goals.

5. Build manufacturing capacity now to guarantee commodity security: We also acknowledge South Africa's new role in hosting the WHO technology transfer hub for the region. Manufacturers need to share licenses, technology and other tools to boost manufacturing for Africa.

African governments, through the African Union, must commit to fund regional manufacturing hubs (at a minimum) and shaping markets to ensure supply matches demand with minimal duplication and waste.

Amref Health Africa is firmly committed to ending COVID-19 vaccine injustice and we continue to fight for vaccine equity. Africa must be uncomfortable with the status quo.

Source for above article: Africa Renewal, 30 September 2021 - <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/october-2021/global-covid-19-summit-which-way-africa>

WHO Supporting South African Consortium to Establish first COVID mRNA Vaccine Technology Transfer Hub



The World Health Organization (WHO) and its COVAX partners are working with a South African consortium comprising Biovac, Afrigen Biologics and Vaccines, a network of universities and the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to establish its first COVID mRNA vaccine technology transfer hub.

The move follows WHO's global call for Expressions of Interest on 16 April 2021 to establish COVID mRNA vaccine technology transfer hubs to scale up production and access to COVID vaccines. Over the coming weeks, the partners will negotiate details with the Government of South Africa and public and private partners inside the country and from around the world.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said: "The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the full extent of the vaccine gap between developed and developing economies, and how that gap can severely undermine global health security. This landmark initiative is a major advance in the international effort to build vaccine development and manufacturing capacity that will put Africa on a path to self determination. South Africa welcomes the opportunity to host a vaccine technology transfer hub and to build on the capacity and expertise that already exists on the continent to contribute to this effort."

Source: WHO News Release, 21 June 2021 - <https://www.who.int/news/item/21-06-2021-who-supporting->

Tanzania's President Calls For Waving Of Vaccine Patents

By Pavithra Rao

Tanzanian President Samia Suluhu Hassan one of the few female heads of State from Africa to address the UN General Assembly in New York. decried the COVID-19 vaccine inequality, noting that high and middle-income countries were now giving booster vaccinations while developing countries such as Tanzania had barely inoculated even 2 percent of the population.

"The level of vaccine inequity that we see is appalling. It is truly disheartening to see that most of the countries have inoculated less than 2 per cent of the populace and thus need to seek more vaccines for our people," she said.

"With the current pace, it is less likely that we will meet the WHO threshold of vaccinating at least 40 percent of people in every country by end of 2021, and at least 70 percent by the first half of 2022."

While calling for the waiving of the rights of vaccine patents in order for all countries to be able to produce them, Ms. Suluhu also spoke about the devastating effects COVID-19 had on Tanzania's once-flourishing economy, including increased poverty levels and decreased economic growth.

"After the onset of the pandemic, we in Tanzania, and I believe in many other developing countries, were stuck in the twilight of protecting lives and livelihoods. Measures advocated by the WHO were geared towards protecting lives, however, an economy like Tanzania, consists of a bigger proportion people living on subsistence economy whom we need to keep afloat," she said.

The Tanzanian President also spoke at length on gender equality, a cause she avidly advocates.

"As the first female president in the history of my country, the burden of expectation to deliver gender equality is heavier on my shoulders. Being passionate about gender equality is not sufficient and as such, my government is reviewing policy and legal frameworks in order to come up with actionable and measurable plans to ensure economic empowerment of women and other aspects pertaining to gender equality and gender parity," she noted.

Stimulus packages, she said, were being created to reduce the number of women and girls living in poverty. She called for global unity, saying that countries are intertwined in their goals and that multilateralism must prevail in the face of COVID-19.

"Unilateralism will not get us anywhere when it comes to challenges that transcend our national boundaries. A wise person said, and I quote, 'Alone, one will go faster, but together, we will go far'."

Source: Africa Renewal, 24 September 2021 - <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/news/tanzanias-first-female-president-samia-suluhu-addresses-un-general-assembly-calls-global>



Tanzanian President Samia Suluhu Hassan addressing the UN General Assembly (Photo credit: UN Photo)



Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want

AGENDA 2063 is Africa's blueprint and master plan for transforming Africa into the global powerhouse of the future. It is the continent's strategic framework that aims to deliver on its goal for inclusive and sustainable development and is a concrete manifestation of the pan-African drive for unity, self-determination, freedom, progress and collective prosperity pursued under Pan-Africanism and African Renaissance. The genesis of Agenda 2063 was the realisation by African leaders that there was a need to refocus and reprioritise Africa's agenda from the struggle against apartheid and the attainment of political independence for the continent which had been the focus of The Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the precursor of the African Union; and instead to prioritise inclusive social and economic development, continental and regional integration, democratic governance and peace and security amongst other issues aimed at repositioning Africa to becoming a dominant player in the global arena.

As an affirmation of their commitment to support Africa's new path for attaining inclusive and sustainable economic growth and development African heads of state and government signed the 50th Anniversary Solemn Declaration during the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the formation of the OAU /AU in May 2013. The declaration marked the re-dedication of Africa towards the attainment of the Pan African Vision of An integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens, representing a dynamic force in the international arena and Agenda 2063 is the concrete manifestation of how the continent intends to achieve this vision within a 50 year period from 2013 to 2063.

Source for more information: African Union - <https://au.int/agenda2063/overview>

Malaysia: 'People Power Works': Malaysian Peat Forest Regazetted After Activist Pressure

By Robin Hicks

In a rare victory for environmental activism in Southeast Asia, a peat forest in Malaysia has been spared the bulldozers after a public outcry forced legislators to reconsider its fate.

A decision to degazette more than half of the Kuala Langat Utara Forest Reserve (KLNFR) in Selangor to turn it into a property development is to be voided, the state's chief minister Amirudin Shari said in a statement on Wednesday.

"The state government will stop the proposed development plan for the area and cancel the transfer of the land to the (developer) company (Gabungan Indah Sdn Bhd)," Shari told reporters. The development of the 958-hectare peat swamp forest has been widely opposed, by indigenous groups, environmental activists and community groups, and also Malaysia's national political coalition, which called the withdrawal of the forest's legal protection "irresponsible".

Source: eco-business.com, 9 Sept 2021 - <https://www.eco-business.com/news/people-power-works-malaysian-peat-forest-regazetted-after-activist-pressure/?sw-signup=true>



Activists celebrate the victory (Photo Credit: Shaq Koyo)

Australia: Concerns of Exploitation of Pacific Islander Migrant Meat Workers

Pacific island workers employed at a Victorian abattoir are taking home little more than \$9 an hour after hundreds of dollars are deducted from their weekly pay to cover airfares, visas, phone plans, housing and furniture rentals.

Contracts between Pacific islander meat workers and labour hire firm Regional Workforce Management Pty Ltd show some workers are left with just \$310 from their weekly pay of \$753 after the deductions are made, prompting exploitation concerns.

Although some deductions stop once airfares, vaccinations and visas have been repaid over a period of four months, contracts show other charges, including \$100 a week for housing and \$50 a week for transport, continue throughout a worker's three-year visa.

Details of the Pacific islander contracts come amid an Australian government investigation into worker exploitation in the nation's meat industry, which has for years been heavily reliant on migrant labour supplied by recruitment and labour hire agencies.

Source: Sydney Morning Herald - <https://www.smh.com.au/business/workplace/pacific-island-meat-workers-on-9-per-hour-after-wage-deductions-20210912-p58qyg.html>

USA: Bill to Stop Clothes Companies from Stealing Garment Worker Wages Passes California Assembly

By Sam Dean and Suhauna Hussain

Factory owners in California's garment industry have gotten away with illegally paying workers below-minimum wages for decades. A bill that cleared a major hurdle in the State Assembly on Sept 8th aims to change that, requiring apparel factories to pay garment workers an hourly wage and aiming to hold big businesses accountable for labor practices under their watch. The bill will head back to the state Senate for final approval before going to the governor's desk for signature.

By requiring an hourly wage, the bill bans the long-standing piece-rate system that often adds up to less than \$6 an hour, according to a 2016 UCLA study, while allowing employers to still offer productivity-based incentives to workers. It would also allow workers to claw back stolen wages from big fashion brands and retailers, instead of having to go after the small garment factories that those larger companies hire as subcontractors to keep costs low. Those small factories often shutdown and disappear before workers can reclaim their due.



(Photo Credit: Kheel Center. CC by 2.0)

Source: LA Times, 8 Sept 2021 - <https://www.latimes.com/business/story/2021-09-08/california-bill-sb62-garment-workers-wages-assembly-vote>

Philippines: Call Centers Are Capitalizing on COVID Crisis

By Cliff Venzon

MANILA -- As Zoom rose to become the pandemic era's top video conferencing platform, the U.S. company turned to the Philippines, the world's call center capital, for customer and operations support.

Zoom is one of dozens of new contracts won by Philippine business process outsourcing (BPO) companies during the pandemic, enabling the \$26.7 billion industry to expand despite a global recession. But while the sector, a pillar of the Philippines' \$361.5 billion economy, stands to benefit from companies' penchant for cost cuts during crises, automation by chatbots and artificial intelligence continue to hang over its future.

The industry, which includes non-voice services from IT support to animation, as well as call centers, saw revenue rise 1.4% to \$26.7 billion last year, according to the IT and Business Process Association of the Philippines (IBPAP). After increasing head count by 1.8% last year, it now employs 1.32 million of the Philippines' 109 million people.

Source: Nikkei Asia, 17 September 2021 - https://asia.nikkei.com/Business/Business-Spotlight/How-Philippine-call-centers-are-capitalizing-on-COVID-crisis?utm_campaign=IC_asia_daily_free&utm_medium=email&utm_source=NA_newsletter&utm_content=article_link

Sri Lanka: Opposition Grows As Sri Lanka Goes Organic

By Devinder Sharma

The uproar over Sri Lanka's path-breaking decision to go organic is on predictable lines. The same arguments, the same kind of fear psychosis, and the bogey of ideological thinking that will take the world backwards should not come as a surprise anymore. Any possible disruption to the power equilibrium dominated by agribusiness giants is sure to be met by an orchestra playing the usual wrong concerto.

Even before the UN Food Systems Summit recognised the need to move towards a healthier, more sustainable and more equitable food systems, Sri Lanka had made a bold resolve a few months earlier to put the concept of agro-ecological transformation into action by banning the imports of chemical fertiliser and pesticides, through a gazette notification on May 6. Coming after the ban on palm oil imports and the directive to growers to uproot the existing plantations in a phased manner, Sri Lanka has shown a remarkable determination to make a transition towards a healthy and sustainable future for farming.



Sri Lankan paddy field (Photo credit: Kalinga Seneviratne)

Addressing the UN General Assembly in New York on September 22, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa said: 'Sustainability is the cornerstone of Sri Lanka's national policy frame work. Because of the impact on soil-fertility, biodiversity, water ways and health, my government completely banned the use of chemical fertilisers, pesticides and weedicides earlier this year,' adding that the 'production and adoption of organic fertiliser as well as investments into organic agriculture are being incentivised.'

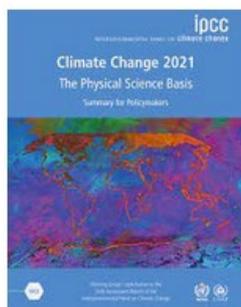
For a country reeling under a huge foreign debt burden, with as much as 80 per cent of the revenue collected going towards debt servicing, and at the same time faced with severe food shortages at home, the Sri Lankan President has so far stood firm against the panic being created in the name of growing food insecurity arising from an anticipated drop in production.

Source: The Tribune (India), 2 Oct 2021 - <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/comment/sri-lanka-goes-organic-318938>

Afghanistan: In the Grip of Hunger: Only 5 percent of Afghan Families Have Enough to Eat

As the harsh Afghan winter looms closer, recent surveys conducted by the World Food Programme (WFP) have revealed that only five percent of families have enough to eat every day, while half reported they had run out of food altogether at least once in the past two weeks. For the first time, urban residents are suffering from food insecurity at similar rates to rural communities, which have been ravaged by drought twice in the past three years. The situation is also dire among the middle classes, who used to be able to feed their families every day.

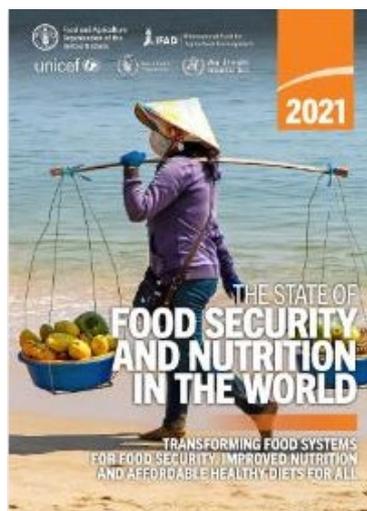
Source: World Fodo Program, 23 Sept 2021 - <https://www.wfp.org/stories/grip-hunger-only-5-percent-afghan-families-have-enough-eat>



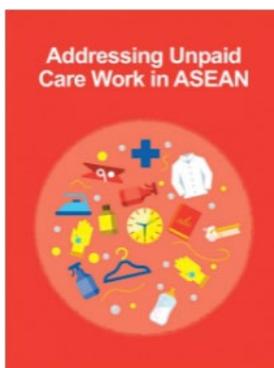
Climatic Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis was released in August 2021. The report addresses the most up-to-date physical understanding of the climate system and climate change, bringing together the latest advances in climate science. Many of the changes observed in the climate are unprecedented in thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of years, argues the report and warns that some of the changes – such as sea level rise – may be irreversible. However, it calls for strong and sustainable reduction measures to limit emission of carbon dioxide and other green house gases to limit climate change.

For more information and downloading of report go to - <https://www.ipcc.ch/assessment-report/ar6/>

The State Of Food Security and Nutrition In The World 2021: In recent years, several major drivers have put the world off track to ending world hunger and malnutrition in all its forms by 2030. The challenges have grown with COVID-19 pandemic and related containment measures. This report presents the global assessment of food security and nutrition for 2020 and offers some indication of what hunger might look like in 2030 when the achievement of SDGs are due.



For more information and downloading of report go to - <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb4474en>



Addressing Unpaid Care Work in ASEAN: This report describes the state of the unpaid care economy in ASEAN countries. By examining the socioeconomic, political, legislative and institutional conditions in each country of ASEAN, this report highlights examples of promising policy measures undertaken either prior to the COVID-19 pandemic or as emergency measures after its onset to address women's unpaid care and domestic work. The report proposes recommendations to introduce a care-sensitive dimension into national and regional gender policies towards building back better and more equal.

For more information and downloading of report go to - <https://www.unescap.org/kp/2021/addressing-unpaid-care-work-asean>

ARC8 Outlook Report 2030: Inclusive and diverse higher education in Asia and Europe: Written by experts and academics from Asia and Europe looks at the effects of the pandemic on higher education equity and inclusion. It calls for inclusion and diversity to be at the centre of the higher education dialogue at the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), the biennial forum for high-level Asia-Europe meetings.

For more information and downloading of report go to - <https://bit.ly/ARC8OutlookReport>



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.



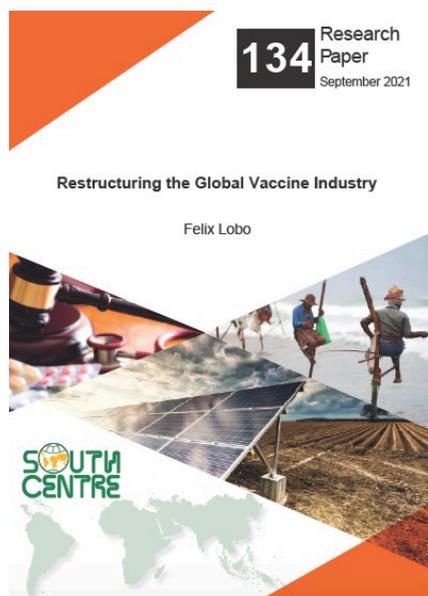
POLICY BRIEF
No. 102 | September 2021

Accelerating COVID-19 Vaccine Production via
Involuntary Technology Transfer

About The Author: Dr Olga Gurgula (PhD, LL.M) is a Lecturer in Intellectual Property Law at Brunel Law School, Brunel University London. She is also a Visiting Fellow at the Oxford Martin Programme on Affordable Medicines, University of Oxford.

Report Could be Downloaded from:
https://www.southcentre.int/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/PB102_Accelerating-COVID-19-Vaccine-Production-via-Involuntary-Technology-Transfer_EN.pdf

This policy brief explains that the currently discussed proposals at the WTO related to increasing the production of COVID-19 vaccines, including the EU proposal to clarify the use of compulsory licensing and the submission by South Africa and India on the intellectual property (IP) waiver, require complementary mechanisms to rapidly improve the production of COVID-19 vaccines that are urgently needed today. The key problem is that to accelerate the manufacture of COVID-19 vaccines, access to knowledge and know-how, that are protected by trade secrets owned by several pharmaceutical companies, is required. It is therefore important that governments implement an additional mechanism of compulsory licensing of trade secrets that would allow an involuntary transfer of COVID-19 vaccine technologies. Such a mechanism would be compliant with the TRIPS Agreement and relevant whether the TRIPS waiver is adopted or not agreed upon. While this mechanism must provide full access to the information necessary to manufacture the vaccines in question, it must also ensure the protection of the transferred trade secrets.



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Paper
September 2021

Restructuring the Global Vaccine Industry

Felix Lobo

The purpose of this report is to analyse the vaccines industry under the focus of Industrial Economics as an input for the design of the pertinent instruments to promote development, manufacturing and distribution of vaccines against SARS-CoV-2 in sufficient amounts to immunize all countries as soon as possible. We also need to be prepared for future emerging infectious diseases with the potential of global expansion.

The report shows that the vaccines industry is – and has been for a long time - far away from the competitive market paradigm with notorious market failures. As a result, the industry is underperforming with shortages and stockouts, exit of firms from the industry, underinvestment in research and development (R&D) and manufacturing, even an “anaemic development pipeline”, all signs of market failure.

After a brief review of policies implemented to tackle these problems we conclude that after the COVID-19 pandemic there is a need to implement a profound overhauling of the industry and to fundamentally reformulate and extend global public policies to stimulate R&D, manufacturing, distribution and access.

Download Report From - https://www.southcentre.int/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/RP134_Restructuring-the-Global-Vaccine-Industry_EN-1.pdf

SouthViews No. 228, 15 October 2021

Carving Out a Role for Human Rights in International Investment Law

by Barnali Choudhury

The public health burdens that have been imposed on governments by Covid-19 serve as an important reminder of the importance for states to be able to regulate public health as well as other human rights issues. Commentators are already describing the myriad of investment arbitration claims that states may expect to face for their acts in handling the Covid-19 crisis. By carving out a role for human rights in international investment law, states can ensure that protection of human dignity, not property interests, will continue to be their ultimate objective.

Download article from - <https://www.southcentre.int/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/SV228-211015.pdf>

As Asia Grapples 'Living With COVID-19' Media May Need to Shed Adversarial Culture

By Kalinga Seneviratne



Bali Opened for tourism on October 14. (Photo Credit: Travelling Lifestyle)

SYDNEY (IDN) — Indonesia's popular tourism islands of Bali opened for tourism October 14, while Thailand announced that from November 1 vaccinated travellers from 19 countries will be allowed to visit the kingdom including its tourism island of Phuket. Both those countries' tourism industry, which is a major revenue earner, has been devastated by over 18 months of inactivity that have impacted on the livelihood of hundreds of thousands of people.

India and Vietnam also announced plans to open the country to vaccinated foreign tourists in November, and Australia will be

opening its borders for foreign travel from mid-November for the first time since March 2020.

Countries in the Asia-Pacific region, except for China, are now beginning to grapple with balancing the damage to their economies from COVID-19 pandemic by beginning to treat the virus as another flu. The media may have to play a less adversarial role if this gamble is going to succeed.

October 11 was "Freedom Day" for Australia's most populous city Sydney when it came out of almost four months of a tough lockdown. Ironically this is happening while the daily COVID-19 infection rates are higher than the figure that triggered the lockdowns in June. Yet, New South Wales Premier Dominic Perrottet told Sky News on October 11, "we've got to live alongside the virus, it's not going away, the best thing that we can do is protect our people (by better health services)."

Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong addressing the nation on October 9 said: "Singapore cannot stay locked down and closed off indefinitely. It would not work, and it would be very costly". He added, "each time we tighten up, businesses are further disrupted, workers lose jobs, children are deprived of a proper childhood and school life". Singapore is coming out of lockdown when it is facing the highest rates of daily infections since the COVID-19 outbreak.

Both Singapore and Australia adopted a "zero-COVID" policy when the first wave of the pandemic hit, quickly closing the borders, and going into lockdown. Both were exceptionally successful in controlling the virus and lifting the lockdowns late last year with almost zero COVID-19 cases. But, when the more contagious Delta virus hit both countries, fear came back forcing them back into lockdowns.

However, PM Lee told Singaporeans that lockdowns have "caused psychological and emotional strain, and mental fatigue for Singaporeans and for everyone else. Therefore, we concluded a few months ago that a "Zero COVID" strategy was no longer feasible". Thus, Singapore has changed its policy to "Living with COVID-19".

In a Facebook posting on October 10, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said: "The phenomenal response from Australians to go and get vaccinated as we've seen those vaccination rates rise right across the country, means it's now time that Australians are able to reclaim their lives. We're beating COVID, and we're taking our lives back."

On October 8, Australia's federal health minister Greg Hunt said that though infection rates may still be a bit high yet less than 1 percent of those infected are in Intensive Care Units(ICUs). Why didn't political leaders take this attitude right from the beginning and continued with it? After all the fatality rate of COVID-19 has not been that much higher than the seasonal flu in most countries. True, it was perhaps more contagious according to medical opinion, but fatality rates were not that large in percentage figures.

According to the Worldometer of health statistics, there have been 237.5 million COVID-19 infections up to October this year and 214.6 million have recovered fully (90.4 percent) while 4.8 million have died (just over 2 percent). According to the US Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates, there have been between 39-56 million flu cases, about 700,000 flu hospitalizations recorded in the US during the 2019-2020 flu season up to April 2020. They also estimate between 24,000 to 62,000 flu deaths during the season. But did the media give these figures on a daily or even a weekly basis?

In March 2019, WHO launched a new global influenza strategy pointing out that each year there is an estimated 1 billion flu cases of which 3-5 million are severe cases, resulting in 290,000 to 650,000 influenza-related respiratory deaths. This has been happening for many years, but, yet the global media did not create the panic scenario that accompanied COVID-19.

Unfortunately, the media's adversarial reporting culture has helped to create a fear psychosis from the very beginning of the outbreak in early 2020, which may have contributed to millions of deaths by creating anxiety among those diagnosed with COVID-19. During the peak of the Delta pandemic in India, many patients died from heart attacks triggered by anxiety. Would they have died if COVID-19 were treated as another flu?

In the US out of the 44 million infected with COVID-19 only 1.6 percent died. In Brazil from 21.5 million infected 2.8 percent of them died, while in India out of 34 million infected only 1.3 percent died. But what did we see in media reports? Piles of dead bodies being burnt in India, from Brazil bodies buried in mass graves by health workers wrapped in safety gear and in the US, people being rushed into ICUs. They are just a small fraction of those infected.

I was the co-editor of a book just released by a British publisher that looked at how the media across the world reported the COVID-19 outbreak during 2020. It paints a bleak picture of sensationalism and adversarial reporting blended with racism and politicization. It all started with the outbreak in Wuhan in January 2020 when the global media transmitted unverified video clips of people dropping dead in the streets and dead bodies lying in pavements. Along with the focus on "unhygienic" wet markets in China this helped to project an image of China as a threat to the world.

It contributed to the fear psychosis that was built up by the media tinged with racism and politicization. If we are to live with COVID and other flu viruses, greater investments need to be made in public health.

In Australia, health experts are talking about boosting hospital bed and ICU capacities to deal with the new policy of living with COVID, and they have also warned of a shortage of health professionals, especially to staff ICUs.

What about if the media focus on these as national security priorities? Rather than giving daily death rates and sensational stories of people dying from COVID—do we give daily death rates from heart attacks or suicide?

We should start discussing more about how to create sustainable safe communities as we recover from the pandemic, and that includes better investments in public health. We need a journalism culture that is less adversarial and more tuned into promoting cooperation and community harmony.

* Kalinga Seneviratne is the co-editor of 'COVID-19, Racism and Politicization: Media in the Midst of a Pandemic' published in August 2021 by Cambridge Scholars Publishers. [IDN-InDepthNews – 15 October 2021]

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