

African Agenda

ISSUE Vol. 19 No.2 2016

US\$5.00 GB£3.00 €5.00



**Which way
Africa's CFTA?**

Contents

COVER

CFTA blues as Africa hastens to establish
Free Trade Area..... page 5

Trade for Economic Justice? The Continental Free
Trade Area and the structural transformation agenda
in Africa..... page 11

DEVELOPMENT

How and why China became Africa's biggest aid donor... .. page 13

Increasing economic inequality not inevitable..... page 16

Back to square one..... page 18

Outflanking the war on drugs..... page 21

INTERNATIONAL

Is South America's 'progressive cycle' at an end?..... page 24

Palestinian population needs greater protection..... page 27

Land grabbing is killing Honduras' indigenous peoples..... page 31

RIGHTS

Mozambique's movement to end land grabs..... page 33

Is the war against drugs a war against women?..... page 35

Local anger is rising against South Africa's resource curse..... page 37

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African Agenda is published six times a year by Third World Network (TWN) Africa.

TWN is an international network of groups and individuals who seek greater articulation of the needs and rights of the peoples of the Third World, especially marginalised social groups, a fair distribution of the world's resources and forms of development which are ecologically sustainable and fulfil human needs. TWN Africa is grateful to Oxfam-NOVIB, Development and Peace, InterPares (Canada), TrustAfrika, Rockefeller Brothers Fund and Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.



page 5 photo : AU's Commissioner for Trade and Industry

African Agenda

Published by TWN Africa

Editor-in-Chief: Yao Graham

Editor: Cornelius Adedze

Design: David Roy Quashie

EDITORIAL, SUBSCRIPTIONS AND ADVERTISING:

TWN-Africa
P.O. Box 19452
Accra-North
Ghana, West Africa
Tel: (233) 302 511189/503669/500419
Fax: (233) 302 511188
Email: africanagenda@twnafrica.org
Website: www.twnafrica.org

TWN INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT

President: Mohammed Iddris
Director: Martin Khor
131 Jalan Macalister
10400 Penang
Malaysia

Rushing towards a CFTA

Africa's rush to create a Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) leaves a lot to be desired. The processes leading to the establishment of the CFTA have not been as transparent, participatory and inclusive. National level discussions, civil society group participation have left much to be desired as the citizenry, the main 'beneficiaries' of the CFTA, have so far not played any meaningful role in the processes outlined so far. There is little space in the structures involved with the CFTA for participation by civil society groups or the private sector. The only possibilities so far seem to be episodic consultations with these groups outside any of the negotiating structures. This could make it difficult for citizens to buy into the CFTA.

Furthermore, from what is known of the negotiating agenda so far, the CFTA seems more focused on the liberalisation of tariffs and the deregulation of services. There is little space for interface between these issues and the other policy measures required to ensure that CFTA does indeed contribute to the comprehensive structural transformation and integrationist agenda at the heart of both the Lagos Plan of Action and the Abuja Treaty. Even those issues that have been identified as Priority Action Clusters going by the Action Plan adopted at the African Union meeting in 2012, such as 'trade policy, trade finance, infrastructure, trade information and factor market integration' - hardly have a look in.

Without attention to these elements geared to the productive dimensions of Africa's economies, a CFTA that comes in being will simply create a giant African market place with little of African products to

trade in. From this perspective, and in the light of agreements between Africa and the outside world, such as the EPA agreement with Europe, the CFTA will simply facilitate the movement of products imported from Europe and other areas across Africa.

Furthermore, as noted in *CFTA blues as Africa hastens to establish Free Trade Area (page 5)*, there are many challenges that make the 2017 deadline for the establishment of the CFTA unrealistic and therefore likely to be missed. Apart from the myriad of processes that member countries are supposed to go through in putting the CFTA in place, with the uneven levels of expertise and development, the 2017 deadline presents a dizzying and frenzied agenda that no matter the good intention and willingness of members cannot be met. Additionally, coping with the various bilateral and multilateral trade arrangements are already a task too many for most African governments with their limited human and financial resources. There is no doubt about the daunting task the governments of Africa face with regards to negotiating and ratifying these trade arrangements. The experiences with the EPA, AGOA and WTO among others speak volumes about the work at stake. The timetable to all intents and purposes is just not practicable to say the least.

The question of the Regional Economic Commissions, RECs, raise another set of issues relating to the coherence between an eventual CFTA and the existing trade and market integration initiatives in the different regions in Africa. For a start, the RECS as such are not parties to the negotiations. This raises questions of the harmonisation between the REC poli-

cies and the issues being negotiated at the CFTA. More critically, as a free trade agreement, the CFTA is a lower level of integration than the customs union already in place in some regions, such as West Africa and EAC, with their common external tariffs. Other RECS like ECCAS (Economic Community of Central African States) and the Arab Maghreb Union are yet to do so. How and when will the RECs be able to harmonise these different levels of preparedness before the introduction of the CFTA?

A more fundamental question is how a lower level agreement at the continent level, CFTA, can be harmonised with regional level agreements which are far ahead without freezing the momentum. This is especially since the expectation of the Abuja Treaty was for continent-wide processes to build on and enhance the progress already achieved at the regional level. All this is quite apart from the difficulties faced by the RECs in terms of their own agenda, and the challenges of sustaining the policies that they have already adopted. Different regions are involved in regional economic efforts with different dynamics.

Properly conceptualised and implemented, the CFTA can indeed contribute to Africa's economic integration and help the continent and its economies meet the challenges of a global order whose imbalances works against their long-term development. As is now proceeding, however, the CFTA on the table is likely to end up integrating Africa into the world. That is a different kind of regional integration -- the open regionalism promoted by the World Bank and its acolytes.

CFTA blues as Africa hastens to establish Free Trade Area

Not to be left out in the global dash for markets, Africa is also at pains to consolidate its market with the establishment of a Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) by 2017. As the magic date approaches it is becoming increasingly clear to some that the CFTA in its current form, apart from an unrealistic deadline, may not be the solution to Africa's development challenges, writes ***Cornelius Adedze**.



A recent colloquium organized in Accra, Ghana by Third World Network Africa in collaboration with the Africa Trade Policy Centre (ATPC) of the UNECA and the African Union Commission (AUC) and on the, 'Continental Free Trade Area: Internal challenges and external Threats' has brought to the fore major challenges that confront Africa's plan for a Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA).

The CFTA is aimed at urgently moving forward Africa's long-standing integration and development agenda. It also presents the continent with the opportunity to redress the vulnerabilities of Africa's economies within the global economic order manifest in and deepened by the imbalances of the World Trade Organisation and other multilateral and bilateral trade agreements. Such is the ambition of implementers of the CFTA that

at an African Union Summit in January, 2012 they gave 2017 as deadline for its establishment.

Generally, the CFTA seeks to create a single continental market for goods and services, with free movement of business persons and investments leading to the establishment of a Continental Customs Union. It is to be achieved through better harmonization and coordination of trade liberalization, facilitation of regimes and

instruments in the various Regional Economic Communities and across Africa generally. It is hoped that in the process the challenges of multiple and overlapping memberships of the RECs will also be resolved and the regional and continental integration processes expedited. It is also envisaged that the CFTA would lead to enhanced competitiveness of industry and enterprise in general with its accompanying opportunities for scale production, huge market access and better reallocation of resources.

As the march towards the CFTA gathers steam, the colloquium offered a moment for knowledge-sharing, reflection and debate on the CFTA and related trade issues by members of the Africa Trade Network and other CSOs from across Africa as well as officials from Africa Trade

Policy Centre and the AUC, UNCTAD and the South Centre. The presentations revolved around, 'Africa in the evolving landscape of Global Trade Relations', 'The threats of the Mega Regionals: EPA, AGOA, TTP and Africa', 'The CFTA Agenda, Agriculture and Agrarian transition', 'The CFTA and Industrial Policy: Minerals and AMV', 'Trade facilitation and the CFTA', 'Global Economic and Political Interests', and 'Africa Region and Domestic Repositioning' among others.

The idea of a common market for Africa is one of the key points in post-colonial Africa's search for a united continent but Africa is still struggling to make it reality. Various attempts have been made over the years to realize this dream to no avail. Currently, the CFTA is being touted as the 'flagship initiative under the African Union's Agenda 2063... a major effort to boost intra-African trade, consolidate African markets and reinforce regional integration.' In his keynote address to the Accra colloquium, the coordinator of the ATPC, Dr. David Luke highlighted the positive potential of the CFTA. According to him it has "the potential to contribute significantly to sustainable economic growth, infrastruc-



AUC Chair - Dlamini-Zuma

ture development, employment generation, poverty reduction, local and foreign direct investment, thereby paving the way for structural change and industrial development". Dr. Luke noted that "progress on the aspirations of Agenda 2063 towards 'the Africa we want' is contingent on changing the way Africa trades which has profound implications for production, investment, enterprise, innovation and sustainable development".

Africa is a continent in hurry to achieve in five years what it has not been able to put into place over five decades. Intra-Africa trade has remained small, a paltry 12 per cent, the lowest it is said among the regions of the world. Latin America, ASEAN, the EU and North America all have intra-regional trade above 40 per cent. With a population in the region of 1.3 billion (the second largest in terms of regions) and a GDP of over USD 3 trillion, Africa stands to make gains from a consolidated market that is fed and supplied from within. The CFTA if adopted in 2017 is envisaged to increase intra-Africa trade to 22 per cent by 2022 and could also be a counter-balance to Africa's small (4 per cent) share of global trade.

Explaining the urgency around the CFTA, Dr. Luke cited an ATPC study which shows that 'over 80 per cent of Africa's exports to the rest of the world is mainly unprocessed commodities, close to 40 per cent of intra-African exports are processed goods.' In his view this situation supports the establishment of the CFTA as it could quicken Africa's structural transformation agenda. The ATPC Coordinator however, cautioned that this increase in intra-African trade could only be significantly stronger if implementation of the CFTA is accompanied by improved trade facilitation measures, including discipline on non-tariff barriers.

According to Dr. Luke the CFTA can be a catalyst to Africa's economic transformation as it will make African entrepreneurs to source 'inputs, intermediate

goods and services from within the continent and to export to neighbouring markets thereby enhancing both competitiveness and productivity.' He drew attention to the adoption of the Boosting Intra-African Trade (BIAT) Initiative by an AU Summit in 2012. The BIAT significantly identifies seven clusters - market integration, productive capacity, trade-related infrastructure, trade information, trade facilitation, trade finance and factor mobility. These are critical if any progress is to be made in the march to establish the CFTA.

In pursuit of regional integration the various regional economic commissions, RECs, were to work towards making the RECs the building blocks. So far SADC, COMESA and EAC have at varying degrees established Free Trade Areas. Under the Abuja Treaty of 1991, an African Economic Community is to be in place by 2025.

Over the years, the RECs have made varying levels of progress on trade liberalisation among their members. Free trade areas (FTAs) are operational in COMESA and EAC. SADC, ECCAS (Economic Community of central Africa States) and ECOWAS are also in the process of doing so. The Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) faces



the challenge of establishing a regional trade regime after members have signed FTAs with the EU.

The character of and processes for the establishment of the CFTA were the two issues of greatest concern to the CSO participants in the Accra colloquium. The question most asked was whether the CFTA is not just going to reinforce the easy access of foreign goods to Africa's markets. They base their concerns on the fact that the CFTA in its current form does not seem to be in line with Africa's structural transformation agenda but rather a throwback to tariff liberalization to facilitate trade across the continent which anybody, African or foreign could take advantage of.

There were also questions about the extent to which the CFTA would seek to respond to the threat posed to Africa's structural transformation agenda by the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) signed by African regions with the European Union. The civil society groups further argued that so far the processes towards the establishment of the CFTA have not been transparent, consultative or inclusive. Yao Graham Coordinator of Third World Network-Africa underlined that CSO concerns are not restricted to process issues only but also issues of substance. There should be national level dis-

cussions on the processes, the form of the CFTA, especially whether it is just about trade liberalization or structural transformation, who must be at the negotiating table, and how information is disseminated among other issues.

A lot seems to be going on at the same time in all the RECs but there remain serious challenges which if not tackled head-on will prove stumbling blocks in the way of the CFTA. The CFTA even as it hastens to ensure an integrated Africa seems to be going off tangent as far as the remit of the Abuja Treaty is concerned.

The 207 deadline for completing the CFTA was widely deemed unrealistic by participants in the colloquium. Some pointed to the unevenness of the levels of development and readiness to plug into the CFTA by the various RECs and the individual member countries in support of this view.

In his presentation Mr. Babajide Sodipo of the African Union Commission sought to explain the time table for the establishment of the CFTA. He said there are a number of factors which if not taken into account will make nonsense of Africa's integration efforts. According to him, consensus building based on the multilateral trade system anchored by the World Trade Organisation, WTO, is fast losing its rele-

vance as mega regional trade agreements, based on reciprocity, are emerging as the order of the day. The EPA is a testimony to the preference for reciprocity and the next version of the African Growth and Opportunity Act, AGOA, is also likely to be a reciprocal one. Trade arrangements by Africa with Brazil, China and India also point to reciprocal agreements. In effect, according to Mr. Sodipo, the CFTA will be an immediate and effective response to all these attempts by Africa's trade partners to lock it in some reciprocal trade agreements. Apart from the likely negative impacts these agreements will have on Africa's structural transformation and development agenda, Africa is also going to be further bogged down by having to negotiate all these various multilateral trade arrangements in addition to the CFTA.

Thus sequencing and consolidation of other initiatives on the continent are other major hurdles that need to be cleared for an effective CFTA. Dealing with the issue of Africa's productive capacity, ensuring the CFTA has at its heart structural transformation and not trade liberalization would be critical in arriving at a CFTA beneficial to Africa and its people.

**Cornelius Adedze is editor of African Agenda.*

CFTA Road Map

- The Assembly 18th Ordinary Summit in January 2012, decided that the CFTA should be operationalized by the indicative date of 2017, with the following milestones:
- Finalization of the EAC- COMESA-SADC Tripartite FTA initiative by 2014;
- The four other AU-recognized RECS (ECOWAS, CEN-SAD, ECCAS and UMA), to negotiate a parallel FTA - should they wish to do so, by 2014. They could also choose to join the CFTA directly
- Consolidation of the Tripartite and other regional FTAs into a Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) initiative between 2015 and 2016;
- Establishment of the Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) by 2017 with the option to review the target date according to progress made.

The CFTA Negotiating Principles

The Continental Free Trade Area negotiation process shall be guided by the following overarching principles:

- The CFTA negotiations shall be AU Member States/RECs/Customs Territories driven with support of the African Union Commission and its structures.
- RECs FTAs as building Blocs for the CFTA
- Reservation of Acquis
- Variable geometry
- Flexibility and Special and Differential Treatment
- Transparency and disclosure of information
- Substantial liberalisation
- MFN Treatment
- National Treatment
- Reciprocity
- Decisions shall be taken by consensus.
- Adoption of Best Practices

Scope of the CFTA

Trade in goods

- Tariff liberalization,
- NTBs,
- RoO,
- Trade Facilitation
- Customs cooperation
- Harmonization of Documents
- Transit & Transit facilities,
- Trade remedies,
- Safeguards
- Standards,
- Technical Barriers 2 Trade
- Sanitary and phytosanitary
- Dispute settlement
- Institutional arrangements

Trade in Services

- Transportation
- Air, maritime
- Financial Services
- banking,
- insurance,
- Tourism,
- Energy,

Other Issues

- Competition policy
- Intellectual Property Rights,
- Investment
- Movement of business persons,

Phase I: Trade in goods and trade in services will be negotiated concurrently.

Phase II: Other Issues (Investment, IPR, Competition Policy)

Objectives of the African Economic Community

1. The objectives of the Community shall be:

- (a) To promote economic, social and cultural development and the integration of African economies in order to increase economic self-reliance and promote an endogenous and self-sustained development;
- (b) To establish, on a continental scale, a framework for the development, mobilisation and utilisation of the human and material resources of Africa in order to achieve a self-reliant development;
- (c) To promote co-operation in all fields of human endeavour in order to raise the standard of living of African peoples, and maintain and enhance economic stability, foster close and peaceful relations among Member States and contribute to the progress, development and the economic integration of the Continent; and
- (d) To coordinate and harmonize policies among existing and future economic communities in order to foster the gradual establishment of the Community.

2. In order to promote the attainment of the objectives of the Community as set out in paragraph 1 of this Article, and in accordance with the relevant provisions of this Treaty, the Community shall, by stages, ensure:

- (a) The strengthening of existing regional economic communities and the establishment of other communities where they do not exist;
- (b) The conclusion of agreements aimed at harmonising and coordinating policies among existing and future sub-regional and regional economic communities;
- (c) The promotion and strengthening of joint investment programmes in the production and trade of major products and inputs within the framework of collective self-reliance;
- (d) The liberalisation of trade through the abolition, among Member States, of Customs Duties levied on imports and exports and the abolition, among Member States of Non-Tariff Barriers in order to establish a free trade area at the level of each regional economic community;
- (e) The harmonisation of national policies in order to promote Community activities, particularly in the fields of agriculture, industry, transport and communications, energy, natural resources, trade, money and finance, human resources, education, culture, science and technology;
- (f) The adoption of a common trade policy vis-à-vis third States;
- (g) The establishment and maintenance of a common external tariff;
- (h) The establishment of a common market;
- (i) The gradual removal, among Member States, of obstacles to the free movement of persons, goods, services and capital and the right of residence and establishment;
- (j) The establishment of a Community Solidarity, Development and Compensation Fund;
- (k) The granting of special treatment to Member States classified as least developed countries and the adoption of special measures in favour of land-locked, semi-land-locked and island countries;
- (l) The harmonisation and rationalisation of the activities of existing African multinational institutions and the establishment of such institutions, as and when necessary, with a view to their possible transformation into organs of the Community;
- (m) The establishment of appropriate organs for trade in agricultural and cultural products, minerals, metals, and manufactured and semimanufactured goods within the Community;
- (n) The establishment of contacts and the promotion of information flow among trading organisations such as State commercial enterprises, export promotion and marketing bodies, chambers of commerce, associations of businessmen, and business and advertising agencies;
- (o) The harmonisation and co-ordination of environmental protection policies; and
- (p) Any other activity that Member States may decide to undertake jointly with a view to attaining the objectives of the Community.

Article 6

Modalities for the establishment of the Community

1. The Community shall be established gradually in six (6) stages of variable duration over a transitional period not exceeding thirty-four (34) years.

2. At each such stage, specific activities shall be assigned and implemented concurrently as follows:

- (a) First Stage:
Strengthening of existing regional economic communities and, within a period not exceeding five (5) years from the date of entry into force of this Treaty, establishing economic communities in regions where they do not exist;

(b) Second Stage:

- (i) At the level of each regional economic community and within a period not exceeding eight (ii) years, stabilising Tariff Barriers and Non-Tariff Barriers, Customs Duties and internal taxes existing at the date of entry into force of this Treaty; there shall also be prepared and adopted studies to determine the time-table for the gradual removal of Tariff Barriers and Non-Tariff Barriers to regional and intra-Community trade and for the gradual harmonisation of Customs Duties in relation to third States;
- (ii) Strengthening of sectoral integration at the regional and continental levels in all areas of activity particularly in the fields of trade, agriculture, money and finance, transport and communications, industry and energy; and
- (iii) Co-ordination and harmonisation of activities among the existing and future economic communities.

(c) Third Stage:

At the level of each regional economic community and within a period not exceeding ten (10) years, establishment of a Free Trade Area through the observance of the time-table for the gradual removal of Tariff Barriers and Non-Tariff Barriers to intra-community trade and the establishment of a Customs Union by means of adopting a common external tariff.

(d) Fourth Stage:

Within a period not exceeding two (2) years, co-ordination and harmonisation of tariff and non-tariff systems among the various regional economic communities with a view to establishing a Customs Union at the continental level by means of adopting a common external tariff.

(e) Fifth Stage:

Within a period not exceeding four (4) years, establishment of an African Common Market through:

- (i) The adoption of a common policy in several areas such as agriculture, transport and communications, industry, energy and scientific research;
- (ii) The harmonisation of monetary, financial and fiscal policies;
- (iii) The application of the principle of free movement of persons as well as the provisions herein regarding the rights of residence and establishment; and
- (iv) Constituting the proper resources of the Community as provided for in paragraph 2 of Article 82 of this Treaty.

(f) Sixth Stage:

Within a period not exceeding five (5) years:

- (i) Consolidation and strengthening of the structure of the African Common Market, through including the free movement of people, goods, capital and services, as well as, the provisions herein regarding the rights of residence and establishment;
- (ii) Integration of all the sectors namely economic, political, social and cultural; establishment of a single domestic market and a Pan-African Economic and Monetary Union;
- (iii) Implementation of the final stage for the setting up of an African Monetary Union, the establishment of a single African Central Bank and the creation of a single African Currency;
- (iv) Implementation of the final stage for the setting up of the structure of the Pan-African Parliament and election of its members by continental universal suffrage;
- (v) Implementation of the final stage for the harmonisation and co-ordination process of the activities of regional economic communities;
- (vi) Implementation of the final stage for the setting up of the structures of African multi-national enterprises in all sectors; and
- (vii) Implementation of the final stage for the setting up of the structures of the executive organs of the Community.

3. All measures envisaged under this Treaty for the promotion of a harmonious and balanced development among Member States, particularly, those relating to the formulation of multi-national projects and programmes, shall be implemented concurrently within the time period specified for the attainment of the objectives of the various stages outlined in paragraph 2 of this Article.

4. The transition from one stage to another shall be determined when the specific objectives set in this Treaty or pronounced by the Assembly for a particular stage, are implemented and all commitments fulfilled. The Assembly, on the recommendation of the Council, shall confirm that the objectives to a particular stage have been attained and shall approve the transition to the next stage.

5. Notwithstanding the provisions of the preceding paragraph, the cumulative transitional period shall not exceed forty (40) years from the date of entry into force of this Treaty.

Trade for Economic Justice?

The Continental Free Trade Area and the structural transformation agenda in Africa

Will the CFTA deliver economic justice to the people of Africa? Will it promote the structural transformation that Africa so desperately needs, asks ***Catherine Cobin**.



In 2012, the African Union agreed to establish the Continental Free Trade Agreement (CFTA): a key African initiative aiming to urgently take forward the agenda for integration and development that has characterized continental aspirations since the formation of the Organisation of African Unity in 1963. Intended to be finalized in 2017, the CFTA represents a pivotal opportunity to redress the vulnerabilities of Africa's economies within the global economic order. If successful, the CFTA - Africa's "own megaregional," a common market of over a billion people with combined GDP of over USD 3

trillion- conserve as powerful leverage for African economies in the face of WTO dictates and constraining economic arrangements with the European Union and the United States.

The creation of the CFTA, if complemented by trade facilitation measures, could more than double the share of Africa's trade within itself by 2022, according to the African Union Commission. This would be immensely significant for a continent whose intra-regional trade, at approximately 12%, is significantly lower than the intra-regional trade that takes place in Asia, Latin America, or Europe. The CFTA has the

potential to support Africa's economic transformation by enhancing competitiveness and productivity of African goods and services, circulating what African economies are producing to neighboring markets and beyond.

African governments are currently negotiating the shape and form of the CFTA through quarterly AU meetings and the work of a technical support group. A draft text has yet to be released, but updates from the negotiating forum indicate that the emphasis of the CFTA will be on trade liberalization: lowering tariffs and therefore economic barriers to exchanging goods and

services within the continent. So far the discussions around creating the CFTA have not been accompanied by sufficient attention to the linkages between the forthcoming common markets and its relationship to fundamental sectors of the economy: finance, investment, agriculture, employment, gender equality.

Beyond Tariff Liberalization: A CFTA for Development

A CFTA consisting of opening markets - of trade liberalization on its own - will not lead to structural transformation of African economies. Trade does not drive manufacturing by default; facilitating the exchange of goods without supporting the production of those goods will not contribute to meaningful development of African economies. Therefore, the CFTA must encompass an agenda beyond tariff liberalization, including interventionist industrial and agricultural policy. This must support domestic productive capacity and agrarian transformation, to develop manufacturing and agro-processing within domestic economies rather than continuing the export of raw materials and products. In particular, with agriculture as the largest sector in most African economies in terms of livelihoods, employment and incomes, the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) is calling for an agreement on agriculture within the CFTA, to ensure coherence with agreed continental policy frameworks - such as the Malabo Declaration and the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) - that make provisions for enhancing food security, rural development, productivity and enhanced participation in agricultural value chains. This is key in supporting the right to food of African peoples as well as their food sovereignty, while simultaneously creating options for agricultural economies to benefit from the CFTA.

In addition to not being the sole engine for structural transformation in Africa, tariff liberalization alone may end up worsening the economic situation - especially for African countries with relatively lower levels of domestic productive capacity. As the last remaining instrument in African countries' policy toolbox, tariffs help to raise revenue, enable control of prices to privilege local products both to promote local content and to protect against flooding of imports. Abolishing or significantly reducing tariffs will eliminate the leverage of

African governments in protecting their own farmers and consumers; yet tariff liberalization is at the heart of many of the agreements signed by these governments either through the Economic Partnership Agreements with the European Union and/or bilateral investment treaties with the US. As Africa's RECs have already agreed to give preferential treatment to goods coming from Europe and the US, the establishment of a CFTA will expand the market for those incoming goods.

This possibility is further complicated by the *acquis* principle elaborated in the Abuja Treaty, which states that African countries cannot offer arrangements to economic actors outside Africa that are more preferential than those they offer each other. In other words, the CFTA will have to ensure tariff liberalization at levels lower than the tariffs being placed on European and American goods, already reduced by 70-90%. This severely limits the amount of revenue an African government would be able to raise under a CFTA, and traps African governments between continental solidarity on the one hand and binding agreements with Europe and the US on the other. Megaregional trade agreements recently in process elsewhere in the world further complicate this picture, meaning that Africa as a whole would integrate its markets with the partners in those agreements, thereby eliminating their preferential treatment negotiated in the EPAs or BITs.

The CFTA must, therefore, seek to rationalize these different trade regimes and achieve policy coherence currently lacking due to the EPAs and overlapping RECs. Banding together as a continental market can allow Africa the leverage required to challenge existing agreements unfavorable to Africa's structural transformation agenda through the EPAs, BITs, and the WTO. It must also be combined with protectionist measures both as a continent and for individual African countries, taking into account the principle of "variable geometry": the acknowledgement that African countries begin from different starting points in terms of marketable goods and productive capacity.

Conclusions

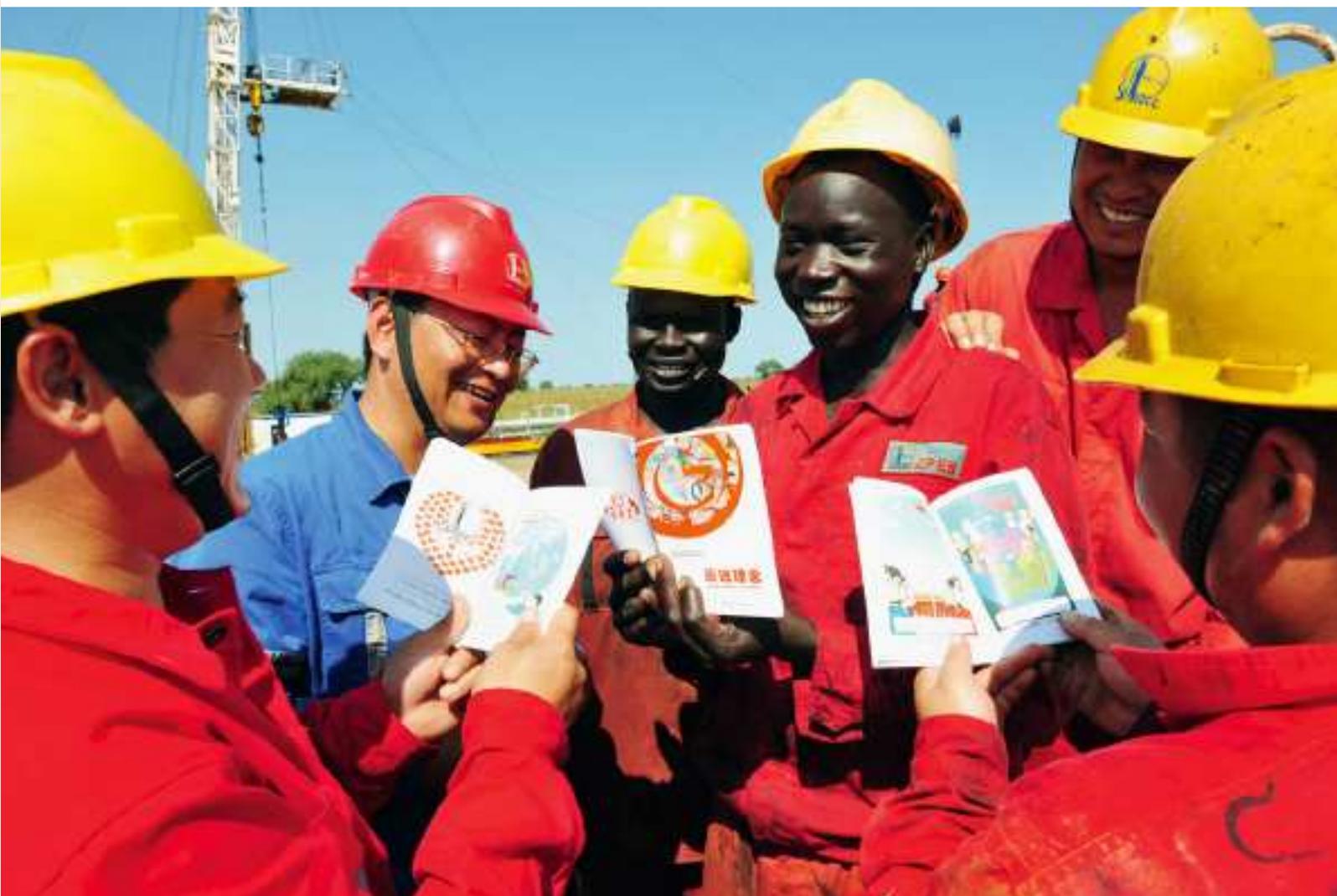
Merely opening African countries' and sub-regions' markets to each other - and to the European and/or US goods circulating within them as a result of pre-existing bilateral arrangements - will not stimulate the

structural economic transformation so urgently needed on the continent. For the CFTA to ensure meaningful benefits for African farmers, traders, consumers, workers, and economies, it must constitute a framework beyond tariff liberalization, accompanied by significant investment in domestic productive capacity and agricultural sectors. Combined with the protection of markets (in acknowledgement that some African countries are set to benefit more and quicker than others) and a collective reorganization of Africa's trade arrangements with external actors, the CFTA has the potential to serve the self-determination of African economies and peoples.

The CFTA negotiations provide an opportunity for ambitious leadership amongst African heads of state, to negotiate a continental agreement that supports Africa's structural transformation through industrialization and the creation of decent jobs, towards a "development" agenda that is meaningful for African economies and people. Further, the CFTA has the potential to tilt existing power imbalances in favor of African economies, driving equity both within Africa along the lines of gender and class, and between African economies and those of the powerful global North. As an engine of broad-based regional integration - beyond tariff liberalization - the CFTA could serve as a fundamental step in improving the economic situation of African countries and peoples.

Next month in Nairobi, African and global governments and civil society convene for UNCTAD 14- the 14th Session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. UNCTAD, as perhaps the sole intergovernmental space to articulate an agenda responsive to the needs and priorities of vulnerable countries, provides an important forum for African leaders to bolster this kind of aspirational thinking. At this meeting on the African continent, African leaders and civil society can bolster the kind of aspirational thinking necessary for a truly transformative CFTA, through regional and global solidarity to support the self-determination of African and other developing country governments and to truly transform their positions in global structures of trade, finance, and economic governance.

**Catherine Tobin is Policy Coordinator, Regions Refocus*



Chinese engineers with their African counterparts

How and why China became Africa's biggest aid donor

By ***Kafayat Amusa, Nara Monkam, and Nicola Viegi**

The foreign aid arena in Africa has traditionally been dominated by the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. However, over the last three decades non-traditional donors such as China, have emerged.

The increasing importance of non-traditional donors has meant that the economic and political stronghold of western countries in sub-Saharan Africa has gradually

ebbed. China is now the largest non-traditional contributor of aid to sub-Saharan African countries.

In the 1960s Africa provided China with an opportunity to increase its political and diplomatic reach. Chinese interest in the continent came about in part as a result of political tensions between China and the Soviet Union as well as increased American and Japanese competition in Asia. In addition to political motives, Africa presented

China with economic opportunities. While the initial motive for Chinese aid was to strengthen diplomatic ties, the resource motive became an important factor.

China's aid policy

At the onset, China's aid policy was premised on equality between partners, mutual benefit, respect for sovereignty, respect for obligations and enhancing the self-reliance of Chinese aid recipients.

According to China's 2011 white paper on foreign aid:

The main areas of support for China has been in projects in agriculture, industry, economic infrastructure, public facilities, education and medical and health care, with the intent on improving recipient countries' industrial and agricultural productivity, laying a solid foundation for their economic and social development, and improving basic education and health care.

China's aid policy in Africa underwent major reforms between 1994 and 1995. These were effected in three main ways:

- New instruments that linked aid, trade and investment between China and Africa were introduced and implemented.
- Programmes that combined foreign aid with economic cooperation were developed and financed, and
- China refined its portfolio of tools to aid domestic restructuring.

The restructuring also saw the creation of three policy banks. These were China's development Bank, China Export-Import bank and China Agricultural Development bank. They were all state-owned and enabled the government to provide targeted finance. The new policy opened the door to an economic and trade strategy. It enabled Chinese investments in manufacturing and agriculture, and growth in Chinese assembly factories. It also created increased demand for Chinese exports and allowed China's incursion into the exploration and investment in minerals and forest resources in Africa.

Resources as a driver

By 1976 Chinese resource interest was apparent in numerous sub-Saharan African countries. Examples include the construction of the Tan Zam railroad in Zambia in part to facilitate China's access to copper. There was also the construction of roads in countries like Ethiopia to assist the movement of cotton exports to China. China's view of the resource possibilities in sub-Saharan Africa continues today.

Since 2001 the need to boost Chinese domestic economic growth has further driven China's interest in sub-Saharan Africa's natural resources.

Examining what drives Chinese aid allocation to sub-Saharan Africa, empirical evidence suggests that China provides more foreign aid to oil rich sub-Saharan African countries than those that are not oil rich.



Chinese donated AU headquarters

Almost half of the top 10 recipients of Chinese aid in the last 10 years gave access to oil wells and granted first rights to prospect for oil in return. Examples include Angola and Nigeria.

Providing billions in debt relief

From 2000 onwards China further cemented itself as a major aid role player in Africa. It established the forum on China-Africa cooperation (FOCAC) which included 44 African countries. It undertook to provide financing for debt relief, training programmes and investments. The China-Africa Business Council was also established, which negotiated the cancellation of \$1.2 billion in debt.

A number of developments made 2006 a watershed year. These included:

- the publication of a white paper on African policy,
- the announcement that debt of \$1.4

billion would be cancelled,

- the creation of a \$5 billion fund made up of soft and commercial loans;
- an undertaking to double aid by 2009, and
- an agreement to build 30 hospitals and train 15 000 people.

Between 2000 and 2012, China undertook more than 1700 projects in over 50 African countries amounting to upwards of \$75 billion. While this amount is less than the \$90 billion committed by the US in the same period, it still represents a significant alternative source of aid financing for the continent.

Where the money goes

China's aid in sub-Saharan Africa is varied and can be found in almost all sectors from telecommunication to health. The largest amount of aid funding goes towards

the transport, storage, energy and communications sectors. A significant share, about 70%, is geared towards infrastructure development.

Chinese aid in infrastructure outweighs that of other donors. It accounts for over 30% of total value of infrastructure projects in Africa. Sub-saharan Africa's education and health sectors have also benefited significantly. But the amount committed to these two sectors lags behind others such as transport and energy. This is possibly due to the fact that a significant amount of western aid is focused on these two sectors. (see Table 1)

Governance myth debunked

Prominent in the aid debate is the notion that western donor countries are more concerned about the degree of governance in recipient countries. Their Chinese counterparts are assumed to overlook the level and type of governance.

At first glance this might be seen to be true. But it is not necessarily the case.

For both types of donors, recipient country governance is important. This conclusion is drawn from looking at the determinants of American and Chinese foreign aid to 31 countries in sub-Saharan Africa. In the case of the US, both political rights and

sion of medicine, the training of health workers as well as the construction of transport infrastructure, there are some drawbacks to the aid. While China provides aid for different projects over a wide spectrum, for the most part it is focused on a few specific sectors. As a result pertinent issues that enable domestic resource generation in the region are not necessarily addressed. This suggests that there is a need to re-assess the type of Chinese aid sub-Saharan countries accept and to make sure that the aid ties in with these countries' development agendas.

**Kafayat Amusa, Lecturer in Economics,*

Table 1: Example of sector pervasiveness of Chinese aid in SSA

COUNTRY	SECTOR	YEAR	PROJECT	AMOUNT (US \$)
Sierra Leone	Telecommunications	2006	Fibre optic installation	15 million
Guinea	Health	2008	Construction of 150 bed hospital	2 billion
Tanzania-Zambia	Transport	2000	Tanzania Zambia railway construction	23.5 million
Namibia	Transport	2012	Loan for road upgrade	126 million
DRC	Budgetary support	2012	Budgetary support	1 billion
Angola	Government	2001	Government	50 million
Guinea Bissau	Agriculture	2004	Agriculture loan	60 million
Angola	Agriculture	2009	Agriculture Development	1.2 billion
Nigeria	Agriculture	2012	Cassava flour processing plant	200 million
Equatorial Guinea	Minerals / mining	2006	Oil backed loan	2 billion
Africa	Debt Relief	2000	Debt Relief	1 billion

Source: *Strange et al* (2013) Tracking Chinese Development Finance to Africa

In terms of the largest sub-Saharan Africa recipients of Chinese aid, Nigeria, Ghana and Sudan have been the top recipients in the last decade. The three countries combined received around \$250 million in aid. The majority goes to energy infrastructure such as oil pipelines.

civil liberty are considerations in its aid allocation decisions to the region. For China, political rights are more important than civil liberty in influencing who receives aid.

Although the benefits of Chinese aid in sub-Saharan Africa are clear in health and infrastructure projects, including the provi-

University of South Africa, Nara Monkam, Research Director, Africa Tax Institute, University of Pretoria and Nicola Viegi, Professor of monetary economics, University of Pretoria.

This is from Third World Network Features

Increasing economic inequality not inevitable

Inequality has been increasing in recent decades with the rich getting richer at the expense of the “middle class” in the world, write ***Vladimir Popov** and **Jomo Kwame Sundaram**.



Since the 1980s, the world has been moving once again to the greatest level of national level income inequalities observed in recorded human history. A study by the Credit Suisse Research Institute suggested that the income share of the rich has increased at the expense of the 'middle class' in most of the world.

Although economic inequality within societies has been with us for a very long

time, inequalities among regions are more recent. According to the late economic historian Angus Maddison, such inequalities increased from about half a millennium ago, before accelerating greatly about two centuries ago with the Industrial Revolution.

With colonialism abroad, new forms of economic hegemony accelerated wealth and income inequalities among and within many societies. In England, Holland and

Spain in the eighteenth century, the Gini measure of income inequality was around 50% to 60% - much higher than today.

Traditional communal, cooperative and collectivist institutions in Europe were eroded during the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, e.g. by the 'enclosure movement' in England.

Economic inequality in the United States at the time of American independ-



UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon

ence in the late 18th century (excluding slaves) was initially lower than in Europe due to the absence of large inherited fortunes and the availability of abundant land at low cost in the New World. But inequalities increased greatly after the mid-19th century despite the end of slavery, peaking during the Gilded Age in the 1920s.

In the US, the ratio of the largest fortunes to the median wealth of households increased from about 1000 in 1790 to 1,250,000 in 1912 (John D. Rockefeller's fortune of \$1 billion), falling to 60,000 in 1982, before rising again to 1,416,000 in 1999 (Bill Gates' \$85 billion fortune)!

Comparison of the wealth of the richest men in various countries in different epochs gives different numbers, but points to a similar conclusion: compared to the average income in the US, Bill Gates was relatively richer than Carnegie and Rockefeller. However, Russian tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky was relatively richer in 2003 -- compared to Russian average income -- than all of them, including Gates!

Short 20th century

National inequalities peaked in Western societies in the early 20th century, before declining from the 1920s to the 1970s, during historian Eric Hobsbawm's 'short 20th century', before rising again since. This reversal was probably due to the greater egalitarianism of the socialist countries, with Gini inequality measures averag-

ing 25-30%, following the Bolshevik Revolution, the checks to increasing inequalities with the rise of labour, socialist and other egalitarian movements, as well as the growth of the welfare state, wealth and income taxation as well as other reforms and changes discussed by Karl Polanyi.

But as Soviet 'socialism' lost its dynamism from the 1970s and posed less of a threat, a conservative 'counter-revolution' ensued -- first in the Anglophone West, led by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan in the 1980s -- weakening workers' movements, undermining state capacities and legitimacy, and strengthening the rich and powerful's claims to more and new types of income.

The income shares accruing to capital and property increased, at the expense of labour, with rentier incomes, including those accruing to finance or 'intellectual property', growing much more than the real economy.

The collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the USSR in 1991 were among the high points of this 'counter-revolution', also resulting in the de-legitimization of Keynesian and development economics.

Government expenditure, especially social spending, stopped growing, with many social programmes cut, as unemployment rose to levels not seen since the 1930s. Meanwhile, trade unions were defeated in critical industrial actions (coal miners in the UK, air traffic controllers in the US), caus-

“Government expenditure, especially social spending, stopped growing, with many social programmes cut, as unemployment rose to levels not seen since the 1930s. Meanwhile, trade unions were defeated in critical industrial actions (coal miners in the UK, air traffic controllers in the US), causing union strength and membership to decline in the aftermath. The top income tax rates, higher than 50% in the US, UK, Germany and France during 1940-80, have dropped significantly since.”

ing union strength and membership to decline in the aftermath. The top income tax rates, higher than 50% in the US, UK, Germany and France during 1940-80, have dropped significantly since.

Generally, high profit periods enabled some income and other transfers, lowering earlier inequalities during the 1950s and 1960s. However, the increase in the share of profits in national income since the 1980s has contributed to the rising inequality of recent decades.

The conservative Thatcher-Reagan counterrevolution was undoubtedly successful on a global scale. Today, capitalism is the only 'show in town', with communist parties involved in managing capitalism to gain national advantage. The main choice for national regimes today is among varieties of capitalism, with the nature of state involvement being the subject of fierce debates.

** Vladimir Popov was Senior Economic Affairs Officer in the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Jomo Kwame Sundaram was an Assistant Secretary General for Economic Development in the United Nations system during 2005-2015 and received the 2007 Wassily Leontief Prize for Advancing the Frontiers of Economic Thought.*

The article is reproduced from Third World Network Features.

Back to square one

In 2015, the World Bank discontinued its status reports on the implementation of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative. It stated that debt relief had been concluded within the framework of the initiative for all intents and purposes, and that had been successful. But was it really? It makes sense to look back, ***Jürgen Kaiser**.



Until 1996, poor and heavily indebted countries could only obtain debt relief from bilateral creditors, but not from multilateral creditors like the World Bank, the International Monetary Funds (IMF) or the regional development banks. But since governments very rarely granted debt relief, over 40 poor countries found themselves in a veritable debt trap. Economic development became practically impossible. In some cases, the debt burden

was absurdly heavy.

By that point, multilateral institutions had become the most important creditors for many countries concerned. The reason was that they helped poorer nations make their ongoing debt-service payments by issuing them new loans when private and bilateral lenders were no longer willing to do so. Unlike bilateral debt, however, multilateral debt was officially considered ineligible for rescheduling.

There was no international treaty or clause in the charters of multilateral institutions that prevented them from relieving debt in cases of excessive indebtedness. Nonetheless, the conventional wisdom was that these institutions had to be serviced so they would remain available as lenders of last resort and could keep countries afloat even in times of crisis.

Attitudes only began to change in the mid-1990s. Sweden and Switzerland organ-



Future uncertain

ised a consultation with experts from the World Bank and the IMF in 1995, and afterwards the staff of both institutions laid the groundwork for what would become the HIPC (Highly Indebted Poor Countries) Initiative. The idea was to cancel all debts that exceeded a debt-sustainability threshold which Bank and Fund defined. In addition, all other creditors should also cancel debt to varying degrees. Multilateral creditors were meant to act last of all. Once the other creditors had issued their write-offs, they would reduce claims only to the extent needed to make debt levels sustainable once more.

The World Bank and the IMF were to be compensated for debt relief. Donor countries established a trust fund for this purpose, and the multilateral institutions contributed some of their operating profits to it themselves. To talk about “multilateral” debt relief actually only makes sense because they did so to some extent.

It was considerable progress that the multilateral agencies were told to cancel

debt. But when drafting the initiative, the IMF and World Bank undermined their own goals by trying to keep multilateral contributions as small as possible:

- The debt-sustainability thresholds were set so high that only six countries were forgiven rather small sums in the first three years.
- The World Bank and IMF could only request that private lenders participate in debt relief, but there was - and still is - no mechanism to exert pressure on them. One result was the rise of vulture funds. Their business model is to buy government debt at low cost in imminent default and later sue for full payment, including interest.
- The Bank and Fund retained a monopoly on determining debtor countries' need for relief. In a considerable number of cases they underestimated that need because they predicted absurdly high growth rates.

In 1999, the G8 governments expanded the HIPC Initiative at their summit in Cologne. The requirements for relief were lowered, so more countries qualified.

Today, the total number is 39. For three of them - Sudan, Somalia and Eritrea - actual relief has not happened and cannot be expected anytime soon. The reasons are incomplete statehood and questionable governance.

To date, the total amount that has been written off is roughly \$ 120 billion. However, further reforms were necessary to reach that sum. At the G8 Summit in Gleneagles in 2005, the HIPC Initiative was supplemented by the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative (MDRI).

Reductions

HIPC had reduced debts to a maximum debt-to-export ratio of 150 % and a maximum debt service of 15 % of export earnings. In contrast, the MDRI completely cancelled all remaining debt to the IMF and IDA, the World Bank's branch for the poorest nations. Moreover, the MDRI also granted relief on debt to the African and Inter-American Development Banks because of concessional lending.

“From 1999 on, a poverty reduction strategy was made an important precondition for HIPC debt relief. Governments had to draft such a strategy in cooperation with civil society and show how the funds freed up in debt relief would be used to fight poverty. These strategy papers supplemented, but did not replace conventional structural-adjustment programmes.”

The MDRI finally relieved countries to the degree they needed to get their economies going again. Before 1996, the debt-to-GDP ratio exceeded 100 % in most countries concerned. Today, their average ratio is around 20 % - far below the average of all developing and newly-industrialising countries.

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In some cases, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) were not much more than a meaningless compilation of politically-correct rhetoric. Malawi and Chad are examples. In other countries - Bolivia, for instance - they triggered substantial social processes and ultimately led to a political paradigm shift.

What next?

HIPC success is marred however. The international financial institutions and their powerful members expected debt relief to allow countries to escape the vicious circle of borrowing and over-indebtedness once and for all. This expectation was unrealistic. The reason is that HIPC was designed to help over-indebted countries to access the credit market again. And when a country takes out new loans, there is always a risk of

over-indebtedness and ultimately default.

Based on significantly improved debt-sustainability analyses, the IMF last year identified seven of the 36 countries that got debt relief as once again being at “high risk” of over-indebtedness. It stated that the risk for 20 other countries was “moderate”. High risk means that the IMF considers insolvency likely within the next few years under its baseline scenario. “Moderate” risk means a country could become insolvent if one of the IMF's standard crisis scenarios materialises. One such scenario is falling world-market prices for an important export good.

What will happen in a new debt crisis is as unclear today as it was in 1996. The Paris Club of established creditors only plays a marginal role for many poorer countries today. Important new bilateral creditors like China, Taiwan or Kuwait have not joined the Club, which is dominated by the established economic powers. Emerging-market governments appreciate the political leeway that can be gained through strategic and discretionary debt-relief policies and do not show much interest in the “creditor solidarity” which the Paris Club promotes.

Since the beginning of this decade, many formerly over-indebted countries have sold government bonds on international capital markets for the first time. Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Zambia, Mozambique, Tanzania and Ghana successfully did so. Ghana, however, is now considered a high-risk country (see article by Clara Osei-Boateng and Kristina Rehbein - <http://www.dandc.eu/en/article/supposed-model-country-ghana-one-again-struggling-foreign-debt>).

Most of the bonds issued by HIPC government come with collective action clauses (CACs) that allow restructuring based on decisions made by the majority of bondholders. However, coordination between creditor groups is normally a bigger problem than coordination within groups, as became evident when HIPC was first implemented. The consequence was that preemptory debt relief measures were repeatedly delayed, so they became much more expensive than if restructuring had taken place in a timely manner.

In September 2014, developing and newly-industrialising countries took the initiative to address this situation in the UN context. They proposed creating a binding framework for managing sovereign debt crises. However, the initiative was blocked

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by Germany and a handful of other advanced countries.

When asked what will happen if Ghana for instance once again becomes unable to make payments, ministries in Berlin answered that the CACs will then make rescheduling possible. But bonds with CACs only make up less than 20 % of long-term debts in Ghana and other countries on the brink of crisis. The bonds are not the greatest burden on the public budgets and balance of payments.

It is clear that HIPC debt relief is not supposed to happen again. We are back to square one, precisely where we were before 1996.

**Jürgen Kaiser coordinates erlassjahr.de, a German faith-based campaign that focuses on debt issues. j.kaiser@erlassjahr.de and the article is culled from *Third World Network Features*.*



UN Summit

Outflanking the war on drugs?

Reform is unlikely at the UNGASS summit, but there's still hope for change says ***Philippa Garson**.

It's widely acknowledged that the “war on drugs” has failed. A militarised approach based on prohibition and incarceration has stoked staggering levels of violence and misery, cost billions of dollars, and failed to reduce either supply or demand.

In April, the UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) will adopt a consensus position on drug control, but few are expecting a shake-up to the current, conservative, global framework.

That's why some reformers are turning to the Sustainable Development Goals as a

blueprint for the future.

Critics of the “war on drugs” campaign have long evoked the term “harm reduction” to lobby for a more humane approach that treats addiction as a health problem rather than a crime.

They point to glaring contradictions between the current drug policy framework and the new - universally endorsed - global development agenda.

Not only has the war on drugs failed, but it has also piled on more of the ills the SDGs seek to address - rights violations, mass incarceration, livelihood destruction,

violence, gang warfare, weakened states, poverty, the spread of HIV, gender discrimination... the list goes on.

Pipedream

The SDGs were viewed as a starting point for solving these problems in a bottom-up rather than a top-down way. Experts argue that if some of the 17 development goals were even halfway met, then individuals, communities and states would be more resilient to the destruction wrought by drug abuse and trafficking; and that if the \$100 billion spent annually on

drug enforcement went towards policies promoting development instead, then some SDGs may also be easier to attain.

The “drug-free” world the current policy envisages may be a pipedream, whereas a world in which illicit drugs are managed and controlled in less harmful ways may not be.

“The SDGs don't address or solve drug policies, but they give us a framework to more appropriately tackle these issues in ways that do not simply create new harms,” says John Collins, editor of the London School of Economics' After the Drug Wars report.

Evidence-based

Other recent research papers also put development at the core of discussions on new drug policy. In its report, What Comes After the War on Drugs, United Nations University (UNU) recommends setting up a working group to come up with new “Global Drug Control Goals”, in much the same way as the one that paved the way for the SDGs.

And in a much-lauded paper, Addressing the Development Dimensions of Drug Policy, the UN Development Programme outlines the litany of casualties of the war on drugs. It diplomatically quotes UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) boss Yury Fedotov's own acknowledgements of some of the negative outcomes of the strategy he has led, and offers some pointers for how drug policy and control could be more “development sensitive”.

The authors argue for a greater role for UNDP in helping to create a more “evidence-informed, people-centred and development-centred approach to drug control policy”.

In the LSE paper, Mark Shaw, director of the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, argues that a development-oriented, harm-reduction approach should be applied all the way along the drugs chain, to the traffickers in particular and to organised crime in general. “With the arrival of the SDGs, we have the biggest opportunity in a generation to view and respond differently to the back-end of the drug chain too - the supply side,” he told IRIN.

Currently the only mention of drug policy in the SDGs is in SDG 3.5, preventing and treating drug abuse, under the health and wellbeing goal.

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“And in the current drug policy framework, development is narrowly defined as “alternative development”; referring for example to finding livelihoods for growers of poppies and cocoa leaves who have become impoverished in crop destruction campaigns. For various reasons, these programmes, which have been criticised as token window-dressing exercises, have largely failed to work.”

“alternative development”; referring for example to finding livelihoods for growers of poppies and cocoa leaves who have become impoverished in crop destruction campaigns. For various reasons, these programmes, which have been criticised as token window-dressing exercises, have largely failed to work.

But any excitement about what a more coherent “development first” approach could deliver is tempered by the lumbering elephant in the room: the long list of countries that have no intention of budging from the existing law enforcement-oriented regime.

These include Iran, Russia, China, India, Japan and a host of other Middle Eastern, Asian and African states.

This is why there is not much optimism that the three-day jamboree in April - that will see government officials, policy geeks and civil society activists from around the world descend on New York - will yield concrete changes.

Neither is there any real prospect of an overhaul of the three drug treaties of 1961, 1971 and 1988 that govern the current framework when it comes up for official review in 2019, or, for that matter, the key structures that govern policy: the Commission on Narcotics Drugs and the International Narcotics Control Board.

UNGASS is widely expected to result in a consensus document that upholds the existing drug control framework but allows member states the flexibility to pursue their



own policies and experiment with new ones.

This is already happening, with some countries decriminalising and even legalising cannabis possession and/or cultivation.

And while many European countries (Switzerland, Portugal, Holland for example) have for years been quietly pursuing their own “harm reduction” experiments - like needle exchange programmes that tackle drug abuse more as a health problem rather than a crime - Latin American countries have been outspoken about the need to abandon the US-led war on drugs.

They bear the brunt of the gang violence and mass displacement this strategy has inadvertently spawned. It was Mexico, Guatemala and Colombia that in 2012 called for UNGASS in the hope of changing the status quo well before the 2019 policy review.

This change in tone has yet to filter down to more relaxed law enforcement practices in Latin American countries, however, as Catalina Perez and others argue in a paper in the LSE report.



Drug haul on board ship

But the real push for flexibility came when the US chose to pursue this path itself, with moves to stop incarcerating people for minor drug offences and with some of its own states opting to decriminalise and even legalise marijuana.

Summer Walker, who heads UNU's drug policy project, predicts that UNGASS will produce a "consensus document between a number of actors who want different things". But the session is unlikely, she says, to "push any states into new policy directions".

Unity on human rights

The UNU report points out, however, that the UNGASS document will achieve consensus around concepts like respect for human rights and the rule of law, precisely because of the ambiguous nature of these terms.

Different member states have very different positions on how to deal with drug addicts and dealers, for example.

In 2011, Iran executed 540 people for drug-related offences (80 percent of all

those it executed in that year). Amnesty International reported that it executed almost 700 people in the first half of 2015, most of them for drug offences. According to UNODC, although trafficking convictions have been stable around the world, drug possession offences have increased by 13 percent since 2003.

While there is still "no appetite" among many other countries to alter their harsh drug policies, the hope is that these will become less defensible when "harm reduction" policies are shown to work, says Collins. "We can't get consensus at the international level, but there is now breathing-room for other countries to push ahead with more liberal policies."

Shaw cautions, however, that increasing acceptance of harm-reduction strategies on the supply side could result in a "subtle concession to the hardliners: more talk of health approaches balanced by harder law enforcement responses."

He argues that it will be a missed opportunity if a "multi-dimensional harm framework" is not also applied to the drug supply chain and to organised crime in general.

This could mean focusing less on how many people are arrested and how many drugs are confiscated, for example, and more on reducing murder rates and nurturing institutions like a free media that help states resist the corruptions of drug money.

The future?

James Cockayne*, head of the UNU's office in New York, warns that an era of flexibility could result in policy fragmentation. It could see positions becoming even more polarised over time and provide cover for states that don't want to abide by human rights to ignore them in their ongoing crackdown on drugs.

He also points out that it is hard to run

"The UNU report recommends that a new drug policy debate take place outside the Commission on Narcotics Drugs, "which too many states see as unrepresentative and beholden to a drug control discourse that fails to generate coherence with the UN's other public policy objects, such as the promotion of peace and security, development and human rights."

a global health regime when national policies on how to treat intravenous drug users, for example, differ so much. He and others cite the possible entry of California, the world's fifth biggest economy, into a legalised cannabis industry as a potential game-changer, but in ways that are impossible to predict.

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The paper argues that a new temporary forum should be set up to work towards "more coherent global drug policy" between 2016 and 2019.

The good news is that many noticeable shifts are already under way. Even if the term "harm reduction" is still not palatable to many states and won't make it into the UNGASS document, its principles are becoming more widely accepted, say the experts.

And just as the cross-cutting goals of the SDGs bring in every member state and every level of society, so too is drug policy attracting a wider range of voices - from the civil society groups that are becoming increasingly influential in the global debate to the many other UN agencies now coming on board, including UNDP, UNAIDS, the World Health Organization, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and UN-Women.

Is South America's 'Progressive Cycle' at an end?

What seemed to be the beginnings of the triumph of the left-leaning parties over the right in the Latin American political space in the last couple of decades is beginning to unravel much to the detriment of the left as the rightist parties strike back contends ***Claudio Katz**.



Brazilian President : Dilma Rousseff

The year 2015 ended with significant advances of the Right in South America. Mauricio Macri was elected President in Argentina, the opposition gained a majority in the Venezuelan parliament, and Dilma Rousseff is being hounded relentlessly in Brazil. Then there are the conservatives' campaigns in Ecuador, and it remains to be seen whether Evo Morales will obtain a new mandate in Bolivia.

The progressive cycle arose in popular rebellions that brought down neoliberal governments (Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Argentina) or eroded their continuity (Brazil, Uruguay). These uprisings modified the power relations but did not alter South America's economic insertion in the international division of labour. On the contrary, in a decade of rising prices for raw materials all countries reinforced their status as exporters of primary products.

The right-wing governments

(Sebastián Piñera in Chile, Álvaro Uribe-Juan Manuel Santos in Colombia, Vicente Fox-Enrique Peña Nieto in Mexico) used the foreign exchange bonanza to consolidate the model based on openness to free trade and privatizations. The centre-left administrations (Néstor and Cristina Kirchner in Argentina, Inácio Lula da Silva-Dilma Rousseff in Brazil, Tabaré Vázquez-José "Pepe" Mujica in Uruguay, Rafael Correa in Ecuador) promoted increased internal consumption, subsidies to local business owners and social welfare programs. The radical presidents (Hugo Chávez-Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela, Evo Morales in Bolivia) applied models of improved redistribution of income and contended with sharp conflicts with the ruling classes.

The progressive cycle allowed democratic conquests and constitutional reforms (Bolivia, Venezuela, Ecuador) introducing

rights that had been denied for decades by the ruling elites. And greater tolerance was displayed toward social protest. In this respect, the contrast with the more repressive regimes (Colombia, Peru) or with governments that have used the war on drugs to terrorize people (Mexico) is quite striking.

After the defeat of the FTAA many initiatives were taken to forge common structures throughout the area. These included shared industrialization goals, energy loops and communications networks. But those programs have languished year after year.

The regional bank, reserve fund and coordinated currency exchange system have never materialized. Norms to minimize the use of the dollar in commercial transactions as well as priority regional infrastructure projects have remained on the drawing boards.

This impotence is synthesized by the freezing of the Bank of the South. It was obstructed in particular by Brazil, which promotes instead its BNDES and even a BRICS bank. The absence of any common financial institution has undermined the programs for exchange convergence and a common currency.

The failures in integration explain the new impetus that has been given to the Trans-Pacific Treaty. The FTAs reappear with an intensity rivalled only by the decline in South American cohesiveness. The United States has objectives that are clearer than they were at the time of the FTAA. It promotes an agreement with Asia (TPP) and another with Europe (TTIP) in order to secure its pre-eminence in strategic activities (research labs, computing, medicine, the military). In the wake of the 2008 collapse it has been promoting free trade with renewed intensity.

The limits of progressivism have been most visible in the national attempts to implement neo-developmental policies.

Those efforts were aimed at turning again to industrialization using strategies based on greater state intervention, imitating the development of South-East Asia. Unlike the classic developmentalism they have promoted alliances with agribusiness and look to a long period in which to reverse the deterioration in the terms of trade.

After a decade, they have not managed to achieve any of the industrialization goals. The expectation of equalling the Asian advance has dissolved in the face of the higher profits generated by exploitation of workers in the Far East. The hope of entrepreneurship by local business people has faded as they continue to require state assistance. The promotion of an efficient civil service has been neutralized by the re-creation of inept bureaucracies.

In Brazil the debate has been over whether the PT government is managing a conservative variant of neo-developmentalism or a regulated version of neo-liberalism. As it did not have to contend with the crisis and popular rebellion that convulsed Argentina, the changes in economic policy were more limited.

But at the end of a decade the results are similar in both countries. The Brazilian economy has stagnated and the expansion in consumption has not reduced social inequality or increased the size of the middle class. There is greater dependency on commodity exports and a major downturn in industry. Finance capital retains its privileges and agribusiness stifles any hope of agrarian reform.

Dilma introduced the conservative turn that progressivism avoided in Argentina. She won the election disputing the adjustment advocated by her rival (Aecio Neves) and then disowned those promises under pressure of the markets. She appointed an ultra-liberal Finance minister (Joaquim Levy, a replay of the first Lula presidency that began with personalities of the same type (Antonio Palocci).

During 2015 this orthodox management generated increased rates and fees. Dilma justified the cutback in social policies and maintained the advantages enjoyed by financiers as they build their fortunes. But as the new year opened she replaced the bankers' man with a more heterodox economist (Nelson Barbosa) who promises a slower fiscal adjustment to cushion the



Venezuelan President : Madura

recession. This turn does not portend an exit from the mess created by the conservative policies.

Ecuador has experienced the same regression from neo-developmentalism. Correa began with a reorganization of the state that strengthened the internal market. He increased tax revenues, provided improved social programs, and channelled part of the rent into public investment.

But later he faced all the limits of analogous experiments and opted for increased debt and export promotion. He signed a FTA with Europe, facilitated privatization of highways, and awarded fully developed oil reserves to the major companies.

The failings of neo-developmentalism have blocked the progressive cycle. That model attempted to channel export surpluses into productive activities. But it encountered resistance from the economic power and gave in to those pressures.

Throughout the region there was a relaxation in social tensions and the major conflicts were expressed in the political sphere, as in the big resistance mounted against rightist attempts to remove Left governments and the huge mobilizations backing candidates in election battles. But there were no uprisings equivalent to those in the preceding period. Only the heroic response to the coup in Honduras came close.

But the principal novelty in this period was the social protests in the countries governed by the Centre-Left. In a context of strong political pressures from the Right, this outburst from below highlighted popular dissatisfaction.

The defiance was quite striking in Argentina. First there was the extended wave of strikes by teachers and public sector workers, followed by the refusal to pay a tax imposed on higher-income wage-earners. This discontent set off four general strikes in 2014-2015. The size of these actions surprised the leaders of the official trade unions, who opposed the protest.

In Brazil, the discontent emerged in the July days of 2013. The huge demonstrations demanding improvements in public transportation and education convulsed the major cities. These were not just "second generation" claims over and above what was already achieved; they expressed a frustration with the conditions of life. This discontent was manifested in the questioning of the superfluous expenditures associated with the financing of the World Cup that could have gone instead toward investment in education.

Finally, in Ecuador the social and indigenous mobilizations became more frequent in the streets and in the past year reached a peak in terms of numbers involved. Correa responded in a harsh and authoritarian manner, widening the rift separating the government from broad sectors of the masses.

They don't bother to investigate the regression of the PT, which has eroded its social base by agreeing to the adjustments. In the last election, Dilma won by a slim margin. Support from the old working-class base of the PT has declined and been supplanted by traditional clientelism.

Furthermore, the government is tarnished by serious corruption scandals. Shady deals with the industrial elite have come to light that portray the consequences of governing in alliances with the affluent. Instead of analyzing this tragic mutation, the theorists of progressivism repeat their timeless messages in opposition to conservative restoration.

A similar regression is observed in Ecuador. Correa's management is marked by a big divorce between his belligerent rhetoric and his status quo administration. The President polemicizes against Rightists and is implacable in his denunciations of imperialist interference. But day by day he crosses a new barrier in his acceptance of free trade and his confrontation with the social movements.

Here too the analyses of progressivism

are limited to redoubled warnings against the Right. They overlook the disillusionment created by a president who is compromised with the establishment agenda. This turn explains Correa's recent decision not to seek a new mandate.

The Right prepared its usual denunciations of fraud in order to discredit an adverse election result. But it won, and was then unable to explain how it could achieve this victory under a "dictatorship." For the first time in 16 years it obtained a majority in the parliament and will now try to call a vote to revoke Maduro's mandate.

Since they are unwilling to wait until 2018, when his term expires, a huge conflict looms with the Executive power. In the National Assembly they will promote unacceptable demands - free the convicted coup plotters, expose speculation, overturn the social conquests - explicitly aimed at harassing the President.

In Venezuela there was a redistribution of the rent, undermining the privileges of the dominant classes. In Argentina this surplus was distributed without significantly altering the advantages enjoyed by the bourgeoisie. The popular empowerment that Chavismo unleashed bears no comparison with the expansion of consumerism promoted by Kirchnerism. And the anti-imperialist project of the ALBA is quite unlike the conservatism of the MERCOSUR. But the principal singularity of Venezuela is derived from the place it occupies in the system of imperialist domination. The United States has targeted this country, hoping to regain control of the largest oil reserves in the continent. It maintains a strategy of permanent aggression.

This campaign had been unsuccessful until the recent election victory of the Right. Now they are resolved to dust off the plans to overthrow Maduro, combining the erosion in support promoted by Capriles with the violent removal favoured by López. They are trying to push the government into a chaotic situation in order to stage a repetition of the institutional coup perpetrated against Fernando Lugo in Paraguay.

The new situation in South America has emboldened the Right. It thinks its time has come and it promises to end the "populist" cycle and replace "interventionism" with "the market" and "authoritarianism" with "freedom."

What these messages conceal is the Right's direct responsibility in the devastation suffered during the 1980s and '90s. The

progressive governments the Right is challenging came into being because of the economic collapse and the social blood-letting produced by the neoliberals. The Right not only portrays that past as a process unrelated to their regimes, it covers up what actually happened in the countries it governs.

It would seem that the only problems in Latin America are located outside of that radius. This deception has been constructed by the hegemonic news media, which overlook any information considered adverse to right-wing administrations.

The cover-up is shameless and most people are kept in ignorance of any news related to those countries targeted by the dominant press. The media describe the inflation and the currency tensions existing under these governments, but do not mention the unemployment and lack of job security prevalent in the neoliberal economies.

But the grossest omission concerns the functioning of the state. The Right objects to the "discretionary paternalism" practised by the progressive regimes but ignores the social collapse in the narco-states that has occurred in conjunction with free trade and financial deregulation. Three economies known for their openness and attractiveness to capital - Mexico, Colombia and Peru - are now suffering this corrosion of the state.

Mexico has the highest level of violence in the region. No high-ranking official has been jailed and many territories are controlled by criminal gangs. In Colombia the drug cartels finance presidents, parties and sections of the army. In Peru official complicity with drug trafficking has gone to the point that sentences have been commuted for 3,200 people convicted of that offence.

The Right resorts to the same media one-sidedness in embellishing Chile's economic model, which is praised for its privatizations, with no mention of the stifling household debt, job insecurity, and miserable private retirement pensions, or the slowing growth and rising corruption that are jeopardizing the education reforms and social security promised by Bachelet.

In the last decade, of course, there have been social improvements, greater consumption and some growth. But that kind of recovery has occurred in other cycles of business recovery and higher export prices. What has not changed is the profile of regional capitalism and its adaptation to the current requirements of globalization.

In Brazil, the reaction of the PT was

similar. It did not participate when the protests began in 2013. It expressed a lack of trust toward the demonstrators and only conceded the validity of the marches when they became a mass movement. The government limited itself to accusing the Right of encouraging discontent instead of noting the popular disillusionment with an administration that appoints neoliberal ministers.

This hostility toward the actions in the streets was a result of the PT's regression. The party has lost its sensitivity to popular demands as a result of its close links with the business interests and bankers. Its leadership manages the economy in the interests of the capitalists and is surprised when its social base asks for what it has always demanded.

The same tensions emerged in Ecuador in the face of numerous petitions by the social movements in defense of the land and water. Since their marches coincided with the Right's rejection of the government's moves to tax the highest incomes, government officials pointed to the convergence of both actions as the same process of conservative restoration. Instead of favouring an approach to the social protesters in order to forge a common front in opposition to the reactionaries, progressivism blindly lined up with Correa.

What is happening in the face of the protests in these three countries governed by the Centre-Left illustrates how the progressive administrations distance themselves from the popular movement. That is how they pave the way for a return of the Right.

The persistence, renewal or extinction of the progressive cycle in the region depends on the popular resistance. Without this dimension it is impossible to ascertain whether it is the continuation or the close of that period. It is a huge error to assess changes in governments without reference to the levels of struggle, organization or consciousness of the oppressed.

The Right has the initiative for now, but the nature of the period as a whole will be defined in the social battles that the conservatives themselves will surely precipitate. And the outcome of those conflicts does not depend solely on the preparedness to struggle. A key factor will be the influence of socialist, anti-imperialist and revolutionary currents.

**Claudio Katz - Excerpts from the 'Socialist Project'*



Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abass



Israel PM Netanyahu

Palestinian population needs greater protection

A United Nations rights expert laments that Israel has not extended the Palestinians the protection that they are entitled to under international law in the face of increasing violence against them writes ***Kanaga Raja**.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel since 1967, Mr. Makarim Wibisono of Indonesia, has stressed the critical need for the international community to increase its protection of the Palestinian population.

Mr. Wibisono, who has resigned because of Israeli non-cooperation with his task, while presenting his final report to the Human Rights Council, recalled the well-documented violations related to the Israeli occupation policies and practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT),

and appealed to the Government of Israel, as the occupying power, to take practical steps to implement protections under international law as it pertains to the Palestinian population living under occupation.

The report was presented at the Council's thirty-first session in March.

(Mr Wibisono had submitted his resignation to the President of the Human Rights Council on 4 January 2016, and which took effect on 31 March 2016. In a UN news release of 4 January, the Special Rapporteur voiced deep regret that throughout his mandate, Israel failed to grant him access to the OPT. Repeated

requests for access, both written and oral, have been unsuccessful. "Unfortunately, my efforts to help improve the lives of Palestinian victims of violations under the Israeli occupation have been frustrated every step of the way," he had said in the news release.

(During the interactive dialogue in the Council last month, a number of speakers expressed regret over Mr Wibisono's resignation in response to the lack of cooperation by Israel with the mandate. They called on the President of the Human Rights Council to nominate his successor as soon as possible. They also called on Israel to

fully cooperate with the Special Rapporteur and other UN human rights mechanisms. Reportedly, Israel was not present in the room during the dialogue.)

In his final report, the Special Rapporteur said that since assuming his mandate in June 2014, he has been struck by the abundant amounts of information and reports on violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, on the one hand, and the seeming inability of the international community to match what is known of the situation with more effective protection of Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

He noted that year after year, violations of international humanitarian law and of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights continue to be reported.

"Key recommendations to the Government of Israel presented by the Secretary-General, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and independent mandate holders, such as the Special Rapporteur, to the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council remain largely unimplemented."

As an occupied people, under international humanitarian law, Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory are "protected persons".

Yet there is a disconnect between the rights and protections afforded to them under international humanitarian law, and international human rights law in particular, and actual protection.

The Special Rapporteur emphasised that Israel, as the occupying Power, holds the primary responsibility for addressing this disconnect.

The destructive impact of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is particularly clear in times of active hostilities, such as in the summer of 2014 in Gaza, or as has been witnessed particularly in the fourth quarter of 2015, especially in the West Bank, during escalations in violence, said the report.

According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, in October and November 2015, the escalation of violence resulted in the deaths of more than 100 Palestinians and some 11,300 injured, and 17 Israeli fatalities and some 170 injured.

The rights expert reiterated two points, related to the current violence, which are interlinked. The first is that any wanton act of individual violence, whether committed



Ruins of palestine bombed buildings

by Palestinians or Israelis, is unacceptable and must be investigated and prosecuted in accordance with international standards.

The second is that the upsurge of violence with serious concerns of excessive use of force by Israeli security forces in the context of attacks and alleged attacks by Palestinians and during clashes, and ongoing settler violence, is arising within a pre-existing context.

Anyone seeking to quell the unrest, notwithstanding the unequivocal position that individual perpetrators of crimes must be held responsible, would need to look to the context and related root causes of the overall heightened tension.

"To simply condemn individual attacks does not offer any viable way out of the violence rolling over the Occupied Palestinian Territory," said Mr Wibisono.

He reiterated that long-standing Israeli policies and practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, such as continued settlement expansion, the construction of the wall, and the blockade of Gaza, are illegal under international law and well-known to entail ongoing and serious violations of the human rights of Palestinians.

In his report, the Special Rapporteur deeply regrets that he has been obstructed in his ability to fulfil his mandate by the lack of cooperation of Israel.

He assumed the mandate as an impartial observer and has from the outset made great efforts to engage in dialogue with the Government of Palestine and the Government of Israel.

While the Government of Palestine has extended full cooperation, the Government of Israel has repeatedly sought to justify its non-cooperation by referring to its reservations regarding the mandate.

Consequently, despite assurances of access made upon his appointment, and the duty of Israel, as a Member State, to extend cooperation to a special procedure mandate holder, the Special Rapporteur has effectively been denied access to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Mr Wibisono said.

The Special Rapporteur said he has raised a number of concerns related to the rise in violence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, especially of excessive use of force by Israeli security forces during clashes and in the context of attacks and alleged attacks by Palestinians.



The situation escalated in October, following heightened tensions, and continued in November and December 2015.

"The upsurge in violence is a grim reminder of the unsustainable human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the volatile environment it engenders."

Against the backdrop of illegal settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the blockade of Gaza, and a general lack of accountability, including for violations and crimes by Israeli security forces and settlers, tensions rose further in September and October 2015 following restrictions imposed by Israeli authorities on Palestinians' access to the Al-Aqsa compound and what Palestinians viewed as attempts to alter the status quo at the Al-Aqsa compound.

October and November 2015 also saw a wave of protests and violent clashes between Palestinians and Israeli security forces.

Excessive use of force by Israeli security forces against Palestinians in the context of attacks and alleged attacks on Israelis, including soldiers, and during clashes, has

"While Israeli authorities need to respond appropriately and proportionally to the deteriorating security situation, measures that are excessive violate international law and only add fuel to already inflamed tensions."

been widely reported.

The rights expert said that the high number of Palestinian casualties in individual incidents and during clashes with Israeli security forces, since the violence escalated, is extremely worrying.

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that, in October and November 2015, of some 11,300 Palestinians injured, injuries were mainly caused by exposure to tear gas (60%), rubber bullets (23%) and live ammunition (14%).

Of fatalities in the same period, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that 60 Palestinians, including children, were killed in the context of attacks and alleged attacks against Israelis, and 17 Israelis were killed in such attacks.

In addition, 39 Palestinians were killed in the context of clashes with Israeli security forces, and three Palestinians were killed in other types of incidents.

The Special Rapporteur is deeply concerned at measures employed against the Palestinian population in the context of the escalation of violence.

"While Israeli authorities need to respond appropriately and proportionally to the deteriorating security situation, measures that are excessive violate international law and only add fuel to already inflamed tensions."

He noted that in mid-October, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported the approval by the Security Cabinet of a number of measures, authorizing Israeli security forces to "impose a closure on, or to surround, centers of friction and incitement in Jerusalem".

The measures also provided that where a punitive demolition has taken place no new construction would be permitted, that the [suspected] perpetrators' property would be confiscated and their East

Jerusalem residency rights revoked.

Mr Wibisono pointed out that punitive demolitions of the homes of perpetrators or alleged perpetrators of attacks against Israelis are in contravention of international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

"Israel, as the occupying Power, is prohibited from destroying private property in the Occupied Palestinian Territory."

Such demolitions further constitute collective punishment, contrary to article 33 of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, affecting not only the perpetrator or suspected perpetrator, but also the family of the targeted person and often families in adjacent homes impacted by the blast of the demolitions.

According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, from mid-October to the end of November 2015, 11 homes were demolished or sealed in such punitive actions.

This caused the displacement of 80 Palestinians, including 42 children. Twenty-six persons living in adjacent buildings were also temporarily displaced in connection with the demolitions.

In East Jerusalem, extensive restrictions, affecting the right to freedom of movement, in the form of roadblocks and checkpoints were imposed following approval by the Israeli Security Cabinet in mid-October 2015.

At the end of November, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that around 76,000 people in six Palestinian neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem were still directly affected by additional checkpoints, roadblocks and an earth mound.

With respect to the right to education during the period of increased tensions and clashes, the Special Rapporteur said he has received allegations of schoolchildren and teachers in Hebron being harassed by Israeli forces and settlers on their way to and from school in October 2015.

The Special Rapporteur stressed the need to ensure respect for the human rights of Palestinians. "Responding to the deteriorated security situation does not permit excessive measures or measures of collective punishment to be carried out by Israeli authorities."

The Special Rapporteur reiterated that it is imperative that Israeli security forces abide by international standards on use of

force, in particular the Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials.

He renewed the call on Israeli authorities to carry out independent, effective, thorough, prompt and impartial investigations into all suspected cases of extrajudicial, arbitrary and summary executions.

According to the rights expert, most of the human rights violations against Palestinians in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, are linked to the existence and expansion of settlements.

Such violations relate to home demolitions and the consequent displacement, discriminatory supply of water and provision of access to land, movement restrictions, settler violence and the discriminatory military court system which Israel applies to Palestinians.

The Special Rapporteur expressed deep regret that Israel rejected the following recommendations related to settlements: stop the transfer of its population to the occupied territory and put an end to all measures that encourage or perpetuate the settlements; guarantee the right to housing of the Palestinians in the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem, stopping the demolition of Palestinian houses and guaranteeing the property rights of the Palestinian population; and dismantle the separation wall and halt the expansion of illegal settlements.

According to the report, in Gaza, the landscape and the people are scarred by multiple rounds of hostilities with Israel and kept in a state of de-development by the long-standing blockade, which constitutes collective punishment contrary to international humanitarian law.

It has the effect of isolating Gaza, including from the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and affects a range of human rights, especially the right to freedom of movement and the right to an adequate standard of living.

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has reported: "The over-abstraction and scarcity of drinking water have been exacerbated by crumbling sanitation infrastructure, while the blockade creates chronic shortages of electricity and fuel, which in turn aggravate contamination and the water crisis."

Of the many families hit hardest in terms of damage and destruction of their homes during the 2014 Israeli military

operation, some 95,000 people were still displaced as of November 2015.

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that in October 2015 the reconstruction of 10% of homes that had been totally destroyed in 2014 was under way (over 1,100), while 12% of repairs to severely damaged homes had been completed.

The Special Rapporteur is dismayed that there appears to be no indication from Israel that the blockade will be lifted. The Government of Israel rejected seven recommendations expressly on lifting the blockade or closure of Gaza.

Regarding the treatment of Palestinian prisoners and detainees, including children, under the Israeli military court system, the report said figures reported by various non-governmental organizations show a sharp rise in the number of Palestinians detained in the month of October 2015, during the escalation of violence.

According to figures published by an Israeli non-governmental organization, the number of Palestinians in the custody of the Israeli security forces reached some 5,680; a rise of more than 400 persons held compared to September 2015.

With respect to the situation of child suspects and detainees, the Special Rapporteur is astounded at the openly discriminatory approach signalled by the rejection by Israel of the following recommendation: take all steps necessary to ensure that Palestinian children in military custody receive the same level of care and have the same rights as provided by Israeli criminal law to youth offenders.

A rise in Palestinian minors held by Israel has also been recorded, with some 300 of those held by Israel at the end of October 2015 being minors, up from some 170 in September 2015.

"Hundreds of Palestinians being held, now including children, often under secret evidence, and for up to six-month terms that can be renewed indefinitely, is not consistent with international human rights standards. It is fundamental that those suspected of wrongdoing be able to defend themselves and to challenge the detention. The Government of Israel should promptly charge or release all administrative detainees," said Mr Wibisono.

According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, in 2015, settler-related violence continued at a weekly average rate of two Palestinian casualties and three incidents of damage to

"Hundreds of Palestinians being held, now including children, often under secret evidence, and for up to six-month terms that can be renewed indefinitely, is not consistent with international human rights standards. It is fundamental that those suspected of wrongdoing be able to defend themselves and to challenge the detention. The Government of Israel should promptly charge or release all administrative detainees."

Palestinian-owned property.

The Office highlighted a marked increase in settler violence reported in and around Hebron in October and November 2015, with 61 attacks causing injuries to Palestinians or property damage.

Cases of Palestinian fatalities involving Israeli security forces and failures to appropriately investigate and prosecute have also contributed to the sense of impunity for crimes committed against Palestinians.

According to information released in December 2015 by an Israeli non-governmental organization, even when the Israeli Military Police Criminal Investigations Division has launched criminal investigations into alleged offences by Israeli soldiers against Palestinians, indictment rates are low: reportedly, over the past five years, only 3% of criminal investigations resulted in indictments.

The Special Rapporteur reiterated that settlements, the blockade, Palestinian prisoners and detainees, and accountability are critical areas to address and urged Israel to take concrete steps towards addressing related ongoing violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. - Third World Network Features.

* Kanaga Raja is the Editor of the South-North Development Monitor (SUNS) in Geneva, Switzerland.

The above article is an edited version of an article published in the SUNS #8207, 23 March 2016.

Land grabbing is killing Honduras' indigenous peoples

Berta Caceres' killing was a symptom, not an isolated incident, say ***Andrea Reyes Blanco** and **Tim Shenk**.



Working on land that may soon not be yours

Berta Caceres wasn't the first and, unfortunately, she won't be the last. The world-renowned Lenca leader, assassinated in March in Honduras for her opposition to government-backed megaprojects, is one of an increasing litany of fallen fighters for Indigenous and environmental rights in Honduras and around the globe.

The pattern of murder and criminalization of those who would defend land and the rights of rural people has only become more evident. We argue that this pattern responds to the land grab phenomenon that has intensified since the global financial and food crisis of 2007-2008.

On March 15 another Honduran environmental and Indigenous activist was murdered. Nelson Garcia was an active member of the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras or COPINH. His murder took place "when he came home for lunch, after having spent the morning helping to move the belongings of evicted families from the Lenca indigenous community of Rio Chiquito," said COPINH.

Garcia was a colleague of the recently slain Caceres, working with communities opposing the Agua Zarca hydroelectric dam project. The Agua Zarca dam project, now on hold, would provide energy for the

numerous extractive projects slated for Honduras in the coming decade. Since the 2009 coup d'etat against President Manuel Zelaya, 30% of Honduran territory has been allocated to mining concessions.

The eviction after which Garcia was killed was one of many recent violent evictions carried out by Honduran military police in Indigenous territories. Elevated levels of state violence and disregard for due process are business as usual nowadays in Honduras, according to civil society organizations.

In its February 21 report on the Situation of Human Rights in Honduras, the Inter-American Commission on

Human Rights or IACHR expressed concern about the high levels of violence and insecurity in Honduran society, highlighting risks to Indigenous people. The report pointed out that violence against Indigenous people has emerged to a large degree from land grabs. The violence is exacerbated by a context of inequality and discrimination, in addition to the consequent barriers to access to justice. Official figures released in April 2013 by then Attorney General Luis Alberto Rubi indicate that 80% of killings in Honduras went unpunished due to a lack of capacity on the part of investigative bodies.



Honduran President Juan Hernandez

Insecurity

According to the IACHR, the challenges that indigenous communities face are mainly related to: "(i) the high levels of insecurity and violence arising from the imposition of project and investment plans and natural resource mining concessions on their ancestral territories; (ii) forced evictions through the excessive use of force and (iii) the persecution and criminalization of Indigenous leaders for reasons related to the defense of their ancestral territories."

Moreover, the IACHR has clearly stated that many of the attacks carried out against Indigenous leaders and advocates are specifically aimed at reducing their activities in defense and protection of their territories and natural resources, as well as the defense of the right to autonomy and cultural identity.

Harassment takes the form not only of targeted criminal attacks, as we have seen in the case of Berta Caceres, Nelson Garcia and many others, but a much broader net that has been cast against environmental and Indigenous leaders. Official state entities, enacting formal legal procedures, have used the judicial system to catch activists in false charges, resulting in months or years of preventive prison, bogus sentences, legal fees and often a permanent criminal record. In a context in which state violence intertwines with the violence of international economic power, corruption and unethical practices, hundreds of leaders have been prosecuted for crimes such as usurpation of

land and damage to the environment.

What we see in Honduras is part of the global land grab phenomenon, a term that in the words of Phillip McMichael, professor of development sociology at Cornell University, "invokes a long history of violent enclosure of common lands to accommodate world capitalist expansion, but it sits uneasily with the 'free market' rhetoric of neoliberal ideology." Land grabs are a symptom of a crisis of accumulation in the neoliberal globalization project, which has intensified since the global financial and food crisis of 2007-2008. This in turn is linked to an acceleration of a restructuring process of the food regime as a consequence of a large-scale relocation of agro-industry to the global south.

According to the 2011 Oxfam briefing paper, "Land and Power, the growing scandal surrounding the new wave of investment in land," recent records of investment show rapidly increasing pressure on land, resulting in dispossession, deception, violation of human rights and destruction of livelihoods. It is a war on Indigenous peoples conducted in order to establish modern corporate capitalism.

Displacement

Indeed, all around the world peasants and Indigenous people are being displaced from their territories in order to develop large-scale agribusiness, such as massive palm oil and soy plantations, mining projects, hydroelectric dams and tourist resorts, among other investments. State-sanctioned

violence and impunity create the conditions for investors to acquire land that would otherwise not be for sale. The result is a serious threat to the subsistence and socio-ecological resilience of millions of people across the world.

One of the most dramatic examples of this process is the case of the Honduran Palm Oil Company Grupo Dinant, which has an extended record of violence and human rights abuses associated with the killing of more than 100 peasants in Lower Aguan Valley. The Unified Peasants Movement of the Aguan Valley or MUCA waged a long battle to defend their land rights, sustaining many

losses. In addition, international human rights groups such as FoodFirst Information and Action Network brought pressure to bear, and in 2011 the Honduran government was forced to convene MUCA and the company to negotiate a deal. Paradoxically, according to the deal, the farmers have to buy back the disputed land at market prices (Oxfam 2011).

Land grabbing in Honduras has a long and lamentable history, and related violence has increased dramatically since the 2009 coup d'etat. Despite regular violent evictions by state security forces, Indigenous and peasant groups continue to pursue their right to control their ancestral lands through land occupations.

Those who are incensed by the killing of Berta Caceres must understand that her assassination was not an isolated event carried out by those who had a personal vendetta against her. Rather, Berta, her colleagues at COPINH and other Indigenous organizations represent an obstacle for those who would further a vision of society that values profit over all else.

** Andrea Reyes Blanco is a Humphrey Fellow at Cornell University, and Tim Shenk is coordinator of the Cornell-based Committee on U.S.-Latin American Relations (CUSLAR), cuslar.org.*

The article is reproduced from Third World Network Features.



Mozambican President Filipe Nyusi

Mozambique's movement to end land grabs

Activists have come together to protect farmers and communities from losing their land and to stave off destructive developments, writes ***Anabela Lemos.**

To corporations, the forest is only business. To communities, the forest is everything: trees, medicine, culture, spirituality. Land-grabbing and the removal of communities from forests and land breaks the community, displaces access to food and water, and uproots the connection to nature and [local] knowledge. If the community structure is broken, if the land - the means of food production - is lost, we lose everything.

Land That Can Only Grow Stones

In Mozambique, where 80% of the population is *campesinos* - traditional, family farmers - companies are taking the best,

most fertile land and moving people to land that can't grow anything. For example, the coal mining project in the Tete province relocated people from the fertile soil by the Zambezi River, with the promise of houses and two hectares of land per family. They were moved to an arid place with land that can only grow stones, as they say, losing access to the land and river their lives depended on.

When a foreign company wants to extract [natural resources], the government grants them the rights, claiming ownership of whatever is beneath the ground. Legally, these extractive projects need to be accepted by the communities, but the legal system

doesn't work properly.

Activists in Mozambique formed *Justiça Ambiental [JA]* in 2004 to address issues of food, water, mining, extraction, forests, and energy as they relate to the climate crises. In 2008, JA became a member of Friends of the Earth International. JA keeps civil society informed and brings awareness to people in cities who are disconnected from rural areas.

We organize to support farmers and communities in taking back their land, their forests, and their rights and demand that our government does not jump on the GMO (genetically modified organism) bandwagon. We work on leveraging legal

support for communities in the struggle against mining, despite repeated instances of our cases being turned down in the courts. We are still waging a 14-plus year fight to stop the Mphanda Nkuwa dam from being built on the Zambezi River. We know that change comes from the ground up and that together we have the power to build movements for our collective struggles.

“Free” Land and False Promises

There is an old saying in Africa: the land doesn't belong to us; it belongs to our children, and the children of our children.

In the past decade, Mozambique has seen a huge increase in land-grabbing and foreign investment in agriculture and natu-

“There is an old saying in Africa: the land doesn't belong to us; it belongs to our children, and the children of our children. In the past decade, Mozambique has seen a huge increase in land-grabbing and foreign investment in agriculture and natural resources, [coupled] with pollution and climate change. The government decided that poverty and hunger would be solved by agribusiness, but everyone knows this is a lie. Every time a corporation takes land from a campesino farmer, it leads to poverty.”

ral resources, [coupled] with pollution and climate change. The government decided that poverty and hunger would be solved by agribusiness, but everyone knows this is a lie. Every time a corporation takes land from a campesino farmer, it leads to poverty.

The government invites in both economically developed and developing countries, like Brazil and China, as well as international corporations, saying that there's

plenty of free land. But there is no free land in Mozambique. Land belongs to communities, and if there is no community living on the land, it belongs to the forest, and if there is no forest, then it's the commons.

In reality, the motive behind this business model is corporate monoculture - everyone farming the same crops on land owned by corporations. And for what? To export cash crops to other countries, not to grow food for people here.

Corporations and their government representatives go into communities to try to convince farmers, who don't know about their legal rights, to sell their land or accept GMO seeds. They make promises of a better life, but it's a false promise.

By the time we find out about investments or projects, the agreement has already been approved and signed, the land has already been grabbed, or companies are already testing GMOs. In this turmoil, there is very little to do other than fight to defend farmers and communities and demand an end to [land-grabbing] projects. The movements are growing here; we've seen advances.

Pushing Back on a GMO-Friendly Mozambique

[In 2008, the government welcomed investment in biofuels produced from a plant called Jatropha.] The president campaigned widely, and convincing small farmers to exchange their land for work. After learning that the GMO seeds were poor quality and the biofuel was not a source of additional farm income, farmers successfully campaigned against the Jatropha projects, which closed down. Still, many farmers lost their land and ended up with nothing.

In Europe, many countries are banning GMOs, kicking out corporations like Monsanto, Syngenta, and Dupont. Africa is the last frontier for these corporations, especially because of weak and corrupt governments. Last year, Mozambique changed its precautionary laws against GMOs [by signing the African Regional Intellectual Property Organization's Plant Variety Protection Protocol]. Mozambique is now testing GM seed [in the Water Efficient Maize for Africa (WEMA) project].

There are signed agreements between several Southern African Development Community countries to push forward the WEMA project of genetically modified corn, which Monsanto and the [Gates Foundation] are behind. One of the many

resulting problems from this is that these GMO seeds can't be saved; they need to be bought again [each season].

Organizing Against Agro-Industry

In the Nacala Corridor - Mozambique's most populated area with one of the last tropical forests - the government offered free land to an agribusiness [venture] from Brazil, Japan and Mozambique. Known as ProSavana, the monoculture project would export soy and other cash crops to Japan. [The four million] campesino farmers in the Nacala Corridor would face massive land grabs.

No information was given to Mozambicans; we only found out through international civil society organizations. The National Union of Peasants (UNAC) then began collaborating with groups in Japan and Brazil in a campaign against ProSavana. We sent our representatives to Japan, and together, we brought our campesino voice to the government. In 2014, we discovered the leaked [secret] plans. [The programme has yet to be officially implemented] but over time, land is slowly being taken.

Mobilization is the Way Forward

Our most important work in Justica Ambiental is to raise awareness about food sovereignty, the law, and land rights. We want to have control over the food we grow and eat, and don't want to rely on imports.

The power is in the hands of the people. If a farmer doesn't want to give away their land, they can say no - they have that right. We've seen the power of people on the ground doing work such as community forest exploration, which has countered deforestation and slowly taken control of small forests.

The campesino movement is strong, and we are not accepting this turn toward extractive industry and agribusiness. Solidarity [locally and across borders] is the only way to strengthen a growing movement. We need to support each other and connect our regional and international struggles to make change together

**Anabela Lemos is Co-founder, Campaign Coordinator, and Board Member of Justica Ambiental (JA), the Mozambique branch of Friends of the Earth. This article is from Third World Network Features.*

Is the war against drugs a war against women?

In almost every nation, punitive drug policies have the greatest impact on women who are already coping with poverty and social neglect, histories of physical and sexual violence, and marginalization. The UN special assembly on drugs to be held this month provides an important opportunity for women's rights to be included in the global policies on illicit drugs, writes ***Judy Gitau.**

In April 2016, the United Nations General Assembly convened a special session on the world drug problem at the UN Headquarters in New York. This convening is recognition of the need to review the global policies on drugs, bearing in mind that the current drug regime is based on 50-year-old conventions that lend themselves to an antiquated interpretation of the global drug problem. The drug regime, which comprises of three conventions overseen by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, the International Narcotics Control Board, and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), mostly focuses on criminalization and repressive measures directed at producers, traffickers and consumers of illegal drugs without effectively eliminating supply or consumption of these drugs. In fact this approach, which scholars in recent times have referred to as 'broken', fails to consider the unique nature of the global drug problem which has social, economic and even security dimensions.

A broad observation of the impact of implementing the current legal framework as it is across the globe illustrates instances of 'criminalization' and social exclusion of entire communities viewed to fall within locations that produce, supply or use drugs, for example. It has also shown, for purposes of expediency, mass incarceration of drug users which is found to be both highly ineffective and strenuous to the justice system. This criminalization process further encourages high-risk behaviour such as unsafe injecting by drug users increasing the risk of spreading HIV, Hepatitis C and other blood-borne diseases. It further deters people in need of drug treatment



UN headquarters - New York

from seeking it and diverts law enforcement resources from focusing on serious criminality. The current global drug policies reduce personal and government funds that might otherwise be available for positive investment in economically struggling communities who then become vulnerable to illegal organizations dealing in drugs. Indeed drug production, trafficking and/or consumption often results from a variety of coercive forces often driven or even necessitated by poverty and social neglect. Contemporary drug policies usually overlook these drivers and instead emphasize eradication and prohibition.

Whilst the discourse to review the law in April 2016 takes cognizance of all of the above issues, the broader discussions on reforms of the policy framework on drugs fail to recognize the disproportionate impact this broken law has had on women and children. Despite the statistics that a large majority of those using and trafficking drugs are men, the understudied and under-researched category that is indeed greatly affected by these policies are women and children.

Increase

Just looking at the numbers globally, for example, the rate of incarceration of women for minor drug-related crime is increasing at an alarming rate. Indeed women, whose role in this illicit drug economy is most often as consumers or low-level sellers often driven by the need to provide for their families, are finding themselves imprisoned at an unprecedented rate.

Beyond the numbers it is a fair assessment to state that women are uniquely vulnerable to prosecution and incarceration based on their relationships with others who are involved in the illegal drug trade rather than their own leadership or conduct in that trade. Owing to poverty and the inability of women in many societies, including, if not especially, in Africa, to access basic resources, drug trafficking organizations that thrive under existing global policies often times take advantage and induce such vulnerable women to courier drugs. It is these women who are then promptly incarcerated as low-level 'criminals' leaving out the more culpable organizations from the equation. These organizations seek out other vulnerable women and the cycle continues.

The penalty of incarceration meted on the women is doubly penalizing as it often

“Indeed the vast majority of women who are incarcerated around the world for drug-related offenses are mothers and therefore suffer this plight. Drug policies focusing on punishment not only deprive women of their freedom, but also compromise the wellbeing of their children. Taking this double tragedy to its logical, if not illogical conclusion, increasingly, punishment as a response to drug use also includes removal of children and termination of parental rights. Women then who took part in this illicit trade to provide for their children end up losing their children altogether.”

results either in separation of mothers and their children or the incarceration of children alongside their mothers. Indeed the vast majority of women who are incarcerated around the world for drug-related offenses are mothers and therefore suffer this plight. Drug policies focusing on punishment not only deprive women of their freedom, but also compromise the wellbeing of their children. Taking this double tragedy to its logical, if not illogical conclusion, increasingly, punishment as a response to drug use also includes removal of children and termination of parental rights. Women then who took part in this illicit trade to provide for their children end up losing their children altogether.

The incarceration process further takes away from the family since women are most often the primary care-givers of the family. As such, once imprisoned the family is further impoverished once again ensuring the cycle of poverty continues with their children becoming vulnerable including to the illicit drug trade.

Finally the attendant stigma attached to a woman - and a mother at that - who uses drugs almost certainly ensures she does not access medical care or treatment.

Women face significant barriers to accessing appropriate drug treatment, including lack of childcare, lack of trauma-informed care, and threats of arrest if they reveal that they are pregnant. Without access to nondiscriminatory healthcare, including drug treatment, a woman's chance of acquiring HIV and Hepatitis C, experiencing homelessness, drug overdose, and significant family rupture all increase. In-fact in some jurisdictions drug using women are targeted for campaigns of sterilization.

These failures of the global policy on illicit drugs have visited an enormous cost to women. In almost every nation, punitive drug policies have the greatest impact on women who are already coping with poverty and social neglect, histories of physical and sexual violence, and marginalization.

Previous discussion to reform the global legal framework, though positive, has failed to squarely acknowledge the exceptional challenges women face. On the African front for instance, the African Union Plan of Action on Drug Control, which maps out context specific measures for African countries in their addressing the drug problem, does not make special provisions corresponding to women.

As different government representatives and non-state actors convene in April in New York to discuss the global policy framework on illicit drugs, an opportunity has emerged for countries and regions to consider health- and human rights-based drug policies. Undeniably an opportunity has arisen for women's rights to be included in the global policies on illicit drugs. In the past the UN General Assembly has stated explicitly that governments not only have the duty to pass laws that are aimed towards protecting women, but that the state should also take responsibility for laws that may have unintended consequences of harm.

It is time women held their governments to account.

** Judy Gitau is a Research Fellow with the Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies. She has previously consulted with the Equality Now Africa Office, specifically working on the Solidarity for African Women's Rights (SOAWR) coalition on domestication and implementation of African Union instruments in Africa, on the rights of women. She is an advocate of the High Court of Kenya, a human rights practitioner and presently a consultant for National Advocates for Pregnant women on UNGASS 2016*

Local anger is rising against South Africa's 'resource curse'

South African society's conflict with a mainstay of the country's corporate economy - resource extraction - is permanently on display in the platinum, gold and coalfields in the north and north-east of the country. Now communities on the country's East Coast are confronting mining houses. This is the area that supplied Zulu and Xhosa workers to the mines. And now the mines are coming home, writes ***Patrick Bond**.



A South African mine site

The latest incident, which claimed the life of a leading anti-mining activist, comes as poorer South Africans feel the effects of soaring food, transport and electricity prices. The misery and anger is compounded by the fact that the government has been shrinking state welfare grants - not in nominal terms, but after adjustment for the cost of living.

Growing impatience with economic

conditions has resulted in protests across the country reaching new levels of intensity. Violence against activists also appears to be intensifying.

On March 22 Sikhosiphi "Bazooka" Rhadebe, a grassroots critic of a proposed Australian dune-mining project on the Eastern Cape's Wild Coast, was shot by assailants posing as police officers. The attack has shaken communities and envi-

ronmentalists. A few weeks before his death, the Amadiba Crisis Committee, a local activist group, rejected an environmental impact assessment by titanium-hungry Mineral Commodities Limited, a Perth-based mining firm. The company has previously run into conflict with communities in Sierra Leone and Namaqualand.

The death of Rhadebe follows other acts of intimidation and violence. The week

before, a few hours' drive up the North Coast of KwaZulu-Natal, a lorry belonging to Bongani Pearce was set alight at midnight. Pearce lives near Somkhele, a vast coal mine run by Johannesburg-based Petmin. The attack came hours after Pearce led a militant community march to the local council.

Like the organisation led by Rhadebe, Pearce's Mpukunyoni Community Property Association represents dozens of local villages whose residents are angered by high levels of corruption and maladministration. They believe this is largely due to collusion between local political elites and mining companies, and that it is robbing their community of its livelihood.

Resistance is rising as quickly as the price of commodities crashes: coal from a \$170/tonne peak in 2008 to \$50; and titanium from \$8.80/kg in 2011 to \$3.80. Mining profitability now requires replacing the 2002-11 era's rising prices with much higher throughput - greater quantity at much lower prices. With this, the metabolism of the conflict is quickening.

Mining is blasting new holes in the social fabric.

Protests are increasingly common in areas mainly populated by rural women, including the former KwaZulu homeland strips to the east and west of the Hluhluwe-iMfolozi game park, an area populated by a number of coal mining houses. Last week the Zululand Anthracite Colliery, until recently owned by RioTinto, suffered arson attacks by residents demanding jobs.

Setting aside ubiquitous corruption, government's two major economic policy weaknesses are excessive fiscal stinginess for the poor, combined with intensified state investment in mining-supportive infrastructure.

After last month's slow-motion-austerity budget was announced, 16.5 million poor people face cuts in the real value of grants by several percentage points. According to the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Community Social Action, the cost of a poor household's minimalist monthly R1,650 food basket rose 9% from November 2015 to January 2016. Annualised, that is more than 25% or, as the organiser's lead researcher Julie Smith



South African President : Zuma

notes, "eight times higher than the average monthly increases over the preceding year." The 3.5% grant increase Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan gave foster-care children and 6.1% provided to other dependent children has already evaporated. In February consumer price inflation rose to 7%. This is before state-owned electricity utility Eskom applies its 9.4% price hike.

Steeper increases in electricity and transport, coupled with higher food prices, mean that women are increasingly limited in the diversity of food they put in their shopping trolleys.

Food, transport and electricity account for about 90% of expenditure for most low-income Pietermaritzburg households, says Smith. This makes a mockery of the consumer price index weighting of less than 50% of the total household basket for these items. Subsidies for other basic-needs items have also been cut, including for municipal services and housing.

"If the state continues to squeeze poor people's daily budget and pour subsidies into mega-projects serving mining and shipping capital, revolts like these in President Jacob Zuma's main patronage province will well up with growing vigour."

In contrast, Gordhan budgeted R292 billion from 2016-18 for new transport and logistics infrastructure. This includes the two leading presidential strategic projects:

- state-owned transport company Transnet's new coal rail line to Richards Bay, aiming to export 18 billion tonnes; and
- its South Durban port-petrochemical expansion, aiming to increase container traffic from 2.5 million to 20 million annually by 2040.

Gordhan gained the praise of ratings agency Moody's senior vice president Kristin Lindow, who supports budget cutting, except when it comes to "preserving growth-supporting capital spending."

Even setting aside their contribution to growth-sapping climate change, including KwaZulu-Natal's current drought, do such mega-projects really qualify?

Durban residents have seen billions in taxpayer funds breed a stampeding white elephant herd. These include a World Cup soccer stadium, convention centre and the uShaka Point development - all requiring ongoing subsidisation. Add to this the new King Shaka airport and Dube Tradeport, which suffer massive overcapacity.

At a Sharpeville Day commemoration, South Durban activists vowed to block the port-petrochemical expansion. This follows recent protests against container trucks in the area.

If the state continues to squeeze poor people's daily budget and pour subsidies into mega-projects serving mining and shipping capital, revolts like these in President Jacob Zuma's main patronage province will well up with growing vigour.

Like Rhadebe's Amadiba Crisis Committee and so many other infuriated east coast residents, Pearce and the Somkhele activists intimately understand why South Africa is "resource cursed". And like others opposed to state capture by dubious corporations and families, these communities vow to keep fighting no matter the rising danger.

** Patrick Bond, Professor of Political Economy, University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, and Director of the University of KwaZulu-Natal Centre for Civil Society in Durban. This article was first published at The Conversation*

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