Africa Mining Vision: 10 years on
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Since its adoption in 2009 by the African Union, there have been a flurry of activities aimed at supporting and ensuring that the AMV’s rallying call for a “transparent, equitable and optimal exploitation of Africa’s mineral resources to underpin broad based sustainable growth and socio-economic development” was achieved.

Economic and social indicators in African countries, according to the AMV, had not improved much relative to the mineral endowments of most of the countries which have been exploited over the years since before independence. It was therefore time, “to shift mineral policy beyond the focus on regimes devoted to the extraction of minerals and sharing of revenue” and put in place a mineral governance that takes a much broader account of minerals and their critical role in poverty eradication, sustainable growth and development.

Over the past ten years, the African Union has elaborated the agenda of the AMV in a number of key documents, notably the AMV Action Plan, the Country Mining Vision Guidebook, and the Africa Mineral Governance Framework. The Africa Minerals Development Centre (AMDC) was established as a continental coordinating centre to oversee the implementation process. 10 years into the journey, some argue, not much has changed for the African mineral sector.

The adoption of the Africa Mining Vision (AMV) signaled an African consensus against the mineral governance model imposed by the World Bank as part of its Structural Adjustment Programme policies. 10 years on the implementation record across Africa is disappointing, writes *Cornelius Adedze.**

The African Mining Vision @ 10: familiar tale of grand visions and implementation shortfalls

Participants at Africa Forum on Mining
In November, the African Union Commission convened an Africa Forum on Mining in Accra, Ghana to review ten years of the AMV. The event brought together some 200 delegates – from governments, the private sector, CSOs and intergovernmental agencies like the UNDP, UNECA, African Development Bank.

‘Untold misery is still the lot of Africa in the presence of mineral wealth which has not translated into betterment of the lives of the people. The AMV is supposed to be the catalyst, the turnaround of the situation but not much has been done 10 years since its adoption by African countries.” Paul Msoma of the AMDC noted in his opening remarks. He wondered whether the mineral wealth of Africa just like Mansa Musa’s fabled riches would remain a myth to the present generation of Africans instead of benefitting them.

The key note speaker at the event, Antonio Pedro, director of the Economic Commission for Africa, Central Africa region, who presented an overview of the AMV implementation experience lauded the AMV as an important and still relevant intervention in Africa’s mineral sector but emphasized that it needs “accelerated implementation” if much better progress is to be made in ensuring Africa derives maximum benefit from the exploitation of its minerals. He situated his assertions about the enduring importance of the AMV agenda in his perceptions of future trends in the use of minerals in economies and societies. National and regional legislation, compliant policies, strengthening of institutions like the AMDC, he noted, must be tackled with all seriousness by African countries rather than the lukewarm attitude towards the AMV now.

The AMV Action Plan adopted in 2011 summarised the AMV agenda into 9 critical issues. These include Linkages and Diversification, Research and development, Mobilization of mining and infrastructure investment, mineral sector governance, and Environmental and social issues. Others are, Geological and Mining Information Systems, Mining Revenues and Mineral Rents Management, Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining as well as Building Human and Institutional frameworks that ensure the success of the AMV.

Many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa carried out legal reforms in the mining sector over the ten year period of the AMV, unfortunately, most have fallen short at the implementation hurdle. From Angola to Zimbabwe, the AMV, at the least, has awakened African governments to the reality that they could earn much more than they do currently from their mineral resources hence the attempts by many to rewrite their mining sector laws and renegotiate mining agreements. Indeed, countries like Tanzania, Zambia and DRC, have their running battles with such mining companies like Acacia and Glencore among others in pursuit of maximizing benefits from their mineral endowments. Efforts have also been made by countries in East Africa and the SADC regions to put together regional mining frameworks.

These efforts, notwithstanding, there have been some setbacks. A concession made to Gold Fields Ghana (a major multinational gold mining company) by the government of Ghana in 2016 is a typical example. On 29th March 2016 Gold Fields announced in Johannesburg that it had concluded “development agreements” with the Government of Ghana, reducing corporate tax in respect
of its Tarkwa and Damang mines from a rate of 35.0% to 32.5%, and royalty from a flat rate of 5% to a sliding scale starting from 3%. The company estimated that this would save it $26m in tax and royalty payments a year. For Ghana this represents an annual loss of $26m in tax and royalty income from the Tarkwa and Damang mines of Gold Fields. This was a smack in the face of the AMV 7 years into its implementation.

The structural transformation of Africa's mineral economies from a dependence on the export of raw mineral commodities to integrated and industrialized economies is at the heart of the AMV agenda. Unfortunately, infrastructure for raw minerals deals have seen an upsurge during the period even as no meaningful efforts at adding value to the mineral chain have been undertaken. Guinea and Ghana lead the charge in this regard in recent times by concluding infrastructure for bauxite ore deals with China. Guinea and Beijing signed a deal in 2017 involving US$20 billion in loans over 20 years in exchange for bauxite. China has similar arrangements with the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Republic of Congo and Angola. Ghana is the latest to have also handed over 5 percent of its bauxite reserves to China in exchange for $2bn for infrastructure development.

Other areas of the AMV implementation that have not received serious attention include the AMDC itself, set up in 2013. In its years of operation the AMDC has helped some countries with their country mining visions, CMVs and partnered institutions like the African Development Bank, the UNECA, the UNDP, among others to provide the necessary financial and human resource support through capacity-building for mineral endowed Africa countries. In its first- five years of operations, the AMDC, was funded largely by Australia and Canada which have huge mining interests in Africa and are prime beneficiaries of the deficient, operative mining model. Resourcing the AMDC, a critical agency in the success of the AMV, has therefore not appeared to be a priority for many African countries. In the words of a former AMDC coordinator, Kojo Busia, “Africa needs effective institutions and highly skilled people” if the objectives of the AMV are to be achieved, investing in these however, seem to have been lost on African leaders. The AU has agreed that Guinea should be the permanent host of the AMDC. So far support for the move has been lukewarm. Only 2 (Mali and Guinea) out of the 15 countries required to ratify the AMDC agreement to bring it into force have so far ratified it.

African civil society groups including trade unions have been at the forefront of the battle to make the AMV work. From the drawing table through its implementation stage and ten years on groups like Third World Network-Africa (TWN-Africa), Southern Africa Resource Watch (SARW), Tax Justice Network-Africa (TJN-A), Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association (ZELA) and leading national CSOs across the continent have played all kinds of roles to ensure the AMV is on the frontlines of Africa's development agenda. Two years ago, the AMV was the theme for the annual Alternative Mining Indaba in Cape Town. Significantly the African bloc in Publish What You Pay has decided to work on the AMV.

In October, African civil society activists from all over the continent met in Johannesburg to review the ten years of the AMV. Five years ago, there was a similar review and planning meeting.
The primary and long term goal of the AMV is the creation of circumstances that support a “transparent, equitable and optimal exploitation of [Africa’s] mineral resources to underpin broad-based sustainable growth and socio-economic development”. The main features of the mineral sector which should contribute to achieving this goal are outlined in a number of broad areas as follows:

(i) A knowledge-driven African mining sector that catalyses and contributes to the broad based growth & development of, and is fully integrated into, a single African market through:

(ii) Down-stream linkages into mineral beneficiation and manufacturing;

(iii) Up-stream linkages into mining capital goods, consumables and services industries;

(iv) Side-stream linkages into infrastructure (power, logistics; communications, water) and skills and technology development (HRD and R&D);

(v) Mutually beneficial partnerships between the state, the private sector, civil society, local communities and other stakeholders; and

(vi) A comprehensive knowledge of its mineral endowment.

(vii) A sustainable and well-governed mining sector that effectively garners and deploys resource rents and that is safe, healthy, gender and ethnically inclusive, environmentally friendly, socially responsible and appreciated by surrounding communities;

(viii) A mining sector that has become a key component of a diversified, vibrant and globally competitive industrialising African economy;

(ix) A mining sector that has helped establish a competitive African infrastructure platform, through the maximisation of its propulsive local and regional economic linkages;

(x) A mining sector that optimises and husbands Africa’s finite mineral resource endowments and that is diversified, incorporating both high value metals and lower value industrial minerals at both commercial and small-scale levels;

(xi) A mining sector that harnesses the potential of artisanal and small-scale mining to stimulate local/ national entrepreneurship, improve livelihoods and advance integrated rural social and economic development; and

(xii) A mining sector that is a major player in vibrant and competitive national, continental and international capital and commodity markets.
in Lusaka marking the 5th anniversary of the AMV. That meeting called on African governments to show ownership of the AMV by making a more serious approach to promoting and implementing its tenets. In Johannesburg whilst the gathered CSOs affirmed the continuing importance of the AMV they drew attention to some of the factors hampering the implementation of its agenda. These include the failure by governments to popularize and nationalize and integrating it into national, regional and continental development agenda. Claude Kabemba, Executive Director of SARW, host of the Johannesburg conference, criticized the “lack of political will’ on the part of African governments. He lamented, ”the protection of the interests of our countries and the continent” for the bigger interest of the citizenry has not yet replaced the “profit first” motive for political and FDI interests.

Issues critical to the success of the AMV that were pointed out by the Johannesburg CSOs conference include awareness of African governments of the global minerals sector initiatives that may run counter to the AMV’s objectives. Governments should therefore avoid bilateral and multilateral arrangements that undermine the AMV. Harmonised, coherent and coordinated laws (regional and continental) must become the norm so as to end the “race to the bottom”, national discriminatory mining regimes, aimed at attracting FDI that resulted in handing over mining concessions as near give-aways to multinational mining conglomerates.

Price volatility inherent in the global commodity market must also be taken into account else perceived gains could be eroded in no time. There was a call for effective collaboration between multiple stakeholders like CSOs, the AMDC, the Geo-Science Centre in Arusha and the various mineral endowed countries to ensure skills and information share among others.

On the consolidation of civil society efforts to bolster the AMV, there were calls to stop signing on to various foreign promoted natural resource governance instruments amounting to duplication of efforts instead of working together to promote the continental initiative.

Not all CSO activists are supportive of the AMV, however and even hesitate to see the AMV as a game changer. Nnimmo Bassey, an activist from Nigeria cautions against seeing the AMV as anything but ‘a modified extractivist agenda and does not portray Africa as continent showing signs of being part of a global efforts to move beyond extractivism’.

More significantly the most important international NGOs working on extractive issues in Africa have studiously avoided supporting or identifying with the AMV agenda and persist with work which essentially reinforces the paradigm that the AMV is challenging.

The failure of African countries to significantly advance the AMV agenda ten years on is obvious and disappointing but arguably the most important achievement has been its endurance and presence in the mainstream of African policy discourse and expression in policy frameworks. This has legitimized a paradigmatic challenge to the policies which have underpinned dominant mineral governance policies that have been primarily beneficial to foreign owned firms and a narrow stratum of Africa’s elites.

There is a growing constituency within African society for the AMV agenda, how this constituency grows and acts will be critically important for implementation and progress over the next ten years.

* Cornelius Adedze is editor of African Agenda
Climate conference ends amidst major North-South differences

The UN climate talks ended almost two days later than scheduled on Sunday, Dec 15, where some key decisions were unable to be adopted, mainly because of clashes of opinion between developed and developing countries.

Some of the draft decisions were put forward by the COP 25 Presidency to the delegates at the closing plenary, but since these drafts did not enjoy the consensus of all Parties, these controversial agenda items were forwarded to the next COP next year for further work.

Also, a few draft decisions that were tabled and put forward to plenary for adoption could not be adopted due to disagreements on what actually had been agreed to during the negotiations the day before.

The final plenary saw the closing of COP 25, the 15th session of the Kyoto Protocol Parties (CMP 15) and the 2nd session of the Conference of Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA 2).

Earlier on Monday, 9 Dec, the UNFCCC’s Subsidiary Body for Implementation and the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice finished their work, and forwarded draft conclusions to be adopted by the respective bodies of the COP/CMP and CMA, leaving the controversial sticky issues to be dealt with by the Chilean COP Presidency.

Several decisions on finance such as that on long-term finance, were dealt with under the COP, through a contact group in the first week, which went into ‘informal-informal’ consultations directly among Parties in the second week of the talks and then to Presidency-led consultations.

Among the three main agenda items that revealed the North-South divide
among developed and developing countries were on long-term finance, the review of the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage and Article 6 of the Paris Agreement dealing with market and non-market approaches and mechanisms.

The main divide between developed and developing countries was over the push by most developed countries on all countries, for the raising of the ambition level on emission reductions (or mitigation) only.

While the North talked about ambition, (by which they mean ambition in mitigation), the South stressed that their frustration that the finances they require were not forthcoming – to do mitigation or adaptation, but developing countries were also being pushed to report more mainly on their mitigation obligations under the term ‘transparency’, with no corresponding ambition on funds to be provided to developing countries.

Some developing countries made the observation that there appeared to be on the part of developed countries ambition in rhetoric but not on implementation in practice, as the most important implementation was on the means of implementation viz. of finance. Many saw the North as being hypocritical, by mouthing ambition to appease their public but they do not mean it, as they are not willing to provide the means of implementation for developing countries.

Developing countries also countered by stating that the principle of ‘common-but-differentiated responsibilities’ (CBDR) must be adhered to, and that the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement should not be just mitigation-centric and that what is most important for developing countries is the required means of implementation, including finance, technology transfer and capacity-building, so that they can fulfil their mitigation and adaptation needs. They also wanted an effective loss and damage mechanism to avert, minimise and address the impacts of climate change.

The developing countries and their various sub-groups criticised developed countries for not fulfilling their obligations in relation to their own mitigation commitments and especially in trying to escape from their obligations to the developing countries under the Convention. They felt that developed countries were trying instead to shift more of their obligations to the developing countries through strict reporting obligations and assessment or stocktaking of their mitigation actions. In the meanwhile, the much needed financial resources were not forthcoming, including on technology transfer, which has been downgraded.

The most dramatic of confrontation in the final closing plenary came during the discussion on long-term finance which was an agenda item under the COP.

**Long-term finance**

When the COP 25 Presidency tabled the draft decision on long-term finance for the consideration of Parties for adoption, a critical paragraph of the draft decision only noted “the importance of continued discussions on long-term climate finance” and that Parties will decide “to consider the matter (of long-term finance) …” at COP 26 next year, making it clear that there was no certainty that the long-term finance agenda item would be a standing item on the COP agenda after 2020.

The African Group raised objections, and was supported by other developing countries including from the Arab Group, and the Like-minded Developing Countries, who maintained that in negotiations the previous night (on Saturday, 14 Dec) on this item, there was agreement to “affirm the importance of climate finance, and that the matter would continue to be discussed under the COP”.

Meanwhile, some developed countries, led by the United States, the European Union, Japan, Canada and the European Union countered that there was no such agreement reached in the negotiations and several of them said that the draft decision tabled by the COP 25 Presidency was consistent with their understanding of what prevailed in the negotiations.

Many developing countries were visibly upset with efforts by developed countries to drop the consideration of long-term finance under the COP agenda. Their strong feeling was that whilst developed countries used the rhetoric of wanting high ambition, this was only for mitigation targeted at developing countries and with them not even wanting to discuss where the financing would come from, to help developing countries in their implementation of both mitigation and adaptation efforts.

Given the divergence of views on the matter, the COP President had no option but to invoke Rule 16 of the UNFCCC’s Rules of Procedure which provides that “any item of the agenda..., consideration of which has not been completed at the session, shall be included automatically in the agenda of the next ordinary session…”.

Egypt speaking for the Africa Group expressed that it was “unfortunate and disappointing” that there could be no decision to continue the long-term finance discussions under the COP post 2020 and said that it was “really surprised that we are not even agreeing to affirm the importance of climate finance”, adding that that this was indeed “becoming worrisome for a lot of countries.”
oped countries asked developing countries “to raise their ambition, and to take more actions, be more transparent (in their reporting of actions), to pay more from their own pockets for adaptation,” this was a “very unfortunate message that was being sent to the COP that is calling for ambition” when “we are not even able to affirm or even decide to continue discussions on climate finance.”

Egypt said further that when “we ratified the Paris Agreement, we did not walk out of it and are committed to it and the Convention”, adding that “we are not backsliding or rolling back on the commitments but it seems this is not the same for all Parties”. In response to developed countries who were calling “for more ambition” and “for addressing the climate emergency”, the Africa Group said that “we are not here for nice statements applauding nice words” but “we are here to work and make sure that we deliver the right package to enhance the ambition and have things move forward,” adding that it was very obvious that when it came to issues of finance, technology transfer or capacity-building, there was “very limited space to even discuss them or even affirm them”.

**Strong language**

The Africa Group said emphatically that it wanted “to put on record that it will engage on this agenda item again (on long-term finance), but not with a very benign language just calling to affirm or simply request for discussions to continue” but wanted “strong language” that will make clear that “climate finance is a core component for any ambition particularly in Africa”.

The Africa Group sentiments were echoed and shared by other developing countries including the Arab Group and the Like-minded Developing Countries.

Another important issue that occupied much attention of the Madrid talks was the decision on the review of the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage (WIM), which saw a positive decision adopted of importance to developing countries, mainly through the hard work and united efforts of developing countries under the umbrella of the G77 and China.

In the decision adopted, among other things, there is text that “urges the scaling-up of action and support, as appropriate, including finance, technology and capacity-building, for developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change for averting, minimizing and addressing loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change”.

The G77 and China had tabled a much stronger proposal requesting developed countries for “adequate, easily accessible, scaled up, new and additional, predictable finance, technology and capacity building… (for) addressing loss and damage” but due to opposition by developed countries especially from the United States, the final decision is a much watered down version of the original proposal. The United States did not want any “bifurcation” of responsibilities to be attributed to only developed countries.

**Establishment**

The decision adopted, among other matters, agreed to the establishment of as part of the WIM “the Santiago network for averting, minimizing and addressing loss and damage…to catalyse the technical assistance of relevant organizations, bodies, networks and experts, for the implementation of relevant approaches at the local, national and regional level, in developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change”.

However, an issue that could not be resolved in Madrid was the governance of the WIM. Developed countries wanted the WIM to be under the governance of the CMA only (Parties under the Paris Agreement), while developing countries wanted the WIM to also be under the COP governance.

In the decision adopted, it was noted that “considerations related to the governance of the WIM will continue…(in Nov 2020).” Hence, this issue remains to be decided next year.

The G77 and China, in response to the governance decision of the WIM noted that “discussions on this issue here at COP25 and CMA2 did not produce any outcome and that such discussions do not prejudice any further consideration of this matter under the COP and the CMA”.

Tuvalu, in a strong response to the governance issue, said that the decision “does not suggest that COP does not have ongoing role” as it is “the COP that established the WIM”. It also made the observation that “during the consultations, a Party (referring to the United States) who has been insisting that the WIM operates solely under the Paris Agreement, ironically or strategically will not be a Party to the Paris Agreement,” adding that “if they get their way, they will wash their hands in assisting countries who would be impacted by climate change”. It emphasised further that “this is a tragedy and adversity to the millions of people who are already suffering the impacts of climate change. Denying this fact could be interpreted as a crime against humanity,” drawing applause from those present in the plenary hall.

**Article 6**

One of the most contentious and complex negotiations at the talks was that on Article 6 of the Paris Agreement, dealing with market and non-market mechanisms, which had many sub-issues including that related to among other matters, financing for adaptation; accounting, delivering on the overall mitigation in global emissions, transition of activities under the Kyoto Protocol from the Clean Development Mechanism etc. which were mainly technical.

Despite the intense negotiations over the two weeks, Parties could not find agreement on the many issues and managed to only adopt a procedural decision under the CMA, that requested the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice to continue the consideration and adoption by the CMA of decisions next year, “on the basis of draft decision texts” which were prepared by the Presidency in Madrid, while “recognizing that these draft texts do not represent a consensus among Parties”.

Hence, the can has now been kicked down the road to next year on the Article 6 issues.

*A TWN report from Madrid.*
Climate financing being undermined by rich nations, NGOs charge

The successful battle against climate change - which has triggered a rash of natural disasters, including floods, droughts and rising sea levels - will be predicated largely on the availability of financing, writes *Thalif Deen*.

The World Bank last year pledged $200 billion to finance the fight against climate change, between 2021 and 2025. In October, the US offered $1.21 billion to support Blue Economy - an offer described as a proverbial drop in the world’s besieged oceans.

But Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is aiming high.

Last week, at the Conference of Parties (COP25) climate change conference in Madrid, he said: “We should ensure that at least $100 billion a year, is available to developing countries for mitigation and adaptation taking into account their legitimate expectations to have the resources necessary to build resilience and for disaster response and recovery.”

Guterres said there was a need to replenish the Green Climate Fund (GCF) to meet the commitment to mobilize the estimated $100 billion per year for climate action.

But at the GCF Pledging Conference in Paris last October, rich nations pledged only $9.8 billion to the Fund leaving a yawning gap.

But not surprisingly, climate financing was one of the key issues at the two-
A coalition of over 150 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and climate change activists has called on developed countries “to stop using bullying tactics to block funding for climate disasters”.

“But developed countries - those most responsible for the climate crisis - including the UK, US, EU, Australia and Japan, have spent years blocking concrete progress to create funding and debt relief for countries in the global South most affected by rising global temperatures”, said the coalition in its letter.

Tim Jones, Head of Policy, Jubilee Debt Campaign and a signatory to the letter, told IPS that a new fund has to be agreed; otherwise countries suffering from the impacts of climate change will be pushed into taking on ever higher unjust debts.

“There are multiple sources of finance from taxes on financial transactions to international air travel. All developing countries hit by disasters should get moratoriums on debt payments so vital funds stay in the country for rebuilding in the immediate aftermath,” he pointed out.

Furthermore, said Jones, funds should stop being wasted on expensive private schemes such as climate insurance, which lead to public money being wasted on private sector profit.

For example, he said, one climate insurance scheme in the Caribbean has received $293 million in premium payments and grants from donors since it began in 2007 but has paid out just $131 million in claims.

In contrast, $105 million from the scheme has gone to private insurance companies as profit, he added.

The open letter from the NGO coalition says: “The under-signed organisations, recognizing that the UN finds that climate disasters are now occurring at the rate of one per week and are set to cost at least $300 billion per year by 2030, call for an end to the stalemate in negotiations and the creation of a comprehensive financing facility, including debt relief, for developing countries experiencing such disasters.

“Without finance to help countries cope with climate-induced loss and damage, the most vulnerable parts of the world will sink deeper into debt and poverty every time they are hit by climate disasters they did not cause.”

The Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage (WIM), which is being reviewed at COP25, was established in 2013 to support vulnerable countries already experiencing extreme and slow onset climate disasters, such as flooding, droughts and rising sea levels.

Six years on, the WIM has failed in its main purpose - to propose concrete, rights-based financing solutions for communities being hit by climate disasters, the letter adds.

Cameron Diver, Deputy Director-General, the Pacific Community (SPC), who is at the COP25 in Madrid, told IPS sea-level rise is already underway.

“We have seen its effects in the islands of the Blue Pacific continent, as we have in countries and communities around the globe.

“If we truly want to limit the impact on our populations, what we need, to paraphrase Secretary-General Antonio Guterres at the opening of COP 25, is ambition in mitigation, ambition in adaptation and ambition in finance”.

He said ambition in mitigation is to ensure that “we limit levels of greenhouse gas emissions to levels compatible with the Paris Agreement and that contribute to the transformative approach necessary for our economies and societies to make the low carbon transition.”

Without enhanced mitigation actions, global warming will continue, the climate emergency will become ever more dire and our communities will suffer the consequences, he warned.

“This must be accompanied in equal measure by increased ambition in adaptation, so that we accompany the most vulnerable countries and communities in their efforts to adapt to a changing environment and, for coastal communities,
to increased salinization of soils and groundwater, to ocean acidification and coral bleaching that destroys coastal ecosystems and livelihoods, to an ocean that encroaches on sometimes already limited land masses,” he noted.

Without adaptation and mitigation working hand in hand, we will not get the full benefit of concentrated climate action to stem sea-level rise and its effects.

“And to achieve all of this, we need ambition in finance”, said Diver.

“We need to unlock and increase existing international and national climate funds to transform promises on the paper into outcomes in the field and we need public and private finance to accompany the low carbon transition, invest in the green and blue economies, divest investment portfolios of non-Paris Agreement compatible assets and provide the level of funding required to meet global climate ambition,” he argued.

Harjeet Singh, ActionAid’s global lead on climate change, told IPS: “Concrete financing solutions are urgently needed to repair the devastation already being caused by climate change and to prepare for an uncertain future.”

“Our analysis shows that ending state subsidies for fossil fuels and a progressive tax on the oil and gas industry would raise the billions needed to adapt to and repair the harmful impacts of global warming. These solutions put the onus on those responsible for the climate crisis and protect the rights of those most at risk,” he added.

ActionAid’s report, Market solution to help climate victims fail human rights test, looks at the various financing options that help survivors of climate disasters and protect their human rights.

The report examined the current options for market, state and “innovative” funding mechanisms available to cover the soaring costs of loss and damage related to rising global temperatures, reviewing their effectiveness against key human rights principles.

Singh said that most market solutions put the financial burden back on developing countries, who are least responsible for causing the climate crisis.

These mechanisms also fail against transparency and accountability measures and do not involve the people most at risk in decision making to protect their rights.

The analysis identified clear winners:

* Progressive taxes such as a Climate Damages Tax on oil, gas and coal extraction and the Financial Transaction Tax, a small levy to raise revenue from the trading of financial instruments.

* Shifting state subsidies away from fossil fuels and towards addressing the impacts of climate change and funding a “Just Transition” to a low-carbon global economy.

On the GCF, he said: “We expect rich countries to at least double their previous commitments to the Green Climate Fund, recognising that this remains inadequate to address the full scale of the crisis.

“To effectively tackle the climate crisis, we need to see a massive shift in financial flows, far greater than countries have pledged to the fund so far.

“Helping the world’s most marginalised people in developing countries tackle climate impacts requires grant-based public finance, not loans or private investments.”

* Thalif Deen, writes for the IPS from the UN, New York.
Almost nine decades ago, newly elected US President Franklin Roosevelt introduced the New Deal in 1933 in response to the Great Depression.

The New Deal consisted of a number of mutually supportive initiatives, of which the most prominent were: a public works programme financed by budget deficits; a new social contract to improve living standards for all working families, including creation of the US social security system; and financial regulation to protect citizens’ assets and channel financial resources into productive investments.

The New Deal was effectively a fiscal stimulus for recovery, employment, development and environment goals. The Citizens Conservation Corps (CCC) created two million jobs in environmental projects for young Americans aged 18-25 years when the US population was 125 million.

The best known public works project was the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), an integrated regional development programme for an under-developed region. It built infrastructure to generate hydroelectric energy to sustain industrial and agricultural growth in the US Southwest.

Thus, the New Deal helped ensure US economic recovery, but also successfully addressed unsustainable practices that had caused widespread ecological, social and economic crises in environmentally fragile regions, and helped usher in a new era of economic growth and sustainable development.

The world is in need of a ‘New Deal’ that will help propel development, sustainable development just like was done in the US years ago, argue Jomo Kwame Sundaram and Anis Chowdhury.

The Grand Renaissance Dam, Ethiopia
expanding prosperity, especially in poorer regions.

**Sustainable development crises**

Today, the world is in protracted economic slowdown. This crisis needs a similarly bold response, as the United Nations urged following the 2008-2009 financial crisis. But its New Deal was to be more global and sustainable. Public works programmes should move countries to more sustainable development pathways to achieve the United Nations 2030 Agenda for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

First, it has to involve international solidarity, following decades of globalization, and inequalities among and within countries. Second, it has to be sustainable - economically, socially and ecologically. We face profound environmental crises, with global warming the greatest new threat with unprecedented ramifications. While much attention has recently focused on climate change, sustainability is also threatened by air and water pollution, natural resource degradation, loss of forests and biodiversity, as well as socio-political instability due to growing inequalities, repression and resistance.

**A new, new deal**

A New Deal for our times should have key elements similar to Roosevelt’s, namely public works programmes and measures to encourage productive investments for output and job recovery, social protection and prudent financial regulation. Most developing countries are vulnerable to the global financial system. While varied, they are generally less resilient and more susceptible to market volatility, often forced to pursue pro-cyclical macroeconomic policies, exacerbating economic instability and undermining long-term growth.

This New Deal should support counter-cyclical responses in three main ways. First, national stimulus packages in both developed and developing countries to revive and “green” national economies. Second, international policy coordination to ensure that developed countries’ stimulus packages not only create good jobs in the North, but also have strong developmental impacts in the South.

Third, greater financial support for developing countries, as long promised, especially for development and climate change. The North should also enable the South to more effectively mobilize domestic resources, especially through taxation, and stemming illicit outflows of funds.

**Setbacks**

In light of the slowing world economy, and dim prospects for imminent recovery, resources are needed to strengthen social protection to contain poverty and hunger. Hundreds of millions in developing countries are at risk due to lower incomes, declining export earnings and other challenges. A strong fiscal response should make long-term investments to accelerate ecologically sustainable and socially inclusive growth. Front-loading massive, multilaterally cross-subsidised public investments in developing countries in renewable energy and sustainable smallholder food agriculture should induce complementary private investments as spontaneous market forces alone will not generate the investments needed.

The Global Green New Deal (GGND) should include mutually beneficial collaborative initiatives between governments of rich and poor countries. Reforms of the international financial and trading systems should support sustainable development for all. There was a glimmer of hope for such a bold coordinated multilateral initiative at the 2009 London Summit of G20, but cooperation and progress have been disappointing since, e.g., little meaningful progress on its Global Jobs Pact. With the mid-2010 G20 Toronto Summit U-turn, fiscal austerity became the new normal.

Meanwhile, creeping protectionism all around set recovery back further. Growing precariousness and declining living standards, blamed on imports and immigrants, have fuelled the ethno-populist backlash against Others, with multilateralism as collateral damage.

**Global green new deal urgent**

The urgency of an ambitious GGND has risen as most countries drift further off track in achieving Agenda 2030. After almost a decade of stagnation, countries must prioritize recovery, but not at the expense of others. Stimulus packages must lay the foundation for sustainable development. Policy coordination among major economies should minimize adverse spillover effects, especially on developing countries, which have become more vulnerable than ever, after decades of economic liberalization and globalization. Socially useful public works could contribute to climate adaptation and mitigation, and improve public goods provision.

To be sure, many other complementary interventions are needed. But such investments and government spending require significantly improved public finances. While revenue generation requires greater national incomes, tax collection can be greatly enhanced through fairer international tax cooperation. Clearly, the agenda for a new, New Deal requires not only bold new national developmental initiatives, but also far better and more equitable multilateral cooperation, through improvement of the inclusive multilateral United Nations system.

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Vulnerability, with its facets of exposure and dependence, represents a major challenge for the sustained and beneficial integration of developing countries into international trade, the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has said, writes *Kanaga Raja.

According to an UNCTAD Note presented at the eleventh session of UNCTAD’s Trade and Development Commission, as countries open up and deepen their integration into the global economy, their economies become interdependent but also exposed to external risks.

Combined with the absence of alternative means, the process of integration could lead to a state of vulnerability for countries dependent on particular forms of trade, finance, products, markets, suppliers, transport routes and infrastructure, due to their natural endowments and specialization patterns, which could have profound implications for their economic welfare and development paths.

There is a need to effectively address the causes and effects of multi-faceted vulnerabilities, including the imminent threats posed by climate change, to buttress economic resilience for sustainable development, said UNCTAD.

In some opening remarks at the session on 25 November, Dr Mukhisa Kituyi, the Secretary-General of UNCTAD, said that “we are seeing a diverse set of challenges today.” In this context, he pointed to rising sea levels and violent
hurricanes compromising the very existence of SIDS and coastal communities, to transport and shipping links and the vulnerability of small islands and landlocked developing countries to fluctuating commodity prices with major dire consequences for many developing economies, and to rising debt that is hindering the ability of nations to finance development and build greater climate resilience.

“And related to these challenges, we see persistent inequalities translating into an autumn of discontent including in countries particularly in middle income and high income countries. From as diverse a place as Lebanon to Chile, from China to Bolivia, South Africa to France and now the latest Colombia, we are seeing a new uncertainty in the discontent enveloping the world.”

But in the world today, this set of challenges is even additionally complicated by the increasing challenge of trade tensions and unilateralism on the international platform, he said. The impact of the current trade tensions on the multilateral trading system further threatens the vulnerable countries, he added.

The UNCTAD note stated that small island developing States (SIDS) are a heterogeneous group of countries. Despite being “small” and islands, the size and economic profile of these countries differ significantly on several measures. For example, as a group, SIDS include nine least developed countries (LDCs) and extend to all income categories, including six countries classified as high income by the World Bank.

Despite the asymmetries, SIDS face special development needs arising from their unique vulnerabilities, including in the context of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). “Smallness” carries implications of scarce land areas and limited labour and capital for agriculture and manufacturing production, and, consequently, high production costs and low output volumes.

The small market size of SIDS does not allow these countries to benefit from economies of scale, which severely constrains their productive and export capacities, with knock-on effect on the entire economy. Insularity often implies remoteness from major markets, import sources and transport hubs.

The transport and mobility costs for SIDS are high, as they are excluded from major transport networks. Located in the Caribbean Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, the South China Sea and the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans, SIDS are at high risk of extreme weather events and natural disasters and of the effects of climate change in the long term.

SIDS are generally open to and highly dependent on international trade, said UNCTAD. As their domestic markets cannot afford large-scale industries subject to economies of scale, SIDS tend to lack competitive export products that could drive an entire economy. Conversely, they tend to rely heavily on imports of energy and a wide range of food, capital and consumer goods to fuel their economies and meet subsistence needs.

The trade-to-GDP ratio reaches 100 per cent in half of these countries and is above 90 per cent in 75 per cent of SIDS. Consequently, SIDS register large current account deficits. In 2016, SIDS ran current account deficits of 5.8 per cent of GDP on average, reaching 20 per cent in some cases. Persistent deficits translate into external finance needs, which have mainly been addressed through external debt.

Debt dependence and sustainability are indeed a common and longstanding issue in SIDS, particularly in the Caribbean. In 2014, the debt-to-GDP ratio of SIDS stood, on average, at 57 per cent of GDP; the majority of this debt-to-GDP ratio (45 per cent) was external. While concessional loans are vital sources of development funding, the share of official development assistance flows to SIDS steadily has declined as the relatively high income level of many SIDS has made them ineligible for concessional finance. In the absence of concessional finance, non-eligible SIDS have relied heavily on private finance and capital markets. This has exposed them to market volatility and the risk of reversals in financial flows.

Lack of economic diversification, and dependence on a few export commodities and markets, has gradually compromised the participation of SIDS in international trade. Since 2000, their share in world merchandise exports fell from 0.15 to 0.10 per cent. Exports of traditional cash crops such as coffee, fruits and sugar, as well as apparels, dwindled as new competition emerged and preferential market access conditions gradually eroded. This has happened despite the continued importance of these products, for several SIDS, as a source of foreign exchange.

With geographical conditions discouraging agriculture and manufacturing activities, many SIDS have become remarkably focused on services, UNCTAD noted.

Uncertainties regarding the functioning of the multilateral trading system created by heightened trade tensions are therefore a cause for concern for SIDS. These countries have major stakes in a robust and functional rules-based system. The recent debate on World Trade Organization reform to modify the design of the special and differential treatment principle could have an important bearing on SIDS. At issue is whether or not to limit the eligibility for special and differential treatment provisions by the application, inter alia, of the criterion of a country’s per capita income.

This is a reminder of the important policy question of how the special vulnerabilities of SIDS should be measured and addressed in international policymaking processes, said UNCTAD.

Commodity dependence

According to UNCTAD, primary commodity-producing countries that face declining and often volatile prices on the one hand, and have to import manufactures produced in high-wage countries and in industries where entry barriers are high, on the other, could suffer from decreasing terms of trade and be trapped in a state of commodity dependence characterized by an "unequal exchange" with commodity-importing industrialized nations.

The most recent UNCTAD data indicates that 102 countries were commodity dependent (at least 60 per cent of the value of their merchandise exports is accounted for by commodities) in 2013-2017, an increase from 92 in 1998-2002. Two thirds of developing countries’
exports are dependent on commodities. Commodity dependence is almost exclusively a developing country phenomenon that especially affects vulnerable country groups. It affects 85 per cent of LDCs, 81 per cent of landlocked developing countries and 57 per cent of SIDS. Geographically, 89 per cent of countries in sub-Saharan Africa are commodity dependent, which is the hardest-hit region.

Empirically, evidence shows that commodity dependence can have a negative impact on development through terms-of-trade shocks and price volatility, with macro and micro effects, particularly at the household level for small-scale farmers, miners and the poor. At the macroeconomic level, commodity-dependent developing countries are vulnerable to negative commodity price shocks and commodity price volatility.

The impact of these fluctuations can be amplified when commodity prices exhibit a high frequency of sharp positive shocks (peaks) and long bottoms, or downward trends. These price shocks and volatility are detrimental to exporters. For example, average commodity price levels in 2013-2017 were substantially below their peak of 2008-2012. This contributed to an economic slowdown in commodity-dependent developing countries, with several going into recession. As growth decelerated, the fiscal situation in many commodity-dependent developing countries deteriorated, resulting in the accumulation of public debt, often in the form of an increase in external debt. The external debt of 17 commodity-dependent developing countries increased by more than 25 per cent of GDP between 2008 and 2017.

Also, a commodity export earning boom could lead to real exchange appreciation, which in turn creates a situation of inefficient resource allocation and a loss of competitiveness of non-commodity sectors, often described as “Dutch disease”, said UNCTAD. While the share of natural resources in GDP has been found to have a positive impact on growth performance, volatile commodity prices lead to volatile output and investment, which in turn depresses per capita GDP growth.

At the microeconomic level, export earnings uncertainty has an impact on savings and investment decisions. In developing countries, investors are often risk-averse and face liquidity constraints amid poorly functioning capital markets. This could force economic agents to make precautionary savings. Through this channel, income instability could negatively impact investment. Risk occurring from instability in export revenues is likely to modify long-term growth, as economic agents could refrain from investing in technical progress.

For example, during the period of structural adjustment programmes implemented in Latin America and Africa in the 1980s and 1990s, marketing boards and stabilization funds for agricultural commodities were dismantled, while export taxes were removed. The phase-out of marketing boards, by removing price guarantees, increased exposure of these region’s countries to international markets shocks.

Public services were abandoned, without private sector takeovers. This led to production instability amid variable yields and product quality. Farmers reduced adoption of new technologies and control of agricultural processes, leading to lower product standards, said UNCTAD. UNCTAD found that the countries most vulnerable to climate change are commodity-dependent developing countries (including many SIDS and LDCs). They are also among the countries least prepared to adapt to climate change; thus, climate change reinforces the need for economic diversification and transformation in commodity-dependent developing countries.

Transport and logistics are the backbone of globalization. They drive international trade and service value chains, while enabling deeper market integration.

However, this strategic sector is increasingly at the forefront of the vulnerability debate. Its heightened exposure to disruption factors undermines the ability of transport and logistics to effectively support a trade-led sustainable development path.

Over recent years, multiple, interconnected concerns have arisen that have heightened the vulnerability of transport infrastructure and transport and trade facilitation services. These concerns include varied risks that span economic, social, environmental, regulatory, technological and market-related factors.

Concrete examples include the rising geopolitical risks, environmental degradation, fossil fuel dependence, climate change, security threats, disruptive technologies, new demands on cross-border trade facilitation and cybersecurity. Many developing countries and LDCs are faced with persistent transport challenges that could be further exacerbated by heightened vulnerability. These include infrastructural transport deficits, limited connectivity to transport networks, lack of investment and of access to finance and prohibitive transport costs that weaken their trade competitiveness, economic development and social progress.

The vulnerability of transport and logistics is particularly apparent in many SIDS and landlocked developing countries, which are heavily challenged by their unique geographical, economic and logistical profiles. Additional constraints facing these countries result from their geographical disadvantage, small size, limited trade volumes, limited transport options and, often, trade flow imbalances that raise transport costs and further increase the vulnerability of the transport sector to external shocks.

Currently, freight transport, i.e. the transport of goods, accounts for 27 per cent of all transport energy use and is responsible for about 7 per cent of the global economy-wide greenhouse gas emissions, driven in particular by growing global trade and transport activity. At the same time, trade-related international freight volumes are expected to grow by a factor of 4.3 by 2050 compared to 2010. One third of trade in 2050 will
occur among developing economies, compared to 15 per cent in 2010. World road and rail freight volumes are expected to increase more than three-fold and over five-fold, respectively, by 2050.

These trends underscore the challenges facing the transport sector and heighten its vulnerability to unsustainable patterns. Addressing these issues requires mainstreaming sustainability considerations into relevant planning and policy-making decisions. Mitigating the vulnerabilities weighing on transport and logistics requires, among other things, measures and actions that promote economically efficient, competitive, affordable and socially inclusive (multi-modal) transport systems, while at the same time achieving greater energy efficiency and environmentally friendly objectives.

Designing and implementing sustainable transport and logistics systems, especially in developing regions is crucial to tackling the varied vulnerabilities facing the transport sector. Multi-pronged approaches are required to help developing countries build capacity to ensure that their transport and logistics are better prepared to respond to multi-faceted vulnerabilities. Areas of intervention include improving understanding of risks, exposure and implications for the transport and logistics of developing countries.

The benefits of trade reforms to developing countries are substantial. Efficient and simplified trade procedures not only reduce cost and time to trade, they also lower the barriers of inclusion of small and medium-sized enterprises in global value chains and improve government revenues. Trade facilitation reforms could also help prepare countries for the growing digital economy and e-commerce, which are expected to dominate the global trading system in the coming years.

At a time when trade facilitation reforms have now become an obligation for the 164 members of the World Trade Organization under the Agreement on Trade Facilitation, developing countries, including LDCs, will need to pay even more attention to trade facilitation gaps in their national trade reforms, including SIDS that are in particular need of reforms of trade facilitation and port management systems and landlocked developing countries that are particularly vulnerable in border cooperation and transit.

In order to do so, trade facilitation reforms need to be implemented and applied correctly. It is important that countries implement their obligations according to their individual commitments. Even though there are visible signs of progress in trade facilitation across developing countries, including LDCs, challenges remain. Emerging threats and vulnerabilities in the multilateral trading system present both challenges and opportunities to developing countries, including LDCs.

Rising protectionism as well as heightened trade tensions in major economies put developing countries, including LDCs, in an increasingly uncertain position. As most of these countries are increasing trade in intermediate goods, tariffs could heighten prices and render products from developing countries uncompetitive. On the other hand, these emerging threats could present unique opportunities for developing countries to increase market share through favourable trading environments, improved trade procedures and other relevant trade facilitation reforms.

Implemented appropriately, trade facilitation reforms could ensure that developing countries, including LDCs, facilitate imports and exports, generate revenue for investments, eliminate poverty and trade into prosperity. Thus, advancing trade is a precondition for realizing the development agenda and must be included in national development agendas, said UNCTAD.
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Plurilateral talks on e-com divided on key issues

Key members of the plurilateral informal Joint Statement Initiative (JSI) group on electronic commerce have remained divided on a range of issues, writes *Ravi Kanth.

These include “digital trade facilitation and logistics,” “flow of information” covering cross-border data flows and localization of computing facilities, “privacy” of personal information protection and data protection, “cybersecurity”, and “telecommunications,” participants told the SUNS.

During the last JSI group meetings, held on 22-25 October at the World Trade Organization, the participants discussed different proposals in the consolidated draft text on five issues - “digital trade facilitation and logistics,” “flow of information” covering cross-border data flows and localization of computing facilities, “privacy” of personal information protection and data protection, “cybersecurity”, and “telecommunications.”

Prior to the meetings, the coordinators of the JSI group - Australia, Japan, and Singapore - had circulated restricted draft texts on all the five areas.

The draft texts, seen by the SUNS, contains language on five issues with different alternatives in square brackets. Each area was being handled by a focus group.

Around 52 members (the European Union is taken as one representing its 28
Members of the former Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) group such as the US, Australia, Japan, Singapore, and Canada, as well as the EU, China, Russia, and Brazil among others dominated the discussions, said participants, who asked not to be quoted.


China, Korea, and Brazil among others are the major proponents of the Focus Group A given their interests in market access.

Brazil, for example, is the main proponent on the “Single windows data exchange and system interoperability.”

Even though the Doha Trade Facilitation Agreement that was concluded at the WTO’s ninth ministerial conference in Bali, in 2013, is yet to be fully implemented by all WTO members, several JSI participants said it is not correct to rush into “digital trade facilitation agreement” without much clarity on what would constitute electronic transmissions, said a participant, who asked not to be quoted.

The “Focus Group B” discussed the most difficult issues concerning new rules in three different areas. They include (1) Cross-border transfer of information by electronic means/Cross-border data flows, (2) Location of computing facilities, and (3) Location of financial computing facilities for covered financial service suppliers.

The US is the main driving force seeking ambitious rules in all these three areas.

The US has submitted language exclusively on the “location of financial computing facilities for covered financial suppliers.”

In a heavily bracketed text on cross-border transfer of information by electronic means/cross-border data flows, the US along with some other members proposed language that: “No [Party/Member] shall [prohibit or restrict/prevent] the cross-border transfer of information, including personal information, by electronic means, [if/where] this activity is for the conduct of [an enterprise/the business of a covered person/the business for or for the consumers to access, distribute and use services and applications].”

Japan, Brazil, and Singapore also proposed language on cross-border transfer of information, saying, “each [Party/Member] shall allow the cross-border transfer of information by electronic means [, including personal information,] when this activity is for the conduct of the [business of a person of [Parties/Members]/business/ business activity of a covered person].”

In contrast to the first two Alternatives, the EU proposed language that: “The [Parties/Members] are committed to ensuring cross-border data flows to facilitate trade in the digital economy.

To that end, cross-border data flows shall not be restricted by:

(a) requiring the use of computing facilities or network elements in the [Party’s/Member’s] territory for processing, including by imposing the use of computing facilities or network elements that
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are certified or approved in the territory of the Party;

(b) requiring the localisation of data in the [Party’s/Member’s] territory for storage or processing;

(c) prohibiting storage or processing in the territory of other [Parties/Members];

(d) making the cross-border transfer of data contingent upon use of computing facilities or network elements in the [Party’s/Member’s] territory or upon localisation requirements in the [Party’s/Member’s] territory."

During the meeting, cracks emerged among key participants on the interpretation of cross-border transfer of information by electronic means/cross-border data flows, said a participant, who asked not to be quoted.

The US and the EU differed sharply on the issue of restricting cross-border transfer of data on account of “safeguards” to ensure the protection of personal data and privacy.

The US along with Japan, and Canada proposed language in square brackets that: [This Article does not/Nothing in this Article shall] prevent a [Party/Member] from adopting or maintaining a measure inconsistent with paragraph 5 [dealing with cross-border data flows to facilitate trade in digital economy] [that is necessary] to achieve a legitimate public policy objective, provided that the measure:

(a) is not applied in a manner which would constitute a means of arbitrary or unjustifiable discrimination or a disguised restriction on trade;

(b) does not impose restrictions on transfers of information greater than are necessary/required to achieve the objective.

Singapore and Brazil proposed language that: “Nothing in this Article shall prevent a [Party/Member] from adopting or maintaining measures inconsistent with paragraph 5 [dealing with cross-border data flows to facilitate trade in digital economy] [that is necessary] to achieve a legitimate public policy objective, provided that the measure is not applied in a manner which would constitute a means of arbitrary or unjustifiable discrimination or a disguised restriction on trade.”

In sharp contrast to the US proposal on cross-border data flows, the EU proposed alternative language that: “[Parties/Members] may adopt and maintain the safeguards they deem appropriate to ensure the protection of personal data and privacy, including through the adoption and application of rules for the cross-border transfer of personal data. Nothing in the agreed disciplines and commitments shall affect the protection of personal data and privacy afforded by the [Parties/Members] respective safeguards.”

The US objected to the EU’s language at the meeting, saying that it is too broad and full of exceptions, said a participant, who asked not to be quoted.

In response, the EU maintained that it will need absolute safeguards for protecting personal data and privacy, the participant added.

On location of computing facilities too, sharp differences came to the fore during the meeting.

The US, Japan, Canada, and Korea among others proposed that: “No [Party/Member] shall require [a covered person/an enterprise/a person of [Parties/Members]] to use or locate computing facilities in that [Party’s/Member’s] territory as a condition for conducting business in that territory.”

Singapore proposed language that: “[Parties/Members] shall not require the use or location of computing facilities in its territory as a condition for conducting business in that territory.”

China, for example, said it would need to protect information in computing facilities covering its hospitals, power plants, infrastructure units, and shopping Malls among others on legitimate policy grounds.

Significantly, the US is the only member that provided language exclusively on “Location of financial computing facilities for covered financial service suppliers”.

The US proposal covers “Financial services” such as “all insurance and insurance-related services and all banking and other financial services (excluding insurance), as well as services incidental or auxiliary to a service of a financial nature.”

The US proposal is drawn largely from the former TPP agreement, said a participant, who asked not to be quoted.
Africans charged more than 3.5 times the “affordable” rate for mobile data

People living in Africa are charged an average of 7.1 per cent of their monthly salary for a gigabyte (GB) of mobile data, more than 3.5 times the threshold considered affordable asserts *Gareth Willmer.

This is according to a report by the Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI), which classifies the affordable rate as 2 per cent of monthly income. It finds that progress towards competition is stalling across low- and middle-income countries amid consolidation between mobile and internet operators.

The trend threatens to jeopardise the push towards affordable internet access for all, with half the world’s population still unable to connect. Even though the 50 per cent mark was reached at the end of last year, that’s still far short of the UN’s goal of universal access.

The 2019 Affordability Report, published on 22 October, estimates that people in countries with low levels of mobile and internet competition pay about US$3.42 per gigabyte (GB) of data more than those in competitive ones. This premium, says A4AI, is “unaffordable” for many people in low-income countries.

A4AI estimates that 1GB of data costs $7.33 more in a country with a monopoly market than one with two mobile operators — with an estimated 260 million people worldwide having access to just one operator, and 589 million living in low-competition countries.

The impact of limited competition is substantial in regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa, where that price equates to about 5.8 per cent of average monthly income.

In a range of countries that A4AI tracked for affordability between April and June 2019, African nations made up the bottom 13, with the price for a gigabyte in those countries at 10 per cent of average monthly income or more. The figure was as high as 26 per cent in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and more than 20 per cent in the Central African Republic and Chad.

Lack of competition

Less than half (65 out of 136) of the low- and middle-income countries studied in the report have fully competitive markets, says A4AI. “This trend underlines the urgency of promoting competition to support healthy markets that provide affordable internet access,” it adds. “Policymakers and regulators must work to encourage competition and support new entrants.”

Dhanaraj Thakur, research director at the World Wide Web Foundation, which runs A4AI, believes competition must be boosted through regulation to encourage new entrants, more options for public internet access and joint initiatives between the public and private sector, and municipally owned or community networks.

Villages or groups of villages can set up their own not-for-profit networks with services that are relevant to them, Thakur suggests, pointing to examples such as the Zenzeleni community-owned network in rural South Africa.

“Access to broadband internet is still too expensive,” he says. “One of the ways to help reduce costs is through greater competition and a greater mix of solutions… We believe not enough is being done in that regard.” This requires a concerted push from governments, he adds.

Moving forward

Although progress is slow, Thakur says governments are gradually adopting policies and affordability is improving. The report names Cameroon and Mali among countries that have helped boost affordability with new national broadband plans.

Fekitamoeloa Katoa ‘Utoikamanu at the UN Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States says the world has seen “tremendous advances” in digital technology, but that millions of people are being “left behind”.

She calls for support for the world’s poorest countries to form policies, regulations and projects to foster internet access and adoption. “We know all too well that internet access and use significantly shape human, social and economic conditions,” she said.

Claire Melamed, CEO of the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, says it is vital that “technological advancement doesn’t reinforce disadvantage”.

“Giving people visibility and opportunities to connect with others and make their voice heard are an important part of human and economic progress,” she said. “It’s not easy for overstretched governments to grapple with complex regulatory environments, but coordinated policies and approaches are needed to make a reality of the push to ‘leave no one behind’.”

* Gareth Wilmer writes for the IPS. This story was originally published by SciDev.Net
A raft of changes occasioned by global interventions in African countries has taken the control of seeds from the African farmer into the hands of commercial seed conglomerates leaving the farmer likely to become very dependent on others for his seeds, a dangerous move, contends *Isaac Winful Dadzie.

Seeds and seed system in Africa have seen changes at the macroeconomic management level from previously state-led green revolution in the 1960s to an alliance of green revolution guided by neoliberal policies within the framework of a network of civil societies, commercial private breeders, farmers, state regulators and research institutions.

The result? A sea of change in seed policy in a number of countries on the continent. However, this has not led to the promulgation of requisite laws to regulate the situation in most African countries. For example, whereas Ghana and South Africa have enacted laws to cover transgenic seeds production, importation, export and marketing, Liberia is yet to pass new bill for seed production and distribution and has no law on plant variety protection yet. Also disturbing in this transition to the new policy narrative of green revolution is the fact that many public breeding institutions have lost space to corporate breeding organizations on the continent and this is happening at a time when expansion of seed production requires the need and struggle for genetic resources.

The weakness in the seed system in Africa is the difficulty of harmonising farm seed systems into formal seed production and distribution. According
In Ghana, public companies like the Ghana Seed Company which produced certified seeds were closed down and put on privatisation in 1989 due to poor performance in a macro environment not supportive of a parastatal development. The Ghana Grains and Legume Board (GGLB) which was tasked to produce foundation seeds during this same period of structural adjustment converted employed seed growers into private growers. According to Prof Kojo Amanor of the Institute of African Studies (University of Ghana), donor support for seed production during the structural adjustment period was reluctantly given in the context of creating a viable commercial company, which could then be privatised.

to a 2019 report by the African Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) on production quality control in farmer seed systems, the formal seed system, which is largely shaped by the neo-liberal alliance of food governance framework, provides a minority of what farmers need since they are developed at a distance from farmers and do not always adapt well into specific production contexts. The neo-liberal paradigm in formal seed system is yet to fully appreciate the role of small holder farmers especially in appreciating the central role of farmers in biodiversity and conservation. This role is said to underpin farmers’ right. However, this same role in a wider ecological system is not in good health because since the rise of industrial agriculture there has been a greater loss of biodiversity constituting the sixth major extinction event in the history of the life of the earth with dramatic erosion of genetic materials in industrialised capitalist and peripheral countries.

It is important to mention that in the context of seed systems in Africa farmers have a range of diverse practices for ensuring that seed quality is retained over time, says ACB. Nevertheless, they’ve identified that farmer seed system is not perfect on the continent. For instance, “quality controls in smallholder seed production systems are unevenly practised, drought and other difficult production conditions may limit reproduction and maintenance of quality seed, and there are intense pressures on farmers to abandon their diverse crops and varieties in favour of a smaller number from the formal sector that offer potential for cash generation.”

An ensuing debate over promotion of farm saved seeds is whether farmers should register their seeds? ACB argues that “in the existing formal framework, if farmers plan to register their seeds, they will need to fix the characteristics into a defined variety. Registration can open farmer seed to commercial exploitation with uneven allocation of benefits and costs, especially when there are no Free, Prior, Informed Consent (FPIC) or Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) arrangements. But there are reasons why farmers may want to register their seeds in the context of formal seed laws that require registration. For instance, African farmers would want an open space for public support. They would also want to prevent biopiracy through defensive publication of varieties and would want to commercialise.

Another central debate is also how seed laws give space to farmer seed system. It is widely studied that the emerging seed laws in Africa enable intellectual property rights protection for commercial breeders. In Ghana, there is a standstill to a bill in parliament for addressing plant variety protection of breeders and this is due to pressures from CSOs and the public. CSOs such as Food Sovereignty Ghana and Peasants Farmers Association of Ghana have raised questions about the extent of rights given to breeders and the sovereign protection given to them in times of state emergency and how that magnitude of rights may affect traditional methods of breeding.

Another dimension raised by food sovereignty movements in Africa is that a severe weakness of farmer system makes seeds from it enter into commercial sale even as they ought to meet the requirements in formal seed laws designed for commercial breeding and production. This raises the vital question of whether there should be any special dispensation or flexibility even after smallholder farmers have gone past the commercial threshold in seed production.

Since most laws and regulations are not well suited to farmer seed populations in all respects because these seeds require uniformity and stability, the growth of formal seed production and distribution has gained interest and momentum on the continent. The growth occurs yet within a climate where most small holder farmers, contributing nearly 80% of total food crop seeds, maintain their use and exchange of saved seeds. In an interview by the Council for Agriculture Research and Development (CORAF) with Stephen Yacouba Atar, the CEO of Nigeria’s oldest seed company, Da-Allgreen Seeds Limited, he narrates that when CORAF and its partners USAID, and other political and civil society actors set out to level the playing field in matters of seed certification, varietal release, phytosanitary control in West and Central Africa, it led to fast delivery of seed products to targetted farmers in the region. In the past five years, the West African Seed Program has ensured harmonization of national seed rules and has contributed to a considerable improvement in the availability of certified seeds to farmers and enabling countries to adopt legislation to allow cross-border trade.

Nigeria has seen significant growth in certified seed production and export in West Africa. According to Dr Philip Ojo, Director General National Agriculture Seeds Council of Nigeria, “overall, Nigeria now accounts for 60 percent of the total seeds marketed in West Africa”. In 2018 alone, it was reported by Seed Entrepreneurs Association of Nigeria (SEEDAN) that Nigerian companies exported close to 1,200 metric tons of certified seeds to Ghana. These seeds included 830 metric tons of maize, 340 metric
tons of soybeans, and 30 metric tons of sorghum. Both The Gambia and Sierra Leone imported about 450 metric tons of certified rice seeds from Nigeria in the same 2018. These volumes of seed, where until recently, not manifesting due to incoherent rules and lack of opportunities inhibiting the seed business beyond borders. CORAF played a significant role in this development for the certified seed market in West Africa by opening up new opportunities for the Nigeria Seed industry in measures such as providing foundation seeds to efficient companies and helping them in their organisation. As earlier stated, it is worthy to reiterate that most seeds used by smallholder farmers on the African continent are reproduced by farmers themselves outside any formal processes of control. But inadequate formal attention to informal seed systems has led to low dispersal of farmers preferred crop varieties. Effort is being made by organisations like the Integrated Sector Seed Development (ISSD) Africa in parts of the continent like in Ethiopia to strengthen farmer seed system with emphasis on quality control. Some of these initiatives have become possible after assessment on the impact of seed laws on smallholder farmers on the continent.

Although several African countries have commitment to protocols and policies on agriculture, many of them have also made commitments to trade, intellectual property, economic development, climate change, etc. agreements through bilateral, regional and international arrangements which explicitly do not give consideration to the different seed systems on the continent and how these systems impact farmers’ access to quality seeds. Lack of such consideration has created challenges such as poor representation of small holder interest in seed laws. For instance, there is poor understanding of the importance, bias of seed laws towards major crops, poor representation of farmers in seed laws and regulation formulation and absence of review on seed laws. There is also little opportunity for registration of farmer seeds, feasible quality assurance of farmer seeds is poorly understood, and critically most seed laws on the continent criminalise farmer seed practices like seed multiplication, selling and exchange.

The future of the seed industry in Africa is set to achieve some sort of harmonisation of farmer seed system and formal seed system. To a large extent, the aggressive capitalistic effort to ensure formal dominance of farmer seed system has been of concern to many on the continent. But how can farmer seed system be saved and made to survive with changes that can enhance and promote the farmers right to access and control of genetic materials? African Governments must lead in formulating seed policies and laws that provide legal space and support for farmer seed systems. In addition, stakeholders also need to create awareness on the importance, roles, and interests of smallholder farmers and provide support for stronger representation of smallholder farmers in seed law development. There is need for explicit consideration for farmer-based seed systems in seed law reviews as well as regular review of the seed law which should be captured in the law through a special provision.

**MALAWI BRIEF**

With an estimated area of 11 million Ha, where 56% of the land is cultivable, Malawi just like all African countries has informal and formal seed systems. Smallholder farmers constitute about 2 million and are mainly subsistence growers. Sources of seed in the informal sector are largely from farm saved seed, farmer to farmer exchange, local markets, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Community Based Organizations (CBOs).

The informal sources of seed are used by the farmer often because improved seed is not available or the farmer does not understand the benefits of improved seed and sometimes because of traditional and cultural values, high prices and preferences attached to particular seed types. The formal seed system is comprised of local and multinational seed companies most of which have their own breeding, production and distribution programmes. The Seed Act being used now in Malawi was enacted in 1996. The seed laws were introduced to protect the farmer from unscrupulous traders who may sell low quality seed. The aim of the seed laws is to ensure that there is high quality seed available in order to ensure food security of the country. Farmers cannot sell saved seed on the seed market. However, Farmers are able to use and share their seed as crop. The seed laws permit any one, including smallholder farmers to produce certified seed.

“**But how can farmer seed system be saved and made to survive with changes that can enhance and promote the farmers right to access and control of genetic materials?”**
Traditional seeds under threat

In farming communities in Burkina Faso, seeds are used, propagated, bred and traded according to an elaborated traditional system. But this system is increasingly under threat: international seed corporations are aggressively advertising their products, and the government is singing the same tune, writes *Lucien Silga.

Like other West African countries, Burkina Faso is a highly agricultural nation. The sector generates 35% of the gross domestic product and employs four out of five working people. Most of them are smallholders, and many produce primarily for their own consumption. Their livelihoods depend on farmland and seeds. Therefore seeds and the traditional way in which they are used and managed are vital to the nutrition of rural people. This is the basis of existence.

Farmers’ traditional means of using, propagating, breeding and exchanging their seeds are under serious threat. Large seed companies are aggressively campaigning for the use of industrial and genetically modified seeds and forcing their way into the market. They are receiving support from government programmes and laws that play into their hands, as well as from a variety of other actors and donors in the country’s agricultural sector (see box).

In 2006, Burkina Faso passed a law regarding plant seeds. Although it recognises both traditional and “improved” seeds, it promotes almost exclusively the distribution of commercial seeds, primarily by establishing intellectual property rights on varieties and strongly regulating production and trade. Traditional varieties are only affected marginally. However, the law does not address farmers’ rights to keep, use and exchange seeds within their own networks. It does restrict farmers’ rights to certified varieties which are protected by intellectual property rights.

In official discourse, the traditional seed system is seen as inferior. Publicly and privately financed programmes are heavily advertising the commercial system in the countryside. The government is subsidising the production of certified varieties, presenting them as the solution to a variety of problems that farmers face, including ever shorter rainy seasons.
Public-private cooperation in the agricultural sector Many different actors are advocating for the dissemination of so-called improved seeds in Burkina Faso. They include the state, international donor agencies, research institutions, charitable foundations, seed companies and civil-society organisations. Together they wield an enormous amount of financial power.

In most cases, these actors are interconnected, and multinational seed corporations are driving many projects. There is a huge number of public-private partnerships in which private-sector companies cooperate with governments to advance their own economic interests.

One example is the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA). It presents itself as an African initiative, but it is primarily financed by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the US development agency USAID. AGRA works closely with Grow Africa, a consortium of over 200 companies whose goal it is to increase private-sector investments in and profits from agriculture in Africa.

In this context, it is important to note that the seed industry has declared Burkina Faso a target country for the introduction of genetically modified varieties.

Despite the spectacular flop of genetically modified cotton, which was supposed to be resistant to a particular kind of caterpillar, the government wants to bring genetically modified black-eyed peas to the market in the near future.

Furthermore, experiments are currently under way in Burkina Faso, relying on advanced methods of biotechnology. Gene-drive technology, for example, can change the genetic make-up of entire populations of species. It is being used to make mosquitoes sterile in order to reduce the mosquito population and thereby slow the spread of malaria. Civil-society organisations oppose this approach, pointing out that the experiments are being carried out without the prior consent of the local people and against national and international biosecurity agreements.

Diverse and well adapted

Despite the aggressive campaigns, the vast majority of farmers in Burkina Faso still use the traditional land races that have been bred over generations. As Melaku Woredé, the Ethiopian scholar, and other dissident scientists and non-governmental organisations like FIAN have been pointing out for a long time, landraces actually suit local needs (see D+C/E+Z 2012/03, p. 102). Indeed, traditionally used varieties amount to a biological treasure trove, which offers suitable cultivars for all kinds of weather and locations. Farming communities have been breeding for centuries, and further breeding means adaptation to changing conditions. The farmers know what variety to use in which circumstances and temporal changes to rainfall patterns. The country is feeling the impacts of the climate crisis. Another argument is that commercial varieties supposedly lead to higher yields. What is not mentioned, is that they require the use of artificial fertilisers and pesticides.

Some cope with draught, others with pests. The biodiversity of the crops keeps smallholdings resilient. At the same time, commercial breeders use traditional seeds to include desired characteristics in their products.

It is thus not surprising that, according to official data, 80% of Burkina Faso’s farm rely on traditional land races. Smallholders are preserving the agricultural biodiversity they and their ancestors have always depended on. In view of the climate crisis, this approach makes sense. The weather is becoming increasingly volatile, and extreme weather situations occur more often than in the past. As in other countries, that is happening in Burkina Faso. Commercial seed may indeed deliver higher yields, but prudent use of landraces ensures that farmers are very unlikely to lose an entire harvest.

Farming communities have sophisticated seed systems, not only for traditional and local varieties, but also for varieties from other regions and so-called improved varieties. The farmers manage their seeds according to traditional practices and knowledge. The system is ruled by traditional conventions and collective community rights.

Because of the close relationships farming communities have to plants, animals and nature in general, and because of the central importance of these natural resources to their way of life, farmers have certain rights to seeds and varieties. These rights have been enshrined worldwide, for instance in the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA). The UN-Declaration on the rights of peasants, that was adopted in 2018, confirms these rights. However, these rights are not recognised by all countries, and even where they are recognised, the implementation of respective laws may remain unconvincing.

With support from civil-society organisations, farmers’ associations in Burkina Faso are fighting for the government to implement their international rights, particularly ITPGRFA Article 9 on the rights of farmers. Thanks to their efforts, the parliament passed a law regarding access to plant genetic resources for food and agriculture. The law contains provisions addressing how profits from the use of these resources are to be distributed. One chapter explicitly governs the rights of farmers and puts Article 9 of the ITPGRFA in force in Burkina Faso.

On this basis, legal provisions that recognise and effectively protect the traditional seed system must now be passed. Farmers get the right to keep, use and trade their seed varieties. Regulations must then be accompanied by policy measures and public research. Producers, moreover, must focus on the needs of small-scale agriculture. Maintaining the traditional seed system in its entirety is the only way to preserve Africa’s enormous diversity of species and varieties and the knowledge of its farming communities.

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After floods, an early ‘lean season’ awaits South Sudan

‘There will be serious food shortage as early as January 2020.’ South Sudan in the midst of all its political turmoil must brace itself for food shortage the result of raging floods reports *Okech Francis.

Aid groups are predicting a sharp increase in food insecurity in South Sudan after weeks of torrential rain destroyed thousands of acres of cropland, washed away livestock and grazing pasture, and disrupted markets and trade.

South Sudan’s lean season, or hunger gap – the period between harvests when households run out of stored food – typically falls between March and August. But after the substantial crop losses, it is now expected to come as early as January.

Food distributions will need to be stepped up in the coming weeks and months to cope with the almost one million people affected. Meshack Malo, country representative at the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), told The New Humanitarian.

More than 420,000 people have been displaced by the unusually heavy rains – many in areas where humanitarian needs were already sky-high following five years of conflict.

Aid groups say fragile gains made since a September 2018 ceasefire deal risk being reversed, with the rains forecast to continue through December.
A resurgence of conflict that prevents populations from accessing food sources or humanitarian assistance would likely now lead to famine conditions in areas where food insecurity is already severe, according to US-funded famine monitor FEWS NET.

In a sign of the lingering insecurity, the UN peacekeeping mission deployed Nepalese blue helmets last week to Western Lakes State – which has not been affected by the floods – after fighting between the Gak and Manuer communities left 79 people dead and more than 100 injured.

The floods, which began in June, have been driven by a weather phenomenon called the Indian Ocean Dipole. Almost three million people have been affected across East Africa, including Kenya – where at least 120 people died in recent landslides – and Somalia, where roughly 370,000 people have been displaced.

Access to some flood-battered communities in South Sudan remains a challenge, according to Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), which said whole villages are still underwater or have been turned into swamps.

**Crops flooded, livestock lost**

South Sudan often experiences seasonal spikes in food insecurity, but poor harvests in 2018 coupled with delayed rains in early 2019 and the lingering impact of conflict, left a record seven million people hungry this year.

“People were unable to put food on their tables even before the rains and floods,” said Tomson Phiri, a communications officer at the World Food Programme (WFP) in South Sudan.

Roughly 74,000 hectares of cultivated land have now been damaged — equivalent to a 15 percent loss in production in affected areas that will have “expected consequences on food security of the vulnerable population”, said Malo, of the FAO.

Grazing pastures have also been flooded, and widespread livestock deaths — reaching as high as 80 percent in some households — have been recorded, alongside an increase in animal diseases such as Rift Valley Fever and East Coast Fever.

The loss of crops and livestock means people who would generally face shortages during the lean season — when their harvests are depleted — are already finding it hard to get by.

“Where somebody was going to harvest their crops in October or November to carry them through the Christmas period, January, and maybe up to February, that person needs assistance now,” said WFP’s Phiri. “Their lean season starts now.”

There are a lot of areas we can’t reach because the level of the water is still high,” said Eujin Byun, a UNHCR spokesperson in South Sudan, adding that airstrips have been destroyed.

MSF has reported an increase in water-borne and vector-borne diseases like acute watery diarrhoea, malaria, and respiratory infections, and fears possible outbreaks of cholera and measles.

Aid agencies have estimated that $61.5 million will be required to meet immediate needs. Money and resources originally intended for next year’s dry season are currently being spent while responders wait for more funds to arrive.

Despite a recent decrease in violence, peace remains fragile in South Sudan, where an estimated 400,000 people were killed and more than four million displaced over the course of the five-year civil war.

The government and opposition groups signed a peace deal in September last year but have been unable to finalise negotiations on core elements of the agreement such as a unified army.

President Salva Kiir and opposition leader Riek Machar agreed to delay the formation of a unity government by a further 100 days, after missing a 12 November deadline.

* Okech Francis is a freelance journalist based in South Sudan.
Indigenous communities ‘robbed’ as land grabbers lay waste to Brazilian rainforest

Terra Indígena Ituna/Itatá in northern Brazil is home to several groups of uncontacted peoples who are dependent on the surrounding forest for survival. But outsiders have been increasingly moving in and clearing land for agriculture and mining, reports *Ana Ionova.*

All that is left of the lush forest that once covered this patch of land in the Terra Indígena Ituna/Itatá in northern Brazil are a few dried branches and the occasional tree stump. On one side, a massive excavator stands abandoned, gathering dust in the middle of the Brazilian Amazon. Further out, dense, untouched jungle stretches for miles.

The scene, captured by federal authorities in late August, is just one glimpse of the surge in recent invasions of Ituna/Itatá, an indigenous territory spanning some 142,000 hectares (548 square miles) in the northern Brazilian state of Pará. The land is a vast expanse of dense, virgin forest, more than 900 kilometers (560 miles) from the state capital of Belém. By law, it should be home to indigenous people who live in voluntary isolation from the outside world – and no one else.

The presence of these uncontacted peoples was first detected during the planning of the Belo Monte hydroelectric dam, a massive project that opened up the region around Rio Xingu to a flood of business and labor. Outsiders have been banned from Ituna/Itatá since 2011, with the aim of protecting these isolated tribes, which are particularly vulnerable to common disease brought in from elsewhere.

Yet this hasn’t stopped invaders from razing increasingly large swaths of...
forest within Ituna/Itatá, with the area last year earning the somber title of the most deforested indigenous territory in Brazil, according to Rede Xingu+, a network of environmental and indigenous groups working in the Xingu Basin. And more recently, it seems the deforestation may be ramping up further: Satellite data from the University of Maryland recorded around 57,000 tree cover loss alerts between Jan. 1 and Oct. 21, with nearly 70 percent occurring since the beginning of August. Brazilian authorities estimate that about 10 percent of the territory has been illegally invaded and destroyed this year alone.

“There’s a big concern because the uncontacted tribes living in that area may not be able to defend themselves,” Mikaela Weisse, manager of World Resources Institute’s forest monitoring platform Global Forest Watch, told Mongabay in an interview.

**Invaders**

The path into the territory was first opened up by illegal timber exploitation going back at least to 2016, says one local advocacy source who asked to remain anonymous due to security concerns. Soon, ranchers, miners and land-grabbers also began invading the region.

Recently, there have been signs that some of these invaders may be there to stay. Many are registering the land they have illegally cleared within Ituna/Itatá and some have been building settlements in the middle of the jungle. Local sources report movement of pickup trucks deep into the forest, which are believed to be helping clear stretches of land to make way for cattle pastures.

“It’s a type of speculation,” the advocacy source said. “They are going there as if the land will not be indigenous anymore in the future. And they are rushing to grab it for themselves, to secure it now.”

While assaults on indigenous territories in Brazil have been happening for decades, activists say the sharp rise in deforestation and land-grabbing in Ituna/Itatá this year has been closely linked to the country’s controversial new president Jair Bolsonaro.

The far-right leader, who was sworn into office earlier this year, has stated that indigenous people should be integrated into society, while railing against land protections as an “obstacle” to mining and development. Repeatedly, he has vowed not to demarcate a centimeter of additional land for indigenous people.

“They don’t speak our language, but they have somehow managed to get 14% of our national territory,” Bolsonaro said in August, while suggesting demarcation of indigenous land is the result of an international conspiracy.

Bolsonaro has also launched an open attack on Funai, the government agency tasked with protecting indigenous interests in Brazil. The president signed a decree curbing Funai’s powers earlier this year, dealing a further blow to an agency already weakened by the previous government’s move to slash its funding in half. Recently, Bolsonaro also went on to appoint a former police chief with strong ruralist links as head of the organization.

The enforcement of environmental law has also been hard-hit. Earlier this year, Bolsonaro stripped Ibama of some of its powers, handing over final say on environmental sanctions to a newly established court. Environmental fines have also plummeted since the president assumed office in January.

Critics say all of this has emboldened invaders to illegally grab more land in indigenous territories – in Ituna/Itatá and elsewhere across Brazil – without fear of repercussions. Meanwhile, dwindling resources have meant many Funai and Ibama posts in more remote parts of Brazil have shut down in recent years, leaving land-grabbers free to invade indigenous territories.

“There’s a general air of impunity, which has allowed this situation to get so out of control,” said Jonathan Mazower, spokesperson for Survival International, a nonprofit organization that campaigns for the rights of indigenous people. “The system of protection for indigenous territories is unquestionably not working at all.”

The impact has been particularly acute in territories like Ituna/Itatá, which remains under fragile government protection. While the land is under some federal preservation, it is still not fully demarcated as an indigenous territory. In January, Funai renewed its restricted status for another three years – but activists in the region say land-grabbers are betting this may not be the case for long.

“Landgrabbers that support Bolsonaro believe that those lands will not be demarcated,” said Danicley Aguiar, a senior campaigner with Greenpeace Brazil, who is based in Belém and works in the region. “He has promised that they won’t be demarcated. And this creates, in these land-grabbers, an expectation that these lands are not valid.”

Despite the fact that this territory is federally owned and set aside for indigenous peoples, as much as 87% has been
claimed illegally by invaders through the national system of rural land registration, known as Sistema de Cadastro Ambiental Rural (CAR), according to Rede Xingu+. Some plots have even been registered several times by different invaders declaring themselves as the rightful owners, highlighting the mad scramble to lay claim to this territory.

The impact on the people who call this region home, meanwhile, has been profound. Fearing for their lives, uncontacted indigenous people are fleeing from Ituna/Itatá and deeper into the forest, human rights advocates say. As larger stretches of the territory are cleared, some also worry indigenous groups will not be able to continue their nomadic lifestyles.

“Isolated peoples are probably the most vulnerable people we see in the Brazilian Amazon today,” said Christian Poirier, program director at Amazon Watch, a nonprofit working to protect the rainforest and the rights of indigenous peoples in the Amazon Basin. “Where you have increasing pressure on the land, imagine how that affects this particular community. It’s devastating for them.”

This could have the precise impact that land-grabbers are after: as deforestation drives uncontacted communities out of the territory, the chances that Ituna/Itatá will hang onto its protected status are diminishing. This is because, in order to renew the area’s status every few years, Funai must find signs of uncontacted indigenous people still living there.

“These indigenous territories are in the process of being demarcated,” said Aguiar of Greenpeace. “The more the forest is robbed, the higher the chance that these isolated people will flee. And the forest will be left for the ranchers and the land-grabbers.”

The encroachment into Ituna/Itatá is also placing additional pressure on smaller indigenous territories in the surrounding area, local advocates say. As the surrounding forest shrinks and the jungle is chopped up into smaller pieces, neighboring territories like Paquitamba and Arara da Volta Grande do Xingu are becoming increasingly isolated. This means it’s becoming ever more difficult for the forest-dependent indigenous people who live there to survive off the remaining slices of land.

**Fearing for their lives, uncontacted indigenous people are fleeing from Ituna/Itatá and deeper into the forest, human rights advocates say. As larger stretches of the territory are cleared, some also worry indigenous groups will not be able to continue their nomadic lifestyles.**

**Constant battle**

The scene resembled an action film: heavily armed federal agents moved deep into the Brazilian jungle, exchanging fire with land-grabbers. In a dramatic moment during their operation, they discovered and shut down an illegal airstrip that was likely being used to bring chainsaws, fuel and workers to the middle of the jungle.

It was late August and the entourage – which included agents from Brazil’s National Public Security Force and the country’s environmental agency, Ibama – was there to crack down on the rampant deforestation swallowing up large swaths of the Ituna/Itatá indigenous territory, which had been intensifying since the beginning of the month.

The operation, which drew ample attention and media coverage, was not the Brazilian state’s first attempt to curb deforestation in Ituna/Itatá. While clearing within the territory has surged to new and dramatic levels this year, it is really over the course of 2018 that invaders have grown ever bolder in their take-over of this land, after seeing that authorities can do little to stop them.

Ibama has responded to the assault on Ituna/Itatá with at least five operations in the area in 2018 and 2019, advocacy sources estimate. Yet the long-term impact appears to be limited: just weeks after the latest crackdown, activists and local sources report that land-grabbers have gone back to clearing the forest.

The issue lies with a toxic cocktail of factors, which simultaneously enable deforestation and ensure the culprits rarely face punishment. For one, the territory – and the broader region – lies in the heart of the so-called deforestation arc, a crescent-shaped area running along the southern and eastern edges of the Amazon where agricultural development is displacing forest at particularly fast clips. As more and more of the surrounding area has been deforested over the last few decades, the pressure has increased on areas like Ituna/Itatá. “The deforestation and the pressure is coming from the development border,” the local advocacy source said. “And the indigenous protected areas are the only ones where forest remains.”

The remote location of Ituna/Itatá has also helped shield invaders. The territory is only accessible either by helicopter or by ferry from the city of Altamira, followed by about a five-hour drive along a rough road through dense jungle. The isolated location of the region makes it that much easier for the razing of forest to go unnoticed.

Enforcing environmental law across Ituna/Itatá also remains difficult. Ibama, faced with an intensifying shortage of resources, has no permanent post in the region and can only act in a knee-jerk response to a fraction of the rampant clearing taking place in Ituna/Itatá. Even when authorities have held invaders accountable, it’s mostly been a Band-aid effort targeting a few individual invaders rather than the large enterprises behind the deforestation, Aguiar says.

In a recent report, Human Rights Watch found that illegal deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon is largely driven by criminal networks who coordinate large-scale illegal logging operations, while deploying armed men to intimidate forest defenders and indigenous people.

“You can destroy an airstrip or close a ranch,” he said. “But when you return to the city or to Brasilia, the land-grabber will just restart everything. You need to dig deeper to really stop this.”

The article is reproduced from Third World Network Features.
Mass protests in Latin America against the neo-liberal model

Across Chile, Ecuador and Haiti, protesters are demanding change to current economic models that have fueled inequality for decades, writes *Nazaret Castro.*

“It’s not 30 pesos: it’s 30 years.” This slogan, one of the most frequently used in the mass protests in Chile, explains in seven words what has triggered the biggest mass demonstrations in living memory in this Andean country since the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. It was not the 30 Chilean pesos (€0.037 euros, US$0.041) rise in the subway fare but the accumulation of decades of neoliberal policies, which have turned the Chile of today into one of the most unequalitarian countries in Latin America.

The subway fare rise, one of the highest in the region, unleashed, in the words of Argentine sociologist Maristella Svampa, “an unprecedented generalised experiment in civil disobedience” that began on 7 October, when a group of high school students called for a mass avoidance of fare payment. Five days later, the popular uprising took to the streets. “A violent outbreak was to be expected because it was the only way out. When the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) was discussed in Congress, for example, we went on marches, we asked for meetings and consultations, and we were ignored: the system continues along the path of social injustice,” says Alejandra Parra of Envi-
Chilean President Sebastián Piñera, who shortly before the social unrest broke out had described his country as “an oasis of stability” in the midst of regional upheaval, declared a state of emergency and imposed a curfew. As the crisis mounted, the president compared himself to Ulysses: just as Homer’s mythical hero did not succumb to the sirens’ song, he would not give in to the claims of his people (equating the sirens’ songs with populism - and populism with the people’s demands).

Not long afterwards, however, he reversed the increase in the subway fare, introduced a package of social measures and announced changes in his cabinet; changes that his critics consider cosmetic. Chile’s citizen’s movement is aiming further than this: it wants to dismantle the neoliberal economic and social order that was imposed in the country through blood and fire, following the coup that removed Salvador Allende in 1973, and the implementation of a system that effectively remains in place thanks to a constitution which, as Parra explains, “was formulated in the middle of the dictatorship, and designed to place in private hands public services such as health, education and pensions, and basic rights such as water.”

The people responded with mass protests and their demands went far beyond the repeal of the decree; they questioned “the neoliberal policies that are against the people’s interests, under pressure from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which seek to reactivate the business economy but not the economy of the people, or of our rural communities,” concludes Katy Machoa of the Federation of Indigenous Organisations of Napo (FOIN), speaking from the Amazon.

In Ecuador, the protests made President Lenín Moreno reverse the fuel price rise, but it seems less likely that there will be a reversal in the direction of his economic policy. “Ecuador is trapped: it has a dollarised economy that it cannot devalue, it does not control its own currency and is very reliant on the export of raw materials, whose prices are falling,” says Svampa, who is concerned about the rise of the party at a time of “a questioning of the party system.”

In Haiti, where, according to a report by the Tricontinental Institute for Social Research, inflation (18%) and a wage freeze exist alongside the para-militarisation of daily life, the government of Jovenel Moïse, weighed down by corruption and waste, followed the recommendations of the IMF and decided to increase the price of fuel. This provoked shortages, which, in turn, generated mass protests in which, according a report published by the United Nations on 25 October, 30 deaths were recorded, half of them at the hands of the police. It never rains but it pours: the cycle of citizen’s protests had begun in July 2018. The Haitian people are demanding Moïse’s resignation and the end of foreign interference in their economy.

Social power and state repression
If anything is characteristic of these protests, it is the sheer size and diversity of the mobilisation. “In Ecuador, the popular revolt has served not only to put anti-neoliberal theories back on the agenda but also the issue of pluri-nationality, thanks to the strong role played by the CONAIE [Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador], the clear visibility of women and its multicultur-ral nature,” explains Svampa. Students, unions, rural movements and citizens in general have also joined the ranks of the protestors.

In Chile, where the mass demonstrations of 2005 and 2011 were led by students, this time other social actors have joined in, including the middle classes disillusioned with the neoliberal model that has failed to live up to its promises. Alejandra Parra highlights the horizontality of the movement:

“Women will be increasingly important in the mobilisations – in different aspects: community women’s groups, urban or rural women’s groups – as well as native peoples and socio-ecological groups,” says Svampa. This Argentine sociologist also notes a common reaction by the states: “It is to be expected that these crowds will face a repressive response from the state, and a state of emergency.”

We have already seen it in Ecuador, where the Ombudsman’s Office counted eight dead, about 1,200 arrests and 13,400 injured; President Moreno declared a state of emergency and imposed a curfew. In Chile, the tally is even more alarming: 20 deaths, 3,193 detainees and more than 1,000 injured, according to the National Institute of Human Rights (NHRI), which has also reported complaints of rape and torture. Several witness statements suggest that a torture...
“These protests are not so much about the government of the day, but the economic model itself: in Ecuador, the movements now protesting against Moreno have also dissociated themselves from former President Rafael Correa. Likewise, in Chile and Haiti the protests are not against a specific government and in favour of another one, but rather against neoliberalism and its austerity/adjustment policies.”

centre was set up for at least one night at the Baquedano subway station, which brings back dark memories of the dictatorship for the Chilean people. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and former Chilean president, Michelle Bachelet, sent a mission to investigate what happened; the social movements are demanding that there should also be an independent investigation that coordinates with the social organisations.

An uncertain outlook
What will the Latin American political scene look like in the wake of these protests? Parra is optimistic: “I hope that there will be a real change: what we have experienced will stay with us, body and soul, ‘learning by doing’ has not been erased from our popular culture and is seen today in the form of assemblies that are formulating structured proposals from the demands voiced on the streets, in order to launch a people’s demand for structural change in our country; and that will go to a constituent assembly that will lead to the reform of the constitution”. According to a survey carried out in October, 80 per cent of Chilean citizens approve the idea of a new constitution and 85 per cent are “in agreement” with the social movement of recent weeks.

“In Chile there is a radical questioning now of the status quo, but there are no left or centre-left parties capable of articulating those demands,” argues Svampa. What has been put on the table, however, is that the “oasis” of stability that was Chile, for years presented as proof of the success of the liberal model, had feet of clay. From now on, it will be more difficult to use Chile’s macroeconomic figures as an argument to legitimise adjustment policies in the region. And it remains to be seen what will happen to Piñera, who has already had to suspend the summits of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum (APEC) and the 2019 United Nations Conference on Climate Change (COP 25), scheduled for November and December, respectively.

In other words, these protests are not so much about the government of the day, but the economic model itself; in Ecuador, the movements now protesting against Moreno have also dissociated themselves from former President Rafael Correa. Likewise, in Chile and Haiti the protests are not against a specific government and in favour of another one, but rather against neoliberalism and its austerity/adjustment policies. In Argentina, on the contrary, although anti-neoliberal protests are frequent, they have not developed “the ability to break into the public scene and end the simplified neoliberalism versus populism paradigm,” says Svampa.

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