

GOOD GOVERNANCE AND NEW THINKING ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS TO ADDRESS SDGs

The sage "is ready to use all situations and doesn't waste anything. This is called embodying the light." — Lao Tzu, alive circa 600 BCE in China.

"When you are inspired by some great purpose, some extraordinary project, all your thoughts break their bonds." — Patanjali, alive in India circa 100 BCE.

"The life of money-making is one undertaken under compulsion, and wealth is evidently not the good we are seeking; for it is merely useful and for the sake of something else." — Aristotle, alive in ancient Greece circa 300 BCE.

"To rank the effort above the prize may be called love." — Confucius, alive in China circa 500 BCE.

"Although you may spend your life killing, you will not exhaust all your foes. But if you quell your own anger, your real enemy will be slain." — Nagarjuna, India, alive circa 200 CE.

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FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to the 28th issue of the Sustainable Development Observer where we focus on new thinking for good governance and application of technology for achieving SDGs.

In this issue, we present articles that call for Right to Food and also, introduction/application of good governance as a basic human right.

In promoting the application of affordable new digital technology in particular, that is reducing the technology deficit, we present some such examples from Asia and Africa.

Transforming the food production system is a major theme of this issue of Sustainable Development Observer.

In our focus article, we present yet another call, this time by the United Nations' Secretary General Antonio Guterres for the reform of the global financial architecture – especially that of the IMF and the World Bank – and the recognition of BRICS as a major player in such a reformed financial system of the future.

We hope this issue's article will provide some food for thought.

Dr Kalinga Seneviratne – Editor, Sustainable Development Observer

ABERDEEN FISHING COMMUNITY - HONG KONG



I visited the 'Aberdeen Fishing Village' in Hong Kong recently. On the left are the houseboats and old the fishing boats, which are still there, while the people who used to live on the houseboats have been given accommodation on the high rise buildings in the background - but they still use the houseboats "to have parties' (I was told). And the picture on the right shows the local fish market that has hardly changed over the years. I thought of sharing these pictures because that reflects the theme of this issue of new thinking on sustainable development that does not destroy the past to build a new future – if we can synergize both, that could link the past with the future, and keep peoples' identities for future generations. Photo Credit: Kalinga Seneviratne

FAO Chief Pleads for Peace, Right to Food and Global Governance Reforms

By Jaya Ramachandran

RIO DE JANEIRO — The Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Mr. QU Dongyu, has called for peace, recognition of the right to food, and reform of multilateral institutions as cardinal imperatives.



From left: Eduardo Paes, Mayor of Rio de Janeiro; Mauro Vieira, Brazil's Minister of Foreign Affairs; FAO Director-General QU Dongyu

Addressing the first session of the G20 Foreign Affairs Ministers Meeting on 21 February in Brazil, Qu stressed the need to prioritize “actions that promote food security globally to achieve the Four Betters: better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life, leaving no one behind”.

“We need a global governance system that is fit for purpose, works in an efficient, effective, and coherent manner, is accountable to its members, and fully aligned and committed to achieve all the SDGs,” he said at the second session. “When it comes to hunger and poverty, it must prioritize people while also protecting the planet. Agrifood systems are solutions based on science and data.”

G20 represents two-thirds of the world's population

The G20 comprises 19 countries (Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Russia, Türkiye, UK, and USA) and two regional bodies: the African Union and the European Union. The members of the G20 represent around 85 per cent of the world's GDP, more than 75 per cent of world trade and around two-thirds of the world's population.

Participants in the G20 external affairs meeting were, in addition to the FAO Director-General, the heads of other international organizations, including the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the World Health Organization, and the World Trade Organization, as well as UNESCO, UNCTAD, the ILO, and numerous regional development banks.

The meeting was the first major event of Brazil's 2024 G20 presidency, which features hunger, sustainable development and global governance as the key priorities. President Lula da Silva of Brazil has also set up a task force to establish a Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty by the end of the year and open to all countries, not just G20 members.

Rising food and energy prices in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters, as well as ongoing conflicts and wars and asymmetrical fiscal and monetary strains, have impacted food security beyond traditional hunger hotspots.

Qu emphasized the importance of “increased investment to transform global agrifood systems to be more efficient, more inclusive, more resilient and more sustainable”, noting that it will be critical to reduce hunger and bring people out of poverty as well as assure healthy and nutritious foods for all.

Three main pathways

He pointed to three main pathways by which FAO supports and complements the efforts of the broader UN system: tackling acute hunger; bolstering efficient agricultural markets; and increasing the resilience of all Members and their populations.

The food security work entails a range of activities ranging from FAO's hosting of the Integrated Food Security Classification (IPC) global support unit, which maps emerging hunger crises around the world, to taking an active role in fostering the goals of the Black Sea Grain Initiative, which aimed to mitigate conflict's impact on large global trade flows.

The markets work is geared to increasing production and price information and transparency and includes hosting the Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS), established by the G20 in 2011. It played an important role in preventing excessive market volatility during the COVID-19 pandemic.

FAO's work in increasing Members' resilience to allow their communities to prevent and cope with crisis and shock is geared to the most vulnerable people, including women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and rural farmers. "We need to create opportunities for the poor to increase their incomes and improve their livelihoods," Qu said, adding that digitalization and innovation as well infrastructure and better education and health services are all priority investment areas.

The Director-General offered FAO's full support of UN Secretary-General António Guterres's call to overhaul and renew global governance institutions in line with "21st century economic and political realities".

FAO, working as a professional facilitator serving 194 Members, is at the centre of a global governance architecture for food security, engaging the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Food Programme (WFP), the WHO and the WTO along with a partnership of 60 years with the World Bank and other international financial organizations and multilateral development institutions. The Director-General highlighted that FAO offers a unique platform for governments, academic institutions, civil society, the private sector and other key partners for exchange of knowledge and dialogues

Qu pointed to the Global Roadmap for Achieving SDG2 without breaching the 1.5C threshold, which FAO launched at the COP 28 climate summit in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, from 30 November until 12 December 2023. That roadmap can act as a catalyst to guide financing for accelerated climate actions to transform agrifood systems and help transformed agrifood systems achieve "good and nutritious food for all today and tomorrow," he said.

[Transmitted on 23 February 2024 by IDN-InDepthNews]



Farmer Dilip Chandra Tarafdar is busy cultivating 'Charulata' paddy in his paddy exhibition plot. The photo was taken from Chandipur village in Shyamnagar upazila of Satkhira district. Photo Credit: Rafiqul Islam Montu

paddy. This rice seed has been extended to many more farmers in the last season. The yield has also been good.

Dilip Chandra Tarafdar, 45, a farmer from Chandipur village in Shyamnagar upazila (or administrative division) of Satkhira district on the southwest coast of Bangladesh, has developed

Bangladesh Farmers Are Protecting Paddy Cultivation from Climate Risks

By Rafiqul Islam Montu

SHYAMNAGAR, Bangladesh — The new variety of paddy is 'Charulata'. This paddy is salinity tolerant, can withstand normal winds, and yields well without fertilisers and pesticides. It is effortless to save seeds from this paddy. Due to these reasons, 'Charulata' paddy spreads quickly from one farmer to another. Many people are now planting this

this disaster-tolerant rice variety: Charulata monsoon season paddy. Planting of this paddy starts from the last week of June, and the yield of this paddy comes in November-December.

Tarafdar himself has faced many crises while planting paddy. The top of the paddy would dry out due to excess salinity in this area. The disaster caused extensive damage to the paddy. As a result, the expected yield was not obtained. There were losses in paddy cultivation every year. Subsequently, he took the initiative to deal with this crisis. He invented a new disaster-tolerant variety of rice through the cross-breeding method of two local varieties of paddy.

Why is it necessary to invent new varieties of rice? Tarafdar said: “At one time, our ancestors used to plant paddy in the fields. Then, they would go to cut the paddy after ripening. In the meanwhile, they had no other work in the paddy field. But we face many problems after planting paddy—problems with rising water, problems with strong winds. There is an infestation of insects. We have developed a new method of cross-breeding to bring back the disaster-tolerant varieties of paddy planted by our ancestors. I am getting the expected result.”

What is the difference between this newly invented rice and the conventional variety? “This rice can survive in waterlogging and salt water. The tip of this rice is very hard. As a result, this rice can withstand strong winds. Shyamnagar is a disaster-prone area. So, this paddy is quite suitable for this area. The yield of this paddy is up to 840 kg per 33 decimal lands. In contrast, the yield of conventional varieties of paddy in the same amount of land is not more than 400 kg. That is why this paddy is becoming popular among the farmers,” Tarafdar added.

Agricultural planting at disaster risk

Like Dilip Chandra Tarafdar, farmers in this region face multiple obstacles with paddy cultivation. Groundwater in the area is saline. Therefore, paddy cannot be cultivated in the Boro season (dry). In the ‘Aman’ season (monsoon), they incur losses by planting conventional varieties of paddy. He faced various problems in cultivating that paddy. Seeds bought from the market do not germinate well. Paddy fields often do not yield well, even with adequate fertilisers and pesticides. After two or three years of cultivation, the quality of seeds stored at home is not good.

Enamul Haque, Shyamnagar Upazila Agriculture Officer, said: “Farmers in this disaster-prone area have done a great job in preserving local rice seeds and inventing rice varieties. Their work is helping to sustain agriculture in the face of disasters. Several varieties of rice invented by the farmers have been sent to the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute. It takes at least ten years to get results from there.”



Paddy fields on the banks of the Brahmaputra River in Bangladesh. Photo Credit: Kalinga Seneviratne

Farmers in Shyamnagar and other upazilas on the southwest coast of Bangladesh say that natural disasters are a big problem for them regarding paddy cultivation. Due to frequent cyclones and increasing salinity, many farmers have moved away from farming. After Cyclone Ayla in 2009, salinity in the land increased. As a result, many farmers need help cultivating the land. Cyclone

Sidr in 2007 and Cyclone Amphan in 2020 have caused severe damage to crops in the area. But at one time, the land in this area was very good with different types of crops, including paddy.

The land types of Koyra, Dakop and Paikgachha in Khulna district and Asashuni and Shyamnagar in Satkhira have changed. According to a study by the international organisation Practical Action, in two decades from 1995 to 2015, the agricultural land of these five upazilas has decreased by 78 thousand 17 acres. The land for saltwater-based shrimp farming has increased by 1 lakh 13 thousand 69 acres.

According to the World Bank's 'River Salinity and Climate Change Evidence from Coastal Bangladesh', by 2050, river water in ten out of 148 upazilas in 19 districts of the region will be affected by excessive salinity. These are Shyamnagar, Asashuni and Kaliganj of Satkhira district, Batiaghata, Dakop, Dumuria, Koyra, Paikgachha of Khulna district, Mongla of Bagerhat district and Kalapara upazila of Patuakhali district.

Climate expert Dr. Ainun Nishat, a member of the research team of the World Bank, said: "The river water in this region is gradually becoming salty. Saltwater intrusion and flooding are causing havoc. People will migrate if the land is not made cultivable. The land use of this region should be changed now. Developing salinity tolerant varieties and their rapid access to farmers and extension of improved technologies."

According to the data of the Soil Resources Research Institute (SRDI), nearly 89 per cent of the arable land in Khulna is saline land. Besides, there is a severe shortage of irrigation water during the dry season due to the severity of salt water, resulting in some of the coastal areas remaining uncultivated. Due to increased salinity, coastal area inhabitants are forced to move away from agriculture.

Farmers have taken the initiative to save paddy seeds to protect paddy cultivation from climate change and natural calamities. They are inventing different rice varieties through breeding methods as per their requirement.

Farmers have become 'rice scientists' for their own needs

Hayabatpur is a village very close to Shyamnagar Upazila Sadar. Sheikh Sirajul Islam, a farmer from this village, has set up a rice research centre in his house. Here, different varieties of rice are developed through cross-breeding. They are trying to make a variety of 'Dhanshi' suitable for cultivation by cross-breeding with other rice. Earlier, he had produced two more varieties of paddy called 'Sohag-4' and 'Seba' paddy.

Local varieties have been set up at the office of Bangladesh Resource Center for Indigenous Knowledge or BARCIK, a non-government research organisation in Shyamnagar. The organisation provides technical assistance to farmers storing rice seeds and developing rice varieties. BARCIK says farmers have developed 35 varieties of rice. Most of it is still in the field-testing phase. About 200 varieties of local rice seeds have been preserved. A "seed bank" has been set up to help farmers.

Sushant Mandal, 38, a farmer from Deula village in Shyamnagar upazila, said: "At one time, there was a good yield of paddy in this area. We have saved most of the farmer's annual food from agricultural cultivation."

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Laying Foundation for Digital Revolution in Africa's Food Systems

By Douglas Okwach

NAIROBI — Digital technologies will be key in addressing the three persistent problems in Africa's agricultural industry—inefficiency, exclusivity, and unsustainability, according to the 2023 Africa Agriculture Status Report, "Empowering Africa's Food Systems for the Future".



Photo Credit: Africa Renewal

The report is by AGRA (Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa—an Africa-led organisation that seeks to catalyze agriculture transformation on the continent through innovation.

There is already evidence that Africa's agriculture is on the way to becoming more efficient, inclusive and sustainable, the report observes.

But, in spite of the technological gains, food insecurity is worsening in Africa as chronic undernourishment increases and numerous countries face acute food shortage triggered by a combination of factors, including the Ukraine crisis and climate change.

The report aptly captures this situation. In 2022, for instance, the prevalence of under-nutrition in Africa was 19.7 per cent, a slight increase from 2021, the report shows.

In 2022, the prevalence of hunger also rose across Africa with hunger increasing from 22.2 per cent to 22.5 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa, which translates into 9 million more people experiencing hunger compared to 2021, adds the report.

Citing the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), Global Network Against Food Crises (GNAF), Market Data Insight for Actionable Strategy (FSIN), and Oxfam International, the report says the prevalence of under-nutrition in North Africa rose from 6.9 per cent to 7.5 per cent with nearly 2 million more people facing hunger in 2022.

The nature of food systems in the region, it notes, is characterized by underdeveloped markets and is driven primarily by smallholder farmers who operate on small and fragmented farms.

How can this be?

Experts from the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) pointed to underdeveloped markets and the struggles of "smallholder farmers who operate on small and fragmented farms."

The good news is these experts already see evidence of digitalization's positive impact on the efficiency, inclusiveness and sustainability of African agribusinesses.

The launch of this report before some 5,400 delegates from over 90 countries gathered for the 2023 Africa Food Systems Forum¹, themed "*Recover, Regenerate, Act*" in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, offered some hope to Africa.

It took place against the backdrop of extreme weather events, recurring crop disease, inadequate infrastructure and policies, risk averse investors and ongoing conflicts, which have disrupted food and energy markets.

¹ Read communiqué of the forum here - <https://agrif.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/AFRICA-FOOD-SYSTEMS-FORUM-2023-Communique.pdf>

Forum participants acknowledged the continent’s current status, but they refused to accept it as the status quo.

Instead, they resolved to “harness Africa’s potential” by engaging youth in sustainable food production; adopting regenerative farming methods at local levels; collaborating across borders, sharing good practices and pooling resources to lift up smallholder farmers.

They also agreed to improve soil health, grow more nutritious crops, and include women and marginalized communities in all these efforts.

To support all these, countries are to pursue innovative financing strategies and embrace “digital technologies, e-commerce and innovative market platforms.”

Digitalization supports larger goals and aspirations

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in its report, ‘Going Digital : Shaping Policies, Improving Lives’², defines digitalization as “the use of digital technologies and data as well as interconnection that results in new or changes to existing activities” in, say, food systems.

Digital technologies and related products and services can transform production, management, and governance systems.

By “going digital,” Africa can align its food systems with SDG 2: Zero Hunger, to achieve food security, improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.

Digitalization also resonates with the African Union Agenda 2063³, which aspires to “a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development ... underpinned by science, technology and innovation,” with “healthy and well-nourished citizens” and “modern agriculture for increased proactivity and production.”

Electricity to power agricultural change

To power digital transformation, the continent requires cheap, adequate and reliable energy. Africa’s energy paradox—scarcity amid plenty—poses a different challenge to digitalizing its food systems.

In its African Economic Outlook 2022⁴, the African Development Bank reported that, to deliver electricity to the nearly 1.3 billion Africans, some 645 million of which are off the grid, the continent needs investments of \$32–\$40 billion annually in the energy value chain.

Without universal access to electricity, the rollout of digital innovations in agriculture across Africa has been uneven. Even so, many countries are making progress.

In the 2023, Africa Agriculture Status Report, the IFPR experts pointed out some success stories, where smallholder farmers were already accessing real-time pricing information, conducting secure financial transactions and linking to other members of their value chain.

** This report is a slightly modified version of the original published in the January 2024 issue of Africa Renewal*

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² Download report from - https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/science-and-technology/going-digital-shaping-policies-improving-lives_9789264312012-en

³ ‘Our Aspiration for an Africa we want’ - <https://au.int/agenda2063/aspirations>

⁴ <https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/african-economic-outlook-2022>

Poultry and Livestock Production Helps Communities Build Climate Resilience in Zimbabwe

By Farai Shawn Matiashe

HARARE — When Peter Mangana’s crops were hit by drought over a decade ago, he felt depressed. He struggled to feed his family in Bhasikiti village in Mwenezi, southern Zimbabwe.

The 49-year-old later realised that he was experiencing the effects of climate change and that he needed to be smart to survive.

With the help of some local non-governmental organisations, including Mwenezi Development Training Centre (MDTC), he ventured into poultry and growing of traditional grains, which are drought resistant. This was not the first time he did poultry and grow drought-resilient crops.

He grew up doing this minimally and did not know its significance in tackling climate change in his community. Armed with knowledge and skills, Mangana is now full-time in poultry and a farmer of traditional grains such as millet, ground nuts, cowpeas, and bambara nuts.

“I started with 20 Boschveld free-range chickens. This was a new breed to me. They taught me to keep it,” he tells IDN. “They taught me how to feed and vaccinate them. They assisted me with market linkages. I did not even know I could earn a living selling eggs and chicken.”

There is an incubator for the whole community, which smallholder farmers in this community use for hatching eggs at a small fee. He says the fee is meant to repair the incubator in case of a breakdown.

Climate change

Zimbabwe has been experiencing the effects of climate change in the past decade with floods and droughts wreaking havoc on crops leaving many people on the brink of starvation around the country including Mwenezi, about 464 kilometres from the capital Harare.

Here, temperatures can go above 40 degrees Celsius in summer. This year, the government has warned farmers of an El Niño induced drought.

In the 2023/2024 agricultural season, rains came later than in previous years, with livestock in the Matabeleland region dying from dehydration and hunger.

Mangana says he uses the grains harvested from his fields to make feed for the chickens.

“We do not have to buy feed. We use produce from the fields to make feed. We have to make sure that we use materials that provide all nutrients from calcium, fats and vitamins,” he says. “Feeding is critical. If you feed the chicken properly, the eggshells do not get hard, making them hatch easily. Under normal circumstances, the eggs should hatch within a week. For instance, groundnuts and sunflowers provide fats.”

Mangana says the idea is to minimise costs by using available, highly effective resources in poultry production.



Peter Mangana, a smallholder farmer, is running a poultry project at his farm in Mwenezi, Zimbabwe. Photo Credit: Farai Shawn Matiashe.

“Though I buy vaccines from veterinary, I use our indigenous knowledge to vaccinate these Boschveld free-range chickens. I mix barks of indigenous trees with water to make a solution to treat viruses,” he says.

Traditional grains such as millet are drought resistant, and farmers can still have a bumper harvest even if there is rainfall.

Traditional crops

Zimbabwe’s government has been promoting the growing of traditional crops nationwide.

It even supports smallholder farmers with traditional crop input packages and technical advice.

The government showcased traditional grains at the Zimbabwe pavilion at the United Nations climate summit known as COP28 in Dubai in December 2023.

This climate-proofed agriculture is critical in providing sufficient food for people in the southern African nation.

After starting the poultry project with only 20 Boschveld free-range chickens, Mangana now boasts more than 100.

He feeds and clothes his family from the earnings he gets from selling chicks, eggs and chicken to fellow farmers and villagers and supplying markets in town.

“The chickens are sold when they are between six and seven months. I use the money to buy needs for the family. Poultry proceeds also come in handy during droughts. I pay school fees and buy stationary for my school-going children,” he says.

“As a family, we also get eggs and chicken from this project. No one in my family goes to bed on an empty stomach.”

Mangana’s farming venture is supported under a project called Zambuko Livelihoods Initiative which is funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through the United Nations’s World Food Programme (WFP) and implemented by different NGOs including MDCT in Mwenezi, Masvingo and Chiredzi districts.

Enita Chimange, a smallholder farmer from Bhasikiti Village in Mwenezi, says she survives on poultry and small livestock production during drought season.

The 47-year-old with the knowledge she gained from the project through training workshops and international with fellow farmers has built high-rise goat shelters.

“In this community, we have been having problems with hyenas feasting on our goats at night. But we have built safe shelters. It is now a thing of the past,” says Chimange, who has more than 20 goats. “I sell some of the goats to get money to buy essentials like food and clothes for my family.”

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A girl is vaccinated in a village in Mali, which is developing a new system to speed up the approval of vital medicines and vaccines Photo: Credit: Shutterstock/Riccardo Mayer

The Magic of Mali's Digital Pharmaceutical Registry

By UNCTAD

GENEVA — A digital transformation supported by UNCTAD in the West African nation's pharmaceutical industry is paving the way for quicker import and distribution of life-saving medicines—all online.

Imagine living in a country where urgent medical supplies take 18 months to be imported and distributed, putting people's lives at risk and medical personnel in difficult situations where they must make life-and-death decisions without the right medicines at hand.

This could all change for Mali, a vast, landlocked West African nation where this has been the case for decades, as it digitizes – and radically speeds up – the marketing authorization of medicines.

Mali announced in November 2023 that it was working on the live rapid prototyping and testing of a new online pharmaceutical registry, developed in a joint project by UNCTAD, the country's health ministry and the National Pharmaceutical Association.

It will improve the efficiency of the marketing authorization process, ensure the quality and safety of medicines, strengthen transparency and traceability, optimize resources, support the development of the pharmaceutical industry locally and fight against counterfeiting.

Through the online registry, Mali's pharmaceutical importers, producers and distributors – and the government—can remedy supply chain delays and tackle fraud and accessibility challenges more effectively.

Faster approval of vital medicines

The system will speed up the approval time for vital medicines and vaccines from 18 to three months, six times faster than in the past, while providing the government with full oversight.

The investment in the system was partly inspired by the urgency of pandemic preparedness, catalysed by COVID-19. And a growing impetus to tackle and solve some of the country's biggest

medical conundrums to serve its 22 million-strong population of mostly young people under the age of 25, by investing in digital-first solutions.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Mali faces significant health challenges, such as persistently high maternal and child mortality rates and low basic child immunization coverage.

Its basic healthcare challenges are complicated by a relatively high burden of infectious diseases – particularly tuberculosis, malaria and diarrhoea – and an increasing burden of non-communicable diseases.

“This digital registry will have the power to save lives,” says Zeïnabou Sacko Keïta, Secretary-General of Mali’s National Employers’ Council, which is supporting the roll-out of the initiative through its member organizations and offering expert advice.

“It’s a step towards a more modern, efficient health sector adapted to the specific needs of the Malian population,” Ms. Sacko Keïta said, highlighting that the registry is also crucial to improving the country’s public health within a framework of transparency.

How the registry works

The system allows pharmaceutical importers, producers and distributors to register themselves online. It also helps medical authorities to track the entry, production and distribution of pharmaceuticals and rapidly identify obsolete and unauthorized products.

“The registry provides much-needed data on where pharmaceuticals are present and where they need to be, across different types of medical establishments,” Ms. Sacko Keïta says.

UNCTAD has similar digitization projects, successfully implemented or ongoing in 20 countries, mostly developing, touching all areas of civic life and e-government – from business registration to trade portals and identification services.

A powerful force for innovation

UNCTAD’s digital government platform and method is becoming a powerful force for innovation in nations wanting to leapfrog inefficient bureaucratic and paper systems and rationalize them in an online world.

“The impacts of digital systemic change are profound, especially for women and the most vulnerable,” Mr. Grozel says. “But they are also critical for creating the transparency and efficiency necessary to drive investment into the Sustainable Development Goals.”

Mali’s medical and pharmaceutical online registry was publicly announced at the World Investment Forum in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates in October 2023.

[Transmitted on 10 February 2024 IDN-InDepthNews]





Photo Credit: Jakarta Post

Resources and New Forms of Governance Are Needed to Achieve SDGs

By Simone Galimberti

KATHMANDU — To help understand the abysmal state of affairs in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) around the world, it might be helpful to recall a major report published last year, which went primarily unnoticed by policymakers.

It might also be valuable to refer to a recent European Union gathering of Ministers for Competitiveness in Belgium, where former President of the European Central Bank and former Prime Minister of Italy Mario Draghi was the key guest.

Though not directly related, both offer some critical insights on what it will take to realize the future we want in a sustainable and equitable planet instead of consistently warming towards self-destruction.

Most importantly, both offer a clear vision of what it will take to achieve the Agenda 2030. Both also indicate an urgent need to review and revamp the governance systems that rule our lives.

The Global Sustainable Development Report 2023⁵ indicates the six indispensable transformations required if we want to ensure our species' survivability and ways humans can continue to thrive on a much more sustainable Planet Earth.

Human well-being and capabilities, sustainable and just economies, food systems and nutrition patterns, energy decarbonization and universal access, urban and peri-urban development, and the global environmental commons are the key pathways where drastic, urgent and bold actions must be taken.

These pathways were already identified in the 2019 edition of the same report, but last year's edition also added two enabling factors: capacity building and governance.

⁵ https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/GSDR%202023%20Key%20Messages_1.pdf

It is self-evident that any bold undertaking in one of these six areas would require enormous resources, not only a massive injection of public money but also never-imagined contributions by the financial market and private sector.

Here, the Competitiveness Ministerial meeting held in Ghent on 23 and 24 February enters the picture. Relatively low-profile and informal, the event saw Mr Draghi sharing some of his observations on what the EU requires to do to succeed and thrive over the complexities of the following decades in a shift towards a net zero economy.

Huge Funds required

At the same time, Mr Draghi's message was simple but also a daunting one. Put it in simple terms, the EU will require an "enormous amount of money in a relatively short time", as the European edition of Politico reported it.

The former central banker and head of government were not directly referring to the Agenda 2030. Yet it is self-evident that the resources required by the EU to brave the storm coming from these drastic and radical changes will directly contribute to the implementation of the SDGs at its core.

That's why António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, called for an SDGs stimulus equivalent to US\$500 billion a year, which is so important and should not be discounted.

If you think about the amount of money Mr Draghi was referring to for the EU to be capable of competing and thrive in the following decades, the figure proposed by Mr Guterres is almost trivial.

Only for the EU, the amount proposed by Mr Draghi is €500 billion a year. The challenge in fighting climate warming does not relate only to the massive investments in mitigation, essentially all the measures from zero fossil fuel transportation to less damaging food systems that will help cut the existing global carbon emissions.

It is also about the resources needed for mitigation. A report⁶ published by UNEP in November last year identifies a US\$194-366 billion gap annually. Then, there are the efforts in the field of biodiversity preservation.

Ensuring biodiversity

Still below the radar compared to the discussions on climate, ensuring the planet's biodiversity in a way that does not harm locals, especially the indigenous people inhabiting it, remains paramount.

Remarkably, the COP 28 on Climate held in Dubai recognized biodiversity's role in the fight against global warming. This is a crucial year because the international community, for the first time after approving the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework⁷ in 2022, will meet in a new session of the biannual Conference of Party to the Convention of Biological Diversity.

To be held in October in Cali, Colombia, the COP 16 will see government members of the convention present their national action plans on how to implement the new framework. One of the key priorities will be to "mobilize and bolster the means of implementation". In official jargon, this can mean many daunting and expensive things.

"Adequate means of implementation, including financial resources, capacity-building, technical and scientific cooperation, and access to and transfer of technology constitute essential means to implement the Biodiversity Plan fully", explains the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

⁶ <https://www.unep.org/resources/adaptation-gap-report-2023>

⁷ <https://news.mongabay.com/2022/12/nations-adopt-kunming-montreal-global-biodiversity-framework/>

According to a recent report⁸ by the Guardian, Susana Muhamad, Colombia's environment minister, intends to ensure that "the next round of global biodiversity negotiations will put nature at the heart of the international environment agenda". All this will cost a lot of money.

One of the major problems is not just the lack of these resources but also the fact that gigantic amounts of money are being spent in the opposite direction. The State of Finance for Nature 2023, another critical publication by UNEP, stated that "close to a trillion is invested globally each year in activities that have a direct negative impact on nature from both public and private sector sources".

This, according to the report, is "equivalent to roughly 7 per cent of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP)". The bottom line is not that governments and financial markets need to be extremely serious and audacious but also creative in coming up with all the resources we need.

Just imagine if € 500 billion a year is what the EU needs to win over the challenges ahead; what about other regions? According to a report by PwC, the global consulting firm, the Asia Pacific's "annual clean energy investments need to more than double from US\$62.3 billion in 2022 to US\$138.6 billion during the years 2026–2030 and US\$165.8 billion during the years 2031–2035".

According to new research, Africa alone will need US\$ 2.8 trillion U.S. dollars for such transformation. The World Bank, in a 2022 research focused on South Africa alone, predicts that "estimated total investments needed for country's pathways to net-zero at USD\$500 billion by 2050."

While it is hard to come up with the correct estimates, we are talking about mind-blowing amounts. Let's remember that these amounts do not include resources for human development, public education and public health services. The cost of these alone will, undoubtedly, be hundreds of billions of dollars annually. Yet, finding the resources alone is not the only solution.

We must also rethink how governments work, act and relate with the people. That's why governance is seen in the Global Sustainable Development Report 2023 as an indispensable enabler for the transformations required.

As we witness the farmers' protests throughout Europe, many trade-offs are occurring through these unfolding mega-changes. Rethinking governance not only in terms of policies and legislation can be a solution to these problematic bargains.

Policies and legislation must surely be able to do a better job of finding the proper balance between future benefits and immediate sacrifices to be experienced by those directly impacted by the unfolding changes.

But alone, they won't be enough. We must devise new mechanisms that empower people beyond periodically casting ballots. The era of net-zero will require a transformation in the use of public and private financing and a radical overhaul in the way government works.

The latter must be capable of proposing new ideas and, at the same time, able to offset any pitfalls stemming from them. It also needs to formulate new venues for people to express their voices through proper deliberations based on reason.

A novel way of governance will also have to capacitate and empower citizens to have an actual say in the decision-making along the more traditional elections in the North and the South.

*Simone Galimberti writes about sustainable development, youths and the UN.

[Transmitted on 27 February 2024 by IDN-InDepthNews]

⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/feb/23/colombia-names-cali-as-host-city-cop16-biodiversity-summit-aoe>

Food production will become increasingly vulnerable to climate change, with the likelihood of extreme events dramatically increasing.

Solutions to health and climate challenges

FSEC also finds that the food system can be a significant contributor to economies, and drive solutions to health and climate challenges. In the Food System Transformation pathway, economists show that by 2050 better policies and practices could lead to undernutrition being eradicated, and cumulatively 174 million lives saved from premature death due to diet-related chronic disease.

Food systems could become net carbon sinks by 2040, helping to limit global warming to below 1.5 degrees by the end of the century, protecting an additional 1.4 billion hectares of land, almost halving nitrogen surplus from agriculture, and reversing biodiversity loss. Furthermore, 400 million farm workers across the globe could enjoy a sufficient income.

“The cost of achieving this transformation - estimated at the equivalent of 0.2-0.4 percent of global GDP per year - is small relative to the multi-trillion dollar benefits it could bring. Food systems are a uniquely powerful means of addressing global climate, nature and health emergencies at the same time - while offering a better life to hundreds of millions of people”, says Hermann Lotze-Campen, FSEC Commissioner and Head of Research Department Climate Resilience at PIK.

“Rather than mortgaging our future and building up mounting costs leading to high hidden health and environmental costs that we will have to pay down the line, policymakers need to face the food system challenge head-on and make the changes which will reap huge short- and long-term benefits globally”, says Ottmar Edenhofer, PIK Director and FSEC Co-Chair.

“This report should open up a much-needed conversation among key stakeholders about how we can access those benefits whilst leaving no one behind, he concludes.

** The Food System Economics Commission (FSEC) is an independent academic commission, set up to equip political and economic decision-makers with tools and evidence to shift food and land-use systems. It brings together leading experts across the economics of climate change, health, nutrition, agriculture and natural resources, representing organisations including the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, the World Health Organisation, World Bank, London School of Economics, World Resources Institute Africa, and many more.*

[Transmitted on 4 February 2024 by IDN-InDepthNews]



Sugarcane, rice and vegetable cultivation in Fiji (left) and a market in Davao in the Philippines (right).
Photo Credit: Kalinga Seneviratne

As farmers protest, India must urgently deal with its water crisis



Indian farmers are pushing for the legalisation of an historic pricing mechanism that built India's food security, but the problems they face demand far more.

Source: Eco-Business (Singapore)

Link: <https://www.eco-business.com/news/analysis-as-farmers-protest-india-must-urgently-deal-with-its-water-crisis/>

Enhancing Urban Mobility through Low-Carbon Water Transport

In Asia and the Pacific, inland waterway transport is a traditional mode of transportation in many cities that have a network of lakes, canals, and rivers. It includes ferries, pontoon boats, and water taxis (or water buses). The Kochi Water Metro in India's Kerala State, is an example of how inland waterway transport can not only improve commuting but also contribute to climate goals.



Source: Development Asia

Link: <https://development.asia/insight/enhancing-urban-mobility-through-low-carbon-water-transport>

Using technology to fight food insecurity in Botswana



Tumo Kgabeng's agritech solution uses drones to track pests, diseases and soil quality and recommends treatments. Project Anton Tech is a deep-learning Agritech solution that uses technology to detect pests and diseases, predict soil organic carbon levels, and give recommendations on the treatments or appropriate interventions to apply.

Source: Africa Renewal

Link: <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/february-2024/using-technology-fight-food-insecurity-botswana>

Philippines' traditional healers fight to keep their 'forest pharmacy' intact

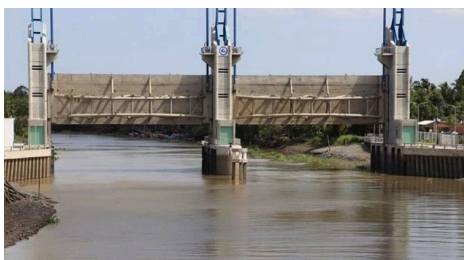
The island of Siquijor in the southern Philippines is famed for its traditional healing practices; less well known is the role its healers play in conserving the island's forests.

Source: Eco-Business (Singapore)

Link: <https://www.eco-business.com/news/philippines-traditional-healers-fight-to-keep-their-forest-pharmacy-intact/>



Saltwater intrusion threatens Mekong Delta rice crop



Local authorities in Vietnam have warned farmers not to plant rice in saltwater-prone areas and to only begin sowing when there are rains and enough freshwater available.

Source: Viet Nam News

Link: <https://asianews.network/saltwater-intrusion-threatens-mekong-delta-rice-crop/>

Challenges Of Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) In The Post-COVID Era Recent Reports from International and Regional Organisations

Empowering Africa's Food Systems For The Future

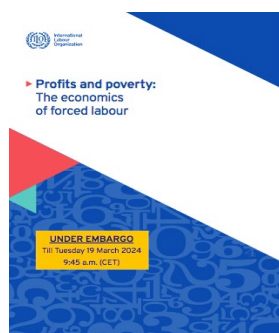
At the heart of a thriving continent lies a vital lifeline: its food systems. Africa, with its abundant natural resources, rich cultural tapestry, and dynamic population, stands at a crossroads in its journey towards resilient and sustainable food systems. As we gaze upon the horizon of this transformation, the 2023 Africa Agriculture Status Report (AASR23), titled "Empowering Africa's Food Systems for the Future" offers a comprehensive outlook into the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead.

Source: Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA)

Download Link: <https://agra.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/AASR-2023.pdf>



ILO Release new report on the economics of forced labour and illegal profits



The International Labour Organization (ILO) has published the second edition of *Profits and Poverty: The economics of forced labour* report, which unveil the latest estimates of illegal profits derived from forced labour. At that time of the first edition in 2014, profits from forced labour were estimated at US\$150 billion annually. The study presents estimates of illegal profits from forced labour at global, regional and sectoral levels. The findings offer a deeper understanding of the complex economic dynamics involved in forced labour practices.

Source: ILO

Download Link: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---ipecc/documents/publication/wcms_918034.pdf

Third World Resurgence: talks are failing to deliver on

The first issue for 2024 of the reviews the COP28 meeting and including a headline decision that attendant fanfare – and what they an overheating planet. It also Australian journalist John Pilger's Western propaganda myths.

Source: Third World Network
Link:

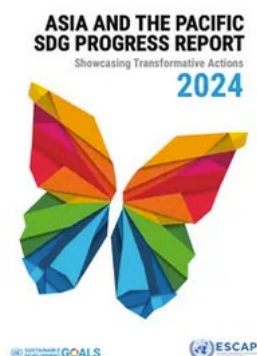


Gloomy weather: How UN climate change

'Third World Resurgence' major outcomes from it – doesn't quite live up to its entail for the effort to save includes a tribute to the late reporting that demolished

(Malaysia)

<https://www.twm.my/title2/resurgence/2024/358.htm>



Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report: Showcasing Transformative Actions 2024

Progress on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) remains uneven and inadequate across various segments of the population and within the five subregions of Asia and the Pacific. According to a new report published by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) - gender and location remain key factors in determining levels of poverty and inequality in the region.

Source: UNESCAP (Bangkok)

Link: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/asia-and-pacific-sdg-progress-report-showcasing-transformative-actions-2024>

UN Chief Urges Reform of IMF, World Bank, Stresses BRICS's Role

By Arul Louis

UNITED NATIONS — The international financial and development institutions should be reformed to reflect the interests of the Global South, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has said.

While the BRICS can play an important and complementary role for developing nations, he stressed that it should not contribute to a fragmentation of the world economy.

The international financial institutions - the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank - and the Security Council that were created in the 1940s after World War II reflect “what the power relations and the global economy were at that time” but aren’t relevant to today’s world, he said at a news conference here on 8 February.

Since they don’t “correspond to the power relations and to the global economy as it is today”, he said, “it will be very important for those institutions to reform in order to represent today’s global economy, to be truly universal and truly inclusive”.

“We obviously need that those institutions reflect more obviously the interests of the Global South”, he emphasised.

Asked about the role of BRICS, he said, that “it is important to have a multiplicity of different organisations to support developing countries” in the finance and trade sectors.



UN Secretary-General António Guterres speaks at the press conference at the UN Headquarters, in New York.
Photo Credit: UN Photo/Loey Felipe

Avoid fragmentation of the global economy

“But”, he added, “it is essential that [it] doesn’t correspond to a fragmentation of the global economy”.

“One of the most important aspects that we need to preserve today is One Global Economy, One Global Market, One Global Internet and to avoid the fragmentation of that global economy”, he said.

“Within a united global economy, I think that many of these institutions [like BRICS] can play an extremely important and complementary role”, he added.

BRICS, made up originally of emerging economies Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, has expanded to include Ethiopia, Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates with membership queries from 34 countries pending.

The group, which aims to foster trade and financial cooperation has created the New Development Bank to fund development projects and help financial stabilisation in the member countries, functioning in some ways like the established financial institutions.

About the fitness of the Breton Woods Institutions - as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund are known for the venue of their founding - to meet contemporary needs, Guterres said that besides the unrepresentative character of their power structure and orientation, they are undercapitalized and too small for the current global needs.

“The truth is that they became too small”, he said, pointing out that “the paid-in capital of the World Bank as a percentage of global GDP today is less than one-fifth of what it was in 1960”.

“So we obviously need a meaningful capitalisation of those institutions”, he said.

On way to the multipolar world in “a very chaotic situation”

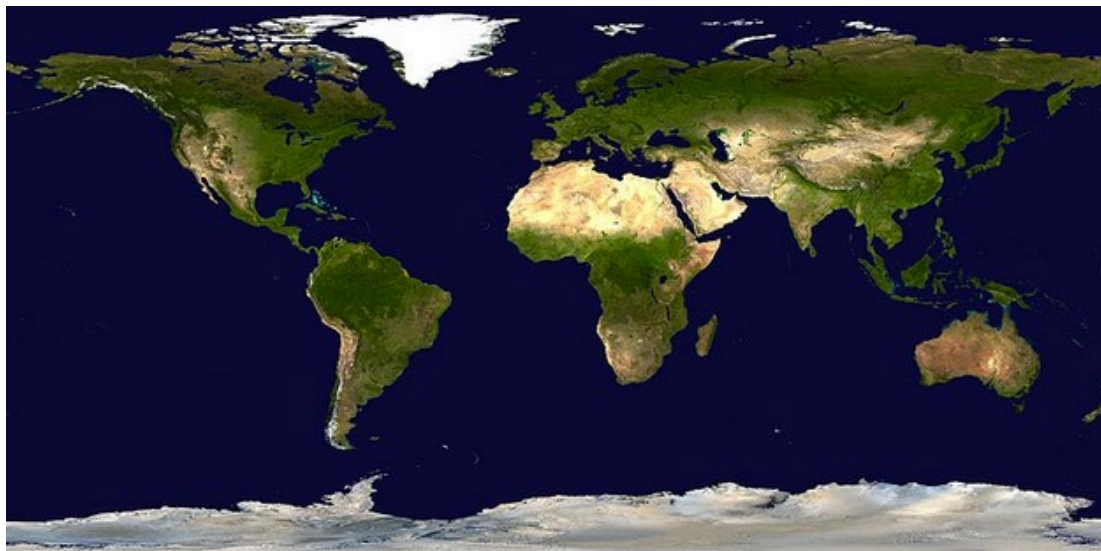
While the UN cannot reform them, Guterres said that he would like to see the United Nations Summit of the Future in September give some directions for the way those institutions “should structurally move”.

Assessing the global political situation, Guterres said, “We are no longer in a bipolar or unipolar world, as I said, we are in a kind of on the way to a multipolar world, but in a very chaotic situation”.

“Power relations became unclear and what we see today in the world is political actors doing whatever they want and with total impunity”, he said.

To end the multitude of conflicts and divisions and to effectively address threats posed by Artificial Intelligence, to act on climate action and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, “a serious conversation between developed and developing countries; between rich and emerging economies; between north and south, east and west” is needed, he said.

[Transmitted on 8 February 2024 by IDN-InDepthNews]



The World Is One – Land and Oceans. Photo Credit: NASA/Wikimedia Commons

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